Social Revolution and Religious Reformation:
Honen's Pure Land Buddhism

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Kamakura Era Japan (1185 – 1333 C.E.) was a time of intense unrest. Imperial power that had held the country together since its mythical founding in the seventh century was suddenly and violently taken away by a new warrior class.[1] The new government, called the *bakufu*, struggled to consolidate power, which did little to help the country return to a state of peace. Famine, pestilence, and death were common visitors to the masses because of the heavy burden the *bakufu* and the still existing but powerless imperial court placed on them.[2] Yet this turmoil produced one of the most religiously stimulating periods in Japanese history. Out of the ruins of the old Japan arose new Buddhist viewpoints based in the chaos of the period.

In order to understand how such a chaotic period produced such religious stimulation, we must look to an aspect of Buddhism that flourished under the harsh conditions of the Kamakura period. "[*Mappo*] revolve[s] around the age-old Buddhist belief that the world is in a steady state of decline. As a result, disasters proliferate and the quality of life worsens. Simultaneous with these events, the capabilities of human beings deteriorate and the effectiveness of the Buddhist teachings decreases."[3] Therefore, *mappo* signifies the degeneration of Buddhist law and is evidenced through disasters. Analyzing the events of the Kamakura period in light of *mappo* can help us see why religious ferment was common. If the people saw the events of the age as the playing out of *mappo*, it would help explain to them why their lives were so terrible.

Yet this concept requires some sort of theological understanding. "At this stage [of *mappo*] the teachings and practices propounded in India by the historical Buddha

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[1] John Whitney Hall, *Japan: From Prehistory to Modern Times* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1970), 75.
[2] James C. Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 56.
[3] *Ibid*, 60.

cease to be meaningful because human beings no longer have the capacity to practice them, much less to achieve enlightenment through them."[4] This leaves the believer in a quandary; how will s/he be able to escape the cycle of suffering when the teachings of the Buddha are ineffective? Here is where the religious development of the Kamakura era comes into play. While three distinct sects of Buddhism arose in this period, the one that addressed the issue and grew the most through *mappo* was Pure Land Buddhism.

Although Buddhism had been absorbed into Japanese culture in the seventh century, the turmoil of the Kamakura period necessitated a change. In the Heian period (794 – 1185 C.E.), the cultural emphasis on court, beauty, and luxury crumbled alongside its religious and social structures. Rather than focusing on Heian concepts of aestheticism, the Kamakura period shifted to a perspective[5] focused on the harsh realities facing the commoner. Buddhist structures that catered to the ordered aristocratic perspective could not meet the demands of the chaotic decentralized perspective that emerged in the Kamakura era. With the rise of social conditions which created receptivity to *mappo* in the lives of the commoners, a vacuum appeared in the realm of religious response that necessitated the rise of new Buddhist schools to meet the new Japanese perspective. Two figures, Honen (1133 – 1212) and his student, Shinran (1173 – 1263), created Kamakura Pure Land Buddhism with its focus on simplicity and salvation. Honen reformed Pure Land Buddhism to become a refuge from the profound perspective shift from aristocratic to chaos that occurred in the move from the Heian to the Kamakura periods. These social and religious changes both harkened back to

[4] Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 60.
[5] For the purpose of this paper, perspective shall be understood to mean the set of concepts, ideas, and structures that are characteristic of the specific period in question.

previous traditions while presenting novel concepts and practices tailored to the conditions of the Kamakura period.

Japan, Pure Land, and the Heian Period

Characteristics of Japanese Religion

Before addressing Pure Land Buddhism in Kamakura period Japan, it is necessary to take a little time to understand the general character of Japanese religion. Religions have been imported by Japan as far back as the seventh century. Yet Japan does not indiscriminately adopt religions into its national character. Instead, Japan has a distinct ability to import a religion and adjust it to its own needs. "Both Buddhism and the Chinese traditions took on a decidedly Japanese character" when they entered Japan.[6] This helps explain the proliferation of Pure Land Buddhism in the Kamakura period because it was the first time that Pure Land began to take on its own unique Japanese character. Through this transformation, Pure Land was able to speak to the Japanese people who were desperate for answers to their lives' troubles.

From its inception in Japan, Pure Land Buddhism was associated with the dead and the ancestors, which became extremely influential in how Pure Land developed during the Kamakura period. In its initial introduction in 640, Pure Land Buddhism "was not perceived as a religion of personal salvation but was closely associated with the indigenous ancestor cult."[7] Buddhism and the dead were intimately related even at such an early date. "The dead are so important in Japanese religion that the label of ancestor worship has been applied to [the] Japanese…" and "a dead person is referred to

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[6] H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity* 2nd ed. (Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc, 1974), 1.

[7] Robert F. Rhodes, "The Beginning of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan: From Its Introduction through the Nara Period," *Japanese Religions* 31 no.1 (January 2006): 10.

euphemistically as a Buddha…."[8] As Pure Land Buddhism's influence spread, it became less associated with death. This also helps explain why Pure Land Buddhism became so popular during the Kamakura period. Death's tie with Buddhism made figures such as Honen more relevant because death was a constant companion during the Kamakura period; answers were sought from Buddhism because of its traditional tie with death. In addition, the high proliferation of disease and death made people more aware of the role of Buddhism.

Pure Land Buddhism

While the Pure Land Buddhism espoused by Honen differs from traditional Pure Land Buddhism, we must first understand traditional Pure Land. From there we may examine the changes brought about by the times and the reformers that helped make it so successful.

Pure Land Buddhism did not arise at the time of the historical Buddha. "The Cult of *Amida* seems to have begun in India about the time of the Christian era, or possibly a little earlier…", which places it almost 500 years following the historical Buddha.[9] Therefore, it is no surprise that the founding sutras concerning *Amida* and the Pure Land, the two Sukhavati-vyuhas, may have been Iranian rather than Indian, although the sutras are written in Indian tone.[10] "In A.D. 252 an Indian scholar, learned in the Tripitaka, came to China, and translated one of the great sutras, called Amitayus."[11] Of interest is that it was transmitted to China at a relatively early date which most likely helped it take the on characteristics of the Far East that endeared it to Japan. Furthermore, it is essential

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[8] Earhart, *Japanese Religion*, 6.
[9] Charles Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, 1935), 360.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] William Elliot Griffis, *The Religions of Japan: From the Dawn of History to the Era of Meiji* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), 259.

to note that Pure Land Buddhism has no basis in the historical Buddha or his teachings, but rather is a later production designed to seem authentic. It was created as a response to the difficulties of traditional Buddhism set down by the historic Buddha much as it was later adapted by Honen and Shinran in part to respond to the pressures of scholastic Buddhism.

Pure Land Buddhism focuses around faith in and worship of Amitabha (*Amida* in Japanese), a Buddha whose name translates "Measureless Light or Life."[12] According to legend, *Amida* was a man named Hozo who made 48 vows before attaining Buddhahood with the express purpose of saving all people on earth.[13] *Amida* is depicted as a sort of messianic figure that differs greatly from the perceptions of the historical Buddha (Shakyamuni) who tried to free people from the suffering of this world, not by faith, but by cessation of existence. However, "Among the stories of the previous lives of *Amida*, which number sixteen in all, the myth of Dharmakara is the most representative and even contains material from the biography of the historical Buddha."[14] The similarities in the biography of the historical Buddha and *Amida* are no mistake according to Pure Land adherents; rather, "This means that *Amida* Buddha is the symbolic expression of the ultimate nature of Shakyamuni Buddha."[15] In this Pure Land interpretation, the historical Buddha is merely an aspect of *Amida*.

For followers of Pure Land Buddhism, *Amida* is the ultimate expression of compassion. He was a living person, one of whose incarnations was the historic Buddha.

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[12] Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism* , 360.
[13] The Tannisho Kenkyukai, *Perfect Freedom in Buddhism: An Exposition of the Words of Shinran, Founder of the Shin Sect, the Largest Buddhist School in Japan*, trans. Shinji Takuwa (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1968), 20.
[14] James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne, ed., *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development* (Berkley: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1996), 14.
[15] Sho-on Hattori, "The Essence of Pure Land Buddhism," Jodo Shu USA, http://jodo.org/about_plb/what_plb.html, March 1, 2009.

In this way, Amidism is legitimized within the greater context of Buddhism. Even though the sutras concerning *Amida* were composed long after the death of Shakyamuni, tying both of them together in a symbolic sense lends authenticity to the claim that *Amida* is the main Buddha. This tie also helped Pure Land expand during the Kamakura era because it seated *Amida* in a place of ultimate authority alongside and also superseding the historical Buddha.

According to Pure Land teachings, *Amida*'s importance originates from what is referred to as the "Original Vow." Before attaining Buddhahood, *Amida* made a series of 48 vows designed to help others escape the cycle of suffering and reside in *Amida*'s Pure Land.[16] Of these, the Japanese school of Pure Land that we will be discussing focus on one specific vow, number 18,

> O Bhagavat, if those beings who in immeasurable and innumerable Buddha countries, after they have heard my name, when I shall have obtained Bodhi (knowledge), should direct their thought to be born in that Buddha country of mine, and should for that purpose bring their stock of merit to maturity, if these should not be born in that Buddha county, even those who have only ten times repeated the thought (of that Buddha country)… then may I not obtain the highest perfect knowledge.[17]

This short statement by *Amida* is what is referred to as the Original Vow. It forms the basis of Kamakura period Pure Land Buddhism. Relating to the concept of *mappo*, this Vow is essential in that, in the degenerate times they were living in, the Vow of *Amida* still holds true and offers the only means of ever attaining nirvana.

Practices associated with Pure Land Buddhism vary depending on location and time. For our purposes, we must look at the prevailing practice of the Kamakura period: the recitation of the *nembutsu*. The *nembutsu* is a phrase in Japanese, "*namu amida*

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[16] F. Max Müller, ed., *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, vol. xlix of *Sacred Books of the East* (1894; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965), 1-22.
[17] *Ibid*, 15.

butsu," which roughly translates as, "I surrender to *Amida* Buddha." Faith in *Amida*, which is the only thing necessary for birth in the Pure Land, is expressed through this short phrase of thanksgiving. The *nembutsu* has come to have a significant and far reaching effect on Japanese Pure Land Buddhism. It became the one true Pure Land practice during the Kamakura period as we will examine later.

It may seem odd that *Amida* made 48 vows but only one managed to gain wide acceptance and recognition. This partially stems from the sutras that are recognized as preeminent in Pure Land teachings. Of the two sutras, the larger and the smaller Sukhavati, "The 'larger' still demands 'a stock of merit' from us as essential to salvation, while the 'smaller' declares that salvation is not a 'reward and result of good works performed in this present life.'"[18] There is in the original texts, a justification for abandoning the quest for enlightenment and relying whole-heartedly on the saving grace of *Amida*. Honen found this specific practice to be the most efficacious way of reaching the Pure Land.

What exactly is the Pure Land? While it would be convenient to label it the Buddhist version of heaven, this does not do it justice. Much of the larger and smaller Sukhavati and the Amitayur-dhyana (the third foundational sutra of Pure Land) are dedicated to describing the Pure Land and its inhabitants. It is a land of incomparable beauty; lotus blossoms bloom in uncountable numbers, gem-trees of "many hundred thousand colors," and heavenly music "is played by clever people."[19] In fact, the Pure Land is described so vividly by the sutras that it is "impossible… to find in English a sufficient number of nouns and adjectives to render the superabundant diction of this

[18] George William Knox, *The Development of Religion in Japan* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons: 1907), 122.
[19] Müller, *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, 33-38.

Description of the Land of Bliss."[20] These kinds of descriptors make it seem as if the Pure Land is a place beyond our comprehension in much the same way that heaven is in Christianity.

Taking a closer look at the cosmology behind the Pure Land however, leaves us with a different view.

> A pure land is not technically a place of pristine innocence before "the Fall," nor is it the place or time for the souls or resurrected bodies of the blessed to dwell with a creator after death or after the restoration of the original paradise at the end of time. Pure Lands are worlds parallel to ours, existing at the same time as our world, but perfected for the express purpose of allowing living beings the opportunity to pursue liberation in a favorable environment.[21]

Pure lands are not places where the dead go after achieving nirvana; instead, they are places perfected in order to be able to practice to reach nirvana. It is important to note that most followers' goal is to reach the Pure Land, with a vague notion of later worrying about nirvana. This recalls the idea of *mappo* since the dharma of this world has become useless that, to attain enlightenment, humans must move to a place where the dharma is still effective, "a favorable environment." Kamakura Buddhism holds fast to the perception of the Pure Land as a refuge from the chaos of this world.

All of these aspects of Pure Land Buddhism are essential to understanding how and why Pure Land Buddhism gained such a large following during the Kamakura period. It was a religion that gave answers to the questions of the time without demanding requirements, as many of the other sects of Buddhism did. People did not have time to meditate or observe precepts due to the problems and chaos of the Kamakura period. People desired a benevolent figure that would welcome them into a land of peace and

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[20] Müller, *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, xi.
[21] Luis O. Gomez, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), s.v. "Pure Lands"

tranquility. The association between Buddhism and death became apparent in the chaos which turned the people to Pure Land in the face of widespread death. The ad hoc nature of the beginning of Pure Land Buddhism also paved the way for its success in Japan during the Kamakura period. It was flexible and changeable which helped it adapt to the needs of the Japanese people in general and the specific needs of the times.

The Heian Period and Buddhism

In order to better comprehend the profound changes in history and religion that occurred during the Kamakura period, we must examine the preceding era, the Heian period. Out of all Japanese history, the Heian period is viewed the most idealistically. "… [T]he four centuries of 'Peace and Ease' (Heian, the poetical name of Miyako) are looked upon as the classical age of Japanese art and literature as well as of Buddhist mysteries."[22] Heiankyo[23] was the name given to Miyako, later Kyoto, the new capital of Japan. To escape the overwhelming influence of Buddhist monasteries vying for control of the country, the court moved from the established capital in Nara to Nagaoka and finally to Heiankyo.[24] It was in Heiankyo that the court settled and controlled the actions of the country for more than 400 years.

This age focused on pleasure above all else and so focused on the aristocracy to the exclusion of the people at large. Out of a population of six or seven million people, only about 5000 to 10,000 held titles or worked in the palace.[25] Of these court nobles, the Fujiwara family was predominant and controlled the royal family through a system of

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[22] Masaharu Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion: With Special Reference to the Social and Moral Life of the Nation* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1963), 108.
[23] The term Heiankyo will be used to designate the city of Heian (the suffix kyo merely meaning capital) to avoid confusion with the period name of Heian.
[24] Hall, *Japan*, 61.
[25] Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan: Volume 2 Heian Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2,122.

intermarriage and regency. Puppet child emperors would be placed on the throne and controlled by their Fujiwara relatives in the position of regents.[26] Although the Fujiwara abused their position of power in order to dictate policy over the emperors, their policies also encouraged pursuit of refinement and artistic goals.

> [Military] training was neglected and culture meant refinement in the arts of poetry and music, or even in the art of distinguishing different kinds of incense and perfume. The delicacy of all the products of this age is often attributed to the peculiar genius of fundamental character of the Japanese people. But this view overlooks the fact that the culture of this period did not pertain to the whole people: it was pre-eminently an aristocratic culture, that of a class which lived in self-content without incentive or competition among its own members.[27]

Court life and pursuits were the basis for the perspective during the Heian period. Fujiwara leaders effectively silenced any revolts and managed to keep the court pre-occupied with artistic pursuits such as art and elegance, which enabled the Heian period to be a time of peace.

Buddhism in Japan began to evolve and adapt during the Heian period. While six schools of Buddhism were established during the Nara period (710 – 794 C. E.), they were almost exact replicas of their predecessors in China.[28] Heian Japan introduced two new schools of Buddhism that adapted themselves to Japan and the Japanese emphasis on the aristocracy. Saicho and Kukai, founders of the new schools of Tendai and Shingon, "… dreamed of a grand union of religion and state, and they were concerned with all phases of national life. Their religious convictions made it possible for them to transcend their immediate surroundings, yet they were both children of their age. They were both

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[26] Joseph M. Kitagawa, *Religion in Japanese History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 47.
[27] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 135.
[28] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 56.

caught in the intertwining of the fortune and fate of the aristocracy and the clergy."[29] Under these two reformers, Buddhism began to lose its association with death as death was unimportant in the aristocratic perspective. Although Saicho and Kukai dreamt of establishing newer, better forms of Buddhism than those of the Nara Schools, they and their schools still were products of their age.

The Tendai School, established by Saicho (767 – 822), was the first of the Heian schools. Tendai proclaimed the idea of universal enlightenment. All beings will become enlightened although not all through the same path. This philosophy led Saicho to include numerous texts from various sources into Tendai teachings so people could discover their own personal path to enlightenment[30], although there was an emphasis on the Lotus sutra as the ultimate expression of the Buddha.[31] Students were brought to the Tendai monastery on Mount Hiei to study esoteric texts. Within a year they were expected to have received their ordination. Seven days after the death of Saicho, the government issued a proclamation allowing Mount Hiei to ordain monks, the first time a non-Nara school was granted the right of ordination. However, this grant carried the stipulation that monks stay on Mount Hiei for 12 further years of study following their ordination.[32] In effect, this requirement removed the monks from the life of Japan both literally and figuratively by placing them on an isolated mountain for those years. While Tendai espoused universal salvation, it was really only attainable by those who receded into the mountains to live a life devoted to study.

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[29] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 59.
[30] William E. Deal, *Handbook to Life in Medieval and Early Modern Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 206.
[31] Shively and McCullough, *Heian Japan*, 468-469.
[32] *Ibid*, 473.

The second of the Heian schools was Shingon, established by Kukai (774 – 835). Shingon Buddhism emphasized the similarities between all religions and advocated that all religions were in fact simply different manifestations of the same great Buddha.[33] Cosmic mysteries were wrapped up in this all-encompassing Buddha. Religious rituals were important in attempting to understand these cosmic mysteries and the best way to comprehend them was the intense study of two mandalas, pictures or diagrams. "These diagrams symbolized two aspects of cosmic life, its being and vitality, in the ideal or potential entity and in the dynamic manifestations."[34] Like Saicho, Kukai established a monastery on the top of a mountain, Mount Koya. Unlike the Tendai monastery, monks were not forced to remain on the mountain and were in fact encouraged to go on tours.[35] Shingon's emphasis on ritual and artistic aspects of Buddhism reflected the mood of the time which helped Shingon rise to the top of Buddhist Schools in Japan.

Aspects of both Tendai and Shingon appealed to the aristocracy which entrenched both schools in Japanese culture. Chinese culture remained (from the Nara period) the epitome of refinement and learning although Japan stopped sending emissaries to China. Both Saicho and Kukai studied in China and as such they were seen as conveyors of cultural refinement. In fact, Emperor "Saga, who was not especially concerned with religion, esteemed Kukai primarily for his profound knowledge of Chinese culture."[36] As arbiters of culture, these two sects prospered through their ties with China. It must be remembered, however, that neither Tendai nor Shingon had any exact replica in China. The two religions were based on existing sects in China but also incorporated whatever

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[33] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 125.
[34] *Ibid*, 126.
[35] *Ibid*, 124.
[36] Shively and McCullough, *Heian Japan*, 476.

sutras seemed to be most important to Saicho and Kukai, as members of Japanese society. This appealed to the aristocracy; while the religions appeared to be Chinese and therefore desirable, they were distinctly Japanese and played up the aspects of the religions that would be most palatable to the Japanese court.

Another way that Heian Buddhism fit into the aristocratic perspective was the idea of Buddhism as art. An emphasis on art and refinement has already been established as some of the foundation for the Heian era. Shingon emphasized mandalas as expressions of true reality and as mandalas are pictures, they fit snuggly with the Heian emphasis on artistic beauty. Furthermore, "Magnificent temples and elaborate chapels were built for the sake of piety as well as of enjoyment; statues and altars were decorated with gold and jewels; artists and artisans were employed to an incredible number. Buddhist ceremonies were as frequent as pastimes, in the court and in the temples."[37] While there existed in Buddhism a practice of sponsoring the construction of temples and monasteries to create merit for the sponsors, Heian period Japan took this to new heights. Art and rituals were the ultimate goal of Buddhism, not some far off idea of salvation that supposedly formed the basis of both Tendai and Shingon. The richness of Buddhist temples and rituals reflected the wealth of the aristocracy and left a visual representation of the aristocratic perspective.

Monasteries were another place that the aristocratic perspective was visible because they were the only way for commoners to join ranks equivalent to the aristocracy. Normally, to be named a member of the aristocracy, a citizen had to fulfill the requirements of lineage, court rank, economic power, and learning.[38] Needless to say, it

[37] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 145.
[38] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 55.

was nigh on impossible for anybody of the lower echelons of society to become an aristocrat. However, during this time:

> The clergy were the only class of men who had as much standing as the aristocrats in terms of court rank, economic power, and learning, without necessarily having the same high family background…. [T]he situation during the Heian period made the priesthood the only available channel of upward social mobility, so that many men "entered temples not in search for the truth but in quest for worldly riches and privileges."[39]

Buddhism partially became a tool for the poor to strive for wealth and privilege. It was essentially the only way for anybody to become socially mobile. Great centers of learning such as Mount Hiei and Mount Koya gave ordinary people access to education. This education would enable them to approach the aristocratic life. In a way, Buddhism became an engine to perpetuate the aristocratic perspective by giving commoners the chance to achieve the characteristics necessary to be included in the aristocratic lifestyle, with complete disregard to the commoner lifestyle.

Yet as the Heian period went along, the lack of interest from the aristocracy and the established schools in the worries of the commoners became apparent. While Shingon was absorbed with the rituals and arts of the Heian period, Tendai remained based in doctrine. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that opponents to the aristocratic perspective on Buddhism arose out of the Tendai school because various traditions were encompassed in the Tendai school. Of these schools, Pure Land Buddhism began to emerge as an important school.[40] While the aristocrats used Pure Land for the

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[39] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 56.
[40] Robert S. Ellwood and Richard Pilgrim, *Japanese Religion: a cultural perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985), 34.

"prolongation of luxury, pomp, and comfort into the next world," the salvation aspects were taught to Tendai monks.[41]

It is on Mount Hiei that the Kamakura leader, Honen, was exposed to the Pure Land sutras that later influenced his teachings. Pure Land began to be seen as opposition to the opulence of the aristocracy. No longer were the masses enamored of the aristocratic perspective; they began to see the depravity of the nobles and the lack of concern for the masses' well-being.

Placing the center of Tendai on Mount Hiei presented one of the biggest problems with Buddhism during the Heian period; it was isolated from society yet wholly supported by it. "The Government in the seventh century endowed the temples, and great nobles and emperors vied with each other in gifts. Hence as early as the eighth century there are loud complaints of the wealth and luxury of the orders, and of the added burdens laid upon the laity; for the possessions of the orders were free from all burdens, and in their vast extent became a grievous evil."[42] Depending utterly on the support from the government, the monks were able to live by, but not in, the world. Since many of these monks desired to live in the aristocratic world, farmers and workers could not see the need to support those who wanted to leave them. This led to a separation between Buddhism and the people. Disassociation with the real world, an obsession with the aristocratic perspective, and emphasis on court patronage left a gap in religion to be filled in the Kamakura period.

The Heian era led Buddhism to the point where it was completely incomprehensible and alien to the population at large. Monks sitting in seclusion,

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[41] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 58-59.
[42] Knox, *Development of Religion*, 115.

reading sutras in foreign languages did little to assuage the concerns of the common person. The Heian period ended with the collapse of the aristocracy and the powerful centralized government. With the fall of the aristocracy, so fell the aristocratic perspective that had dominated Japanese life and culture for more than 400 years. Out of the chaos rose new perspectives of the Kamakura period that enabled the charismatic figure of Honen to rise to prominence. "Among [Buddhists of the Heian period], there arose a tendency to interpret Buddhism not in a scholarly vein but, rather, in subjective religious terms."[43] Openness to interpretation guided Buddhism to further flourish in Japan and finally let it escape the confines of government to spread to the people. The historical conditions of the Kamakura period were perfect for the spread of Pure Land Buddhism.

The Kamakura Setting

The Kamakura period officially began with the establishment of the capital in Kamakura, leaving Heiankyo. As power shifted from Heiankyo to Kamakura, a change also occurred in the very foundation of society. Focus began to shift away from the aristocrats and more toward the masses. While power was still relatively centralized in Kamakura, a newer, decentralized government began to emerge.

People of various regions started to develop a perception of life as chaos as opposed to the aristocratic perspective that dominated the past four centuries. "[T]he Kamakura period was marked by the rejection of artificial culture delicately concocted in favor of a more natural spirit and indigenous forms of culture and society."[44] Influenced by the chaos created by the Gempei war, rampant disease, famine, and death, a new

[43] Kozo Yamamura, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 3 *Medieval Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 546.
[44] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 88.

perspective began to emerge, focused on a need by the masses to define themselves in relation to the world around them. It harkened to the past but embraced the emerging sensibilities of the times. This developing perspective, which will be refered to as the chaos perspective, underlay the Kamakura period and produced the three schools of Kamakura Buddhism. Of the three, Pure Land best addressed the chaos perspective of the people.

The Gempei War and Establishment of the Bakufu

The transition between the Heian period and the Kamakura period was not easy. In 1060, power was wrested from the Fujiwara and placed in the hands of the emperor. He later established the *Insei* system whereby a retired emperor would continue to rule the county from a monastery.[45] Obviously the appearance of another seat of power would have lessened governmental stability. Despite the *Insei* system, the culture and influence of the court remained dominant. While the aristocrats were occupied with art, refinement, and beauty in the capital, the outer provinces came to be governed by military families who were patronized by these same aristocrats.[46] Yet these military families began to desire a more simplistic way of life. First and foremost of these were the Taira and the Minamoto who both had ties to the Fujiwara and imperial lines. Both the Taira and the Minamoto wanted to reform the government of Japan. "[T]hey were bridging figures… between the greatest central aristocrats, who were their patrons, and the great provincial warriors who were their followers."[47] This ability to bridge the past to the future enabled these houses to take advantage of the coming conflict to establish a new order.

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[45] Shively and McCullough, *Heian Japan*, 587, 594.
[46] Hall, *Japan*, 80.
[47] Yamamura, *Medieval Japan*, 49.

Toward the middle of the twelfth century, chaos started to erupt in the capital. "Kyoto was in a state of turmoil as conflicting centers of influence – the Office of Ex-emperors, the Fujiwara, and the great temples – quarreled among themselves. Court interests… had begun to lose effective control over the course of events in the capital."[48] Eventually these quarrels came to a head and opposing factions called in the Taira and the Minamoto to fight for them; the Taira were victorious and killed almost all of the Minamoto clan.[49] Taira no Kiyomori, the leader of the Taira, placed himself as the regent of the child emperor and created "a new social order under the dominance of the warrior class."[50] Japan had not seen a conflict this bloody in the entirety of its history. The four hundred years of peace that preceded it made this conflict, called the Hogen no Ran, even more difficult to understand, not only for those involved but also for the masses. Court intrigue was common during the Heian period, but this conflict marked the first time where people across Japan saw mass bloodshed. It had a profound influence on the way people perceived the path the country was taking.

Power was held almost exlusively by the Taira over the emperor, Fujiwara, and the religious orders, but it was not to last. Upon the death of Kiyomori in 1181, the Minamoto had garnered enough support from the imperial line and Buddhist temples to challenge the Taira hegemony.[51] From 1180-1185, the Gempei war raged between the Taira and the Minamoto. "As part of the process, houses segmented into new alignments and subunits, and the provinces themselves became the staging grounds for a series of

[48] Hall, *Japan*, 83.
[49] *Ibid*.
[50] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 53.
[51] Hall, *Japan*, 84.

incipient civil wars."[52] Not only was there a fight in the capital for control of the country, but there were also conflicts all across Japan over forces allegiant to opposing houses. A country that was once defined by the aristocratic perspective of emphasis on beauty and refinement was reduced to a country of war and chaos. This new perspective was to control Japan for the next 400 years.

Buddhist temples played a key role in the Gempei War. The Heian period saw the rise of *sohei*, or warrior monks, who continually fought between Tendai and Shingon.[53] During the Gempei war, *sohei* were called upon by the Minamoto to fight for them.[54] This association between Heian Buddhist institutions and armed conflict was to stay with the masses long after the end of the Gempei war. Ultimately this helped create the Kamakura schools of Buddhism, because people wished to remain Buddhist but did not want to follow a school that participated in violence. While the new chaos perspective flourished through establishments like the *sohei*, the response by the people to these establishments was largely one of disinterest. They desired a religion of refuge from the chaos not a religion that supported it.

After five years of chaos and fighting, the Gempei war ended in 1185 with the elimination of the Taira and the establishment of Minamoto supremacy. Minamoto no Yortitomo orchestrated the success of the Minamoto and also assured himself control of the country by eliminating all his rivals within the Minamoto family. Unlike Kiyomori before him, Yoritomo did not seek out court titles upon receiving power; rather, he accepted titles conferred on him by the court (including the neglected title of *shogun* or in

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[52] Yamamura, *Medieval Japan*, 53.
[53] Kitagawa, *Japanese Religion*, 62.
[54] Hall, *Japan*, 84.

English, generalissimo), and used them to legitimate, but not control, his power.[55] Further, he established a military center in Kamakura to complement the capital in Kyoto, effectively creating a new power, the *bakufu*, while sustaining and drawing legitimization from the old power, the court. "…*Bakufu* leaders accepted the concept of cooperation with the court and exercised considerable restraint."[56] This system of dual power is essential. It was a further way of establishing the emerging order by slowly drawing power away from the court and aristocracy and placing it in the new hands of the *bakufu* military government while still maintaining the existence of the old legitimizing order.

Bakufu establishment heralded a new era in Japanese society. It presented a relatively centralized government but also cemented the path toward the decentralization of the feudal era that had already started to develop but had not yet come to fruition. For the most part, power was seated in Kamakura and partially shared with Kyoto to the point that "as soon as real opposition reared its head, it was quickly quashed."[57] Cooperation between Kamakura and Kyoto was powerful enough to nullify rebellions. While for the most part they worked in conjunction, "Interactions between court and shogunate also included periodic power struggles."[58] Court and *bakufu* interactions were not as amicable as would have been desired. Fighting between the aristocratic and military seats of power provided opportunities for the people to see that although the war had ended, chaos was still not far off.

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[55] Hall, *Japan*, 87.
[56] Jeffrey P. Mass, ed, *Court and Bakufu in Japan: Essays in Kamakura History* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982), 5.
[57] Pierre Francois Souyri, *The World Turned Upside Down: Medieval Japanese Soceity*, trans. by Käthe Roth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 52 – 53.
[58] Deal, *Handbook to Life*, 88.

Both Kyoto and the *bakufu* realized the problems of a weakened and divided centralized government, but neither could bring themselves to stop attempting to seize power. Remnants of the Gempei war could be seen even in the supposedly solid government. From these struggles, the common people saw the influence of chaos even in the top of society. The chaos perspective was terribly visible in the lives of the masses, but having the government appear to fall to the chaos perspective further entrenched it in their lives.

Violence from the Hogen no Ran and the Gempei War was extremely important in the development of Kamakura society. For the first time in the history of Japan, violence was the first order of business. The aristocratic perspective could no longer support the views and actions of the country and so a new perspective was created out of the chaos and violence from these two conflicts. While the *bakufu* attempted to create a peaceful return to order, the developing chaos perspective had become far too large a part of the realities of the people and society.

Social Realities

The aftermath of the Gempei war left a lasting mark on the people of Japan. Even those not directly linked with the fighting had to deal with its repercussions. Establishing a new regime also took its toll on the people because they were the ones funding it. With the crumbling of the aristocratic perspective, commoners began to realize that the life of luxury and refinement enjoyed by the elites had been paid for by the blood and sweat of the masses.

Various groups in Japan used the Gempei war as an excuse to justify lawless behavior. When the war ended, “warriors could no longer use the Gempei labels to

justify their private lawlessness."[59] Yet this did not stop people from lawless behavior, as many interpreted the loss of power by Kyoto as a suspension of law.[60] Many people had to deal with strangers destroying and despoiling their property with the false justification of support for the war. Even more people saw the fall of Kyoto as representative of the fall of civil order and so took advantage of this chaos to plunder the land. None of this behavior would have been acceptable under the old perspective of peaceful coexistence and pursuit of refinement. Acts by these outlaws helped construct the chaos perspective as people saw their land and labor ruined.

Famine was also a common problem during the Gempei war and the Kamakura period. Today, with all of the agricultural improvements of the past 1000 years, only about 12 percent of Japan is arable.[61] It is not hard to imagine, then, that the amount of arable land under cultivation in Japan during the Kamakura period was significantly less. The most devastating famine of the entire medieval period happened in 1182 – 1183, right in the middle of the Gempei war. In fact, it has been said that the Taira were devastated by this famine because their troops were from the provinces that were hit hardest.[62] Furthermore, a famine occurred in 1230 – 1231 and another one is mentioned by the nun Eshinni, wife of Shinran, in her letter dated 1263.[63]

While Eshinni does not give a detailed account of these famines, an account of the famine from 1182 – 1183 is found in the *Hojoki* (Record of my Square Hut), written in 1212:

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[59] Yamamura, *Medieval Japan*, 58.
[60] *Ibid*, 71.
[61] Land Resources Statistics Section, Production,Marketing and Consumption Statistics Division ,Statistics Department, Ministry of Agriculture,Forestry and Fisheries, "Statistics on Cultivated Land Area, as of July 15, 2004", http://www.maff.go.jp/ accessed May 17, 2008.
[62] Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 56.
[63] *Ibid*, 53.

> There was a famine throughout the land for two years, a horrible thing. In spring and summer we had drought, and in fall typhoons and flooding. Such dreadful things occurred one after another that none of the crops matured…. All life in the capital, no matter what activity is concerned, depends on the countryside for its base [of support]. Since there was nothing whatsoever coming in [from the countryside], how could they succeed to any extent in maintaining composure?... In every case [of starvation] the parent would pass away first. There was one instance of an innocent child lying and sucking at his mother's breast, not knowing that life had passed out of her.[64]

As we see through the *Hojoki*, famines were positively devastating. People constantly faced the harsh reality that they could starve to death. Watching friends and family die put a huge mental strain on people. Dealing with this reality reinforced the chaos perspective and condemned the aristocratic perspective. Even the court could not hold its festivities during famines, and so the excess of the aristocratic perspective was revealed and rejected in favor of the chaos perspective.

Another aspect of life that furthered the development and proliferation of the chaos perspective was disease. While epidemics were more common in early Japanese history, they continued on into the medieval period, especially striking the young and elderly.[65] People of the Kamakura period were not only subjected to watching friends and family succumb to starvation, they often had to watch their children succumb to disease. Grief was a constant companion to parents who could do nothing to stop the death of their children. Furthermore, the elderly yielding to disease kept fresh the thought of death even in the healthiest people. The elderly served as a constant reminder of what people would turn into, and the sight of elderly afflicted with disease would remind people of what could happen to them.

In addition, disease was compounded by famine as evidenced by the *Hojoki*:

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[64] *Hojoki*, in Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 53-55.
[65] Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 56.

> [People] hoped that the new year would bring recovery, but on top of everything, an epidemic broke out. With this added [affliction] there was no sign [of recovery in sight]…. I have no idea of the number of starving and dying against earthen walls or by the side of the road. Because we did not know what to do to dispose [of the bodies], a foul odor pervaded the world. Frequently one could not [bear to] look at the decaying forms or states.[66]

Rotting corpses lining the streets of the towns worsened the spread of disease. As opposed to the pursuit of refinement, the chaos of the diseased world was easily discernable and led to the idea that an escape was desirable.

Death was a constant companion during this time. While little data survives concerning life expectancy during this period, it has been surmised to have been between 28 and 40.[67] "Images of death multiplied, but its perpetual threat was ubiquitous – a fact that only fed fears."[68] Death was so present that it was impossible to not be affected by it. The lighthearted perspective of the Heian period could not meet the social realities of the time. Violence perpetrated during and following the Gempei war firmly entrenched the reality of death in the Japanese psyche; no longer could they hide behind their calligraphy and pretend that everything would be fine. Death's presence was overwhelming and deeply affected the people's world view

New emphasis by Buddhist leaders on death and hell during the Kamakura period furthered the sense of immediate urgency concerning death. Few references remain concerning Heian perceptions of death and sin but some early Kamakura period pamphlets help explain how the people viewed death at the time.

> [Death] no longer tiptoed in the dark, for, through a process of particularization, life after death, which used to sleep in a monotonous,

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[66] *Hojoki*, in Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 54.
[67] Dobbins, *Letters of the Nun Eshinni*, 57.
[68] Soho Machida, *Renegade Monk: Honen and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism*, trans. and ed. By Ioannis Mentzas (Berkley: University of California Press, 1999), 26.

> undifferentiated world of eternal darkness, saw dawn; preceded by deafening screams, extreme temperatures, and tingling anticipations, hell made its grand reopening as a theme park of eternal physical pain, for sinners only.[69]

Monks encouraged contemplation of hell and devoted lots of time to describing the horrible things that would happen to sinners.[70] Not only was death a constant companion to people of the Kamakura period, life after death was also of concern. Buddhist monks of the established schools realized the fears of the people and used them to emphasize their doctrines. People could not even look to death as an escape for they were destined to end up in the hells described by the monks. Ultimately however, this emphasis on damnation was one thing that drew people away from the Heian sects and toward the new Kamakura sects.

Kamakura Schools of Buddhism

While all three schools of Kamakura Buddhism grew out of the Tendai School, each found Tendai to be lacking in answers. Each school sought to respond to the shift in perspective as best it could and attempted to address all the problems of the times through varying means. What resulted were three vastly different schools with varying degrees of popularity that all catered to the specific needs of the Kamakura period as expressed through the chaos perspective.

Soto Zen Buddhism was founded in Japan by Dogen (1200 – 1253), who studied on Mount Hiei but found its answers lacking and so searched for his own answers. Focusing exclusively on a person's individual ability to achieve nirvana, Zen discarded the ornate rituals and mandalas of Heian Buddhism in favor of aesthetic and austere

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[69] Machida, *Renegade Monk*, 33.
[70] *Ibid*.

simplicity.[71] Meditation was the chief way of practicing Zen and Dogen firmly believed that "the true intention of the Buddha can be found *only in the sutras*."[72] Dogen obviously did not believe that the world was in a state of *mappo* because he still believed that enlightenment could be achieved through the sutras. However, it was ultimately the focus on the simplistic that attracted both farmers and the military to Zen.

A void was created during the Gempei war to address the emerging needs of the rising elite. Zen's emphasis on rigorous mind training supplied a new avenue for the military to utilize in order to enforce emerging cultural values of the elite.

> There was need of a religion which could fulfill the task of training the ruling class in mental firmness and resolute action and of satisfying their spiritual aspirations. For this purpose the old religions did not answer; the traditional Buddhism was too sentimental and effeminate, or too intricate and mysterious for the simple and sturdy minds of the warriors…. The method of Zen was simple enough to inspire and invigorate the mind or to calm it amidst agitation, and to show it the right way through the perplexities of life.[73]

Rather than addressing the problems described in the previous section, Zen addressed the problems of the ruling military class. It was intellectual enough to seem befitting of the upper class while still simplistic enough to be appreciate by minds affected by the chaos perspective. Dogen also managed to appeal to farmers, although Soto Zen did not gain as wide acceptance among them as did Pure Land due to the necessity of taking time to meditate. A desire for aesthetic simplicity and austere order within the chaos of the Gempei war and the Kamakura period helped propel Zen into the minds of the people. However, its practices were still too vague and distant to truly answer the religious needs of all Japanese people.

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[71] Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism*, 400.
[72] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 128.
[73] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 210.

The aptly named Nichiren Buddhism was founded by Nichiren (1222 – 1282) and attempted to simplify the teachings of Tendai. Nichiren believed that Tendai's emphasis on the Lotus sutra was a step in the right direction, but he did not think it was enough. In Nichiren Buddhism, all people must recite "*namu myoho rengekyo*" (often referred to as the *daimoku*), as recitation of the name of the Lotus sutra was the only possible way to achieve nirvana.[74] This is reminiscent of the Pure Land teaching of the recitation of the nembustu. *Mappo* was a fixture of Nichiren beliefs since reliance on recitation of the name of the Lotus sutra indicated a loss of belief in the effectiveness of the teachings of the historical Buddha.

A charismatic figure, Nichiren campaigned for the government to outlaw all other schools of Buddhism and proclaim Nichiren as the supreme teaching.[75] Obviously this did not go over well with the other sects, who successfully sent him to be executed. He escaped and continued teaching, gathering followers as "a teacher prescribing new and drastic remedies for the disorders, political and economic, from which Japan was then suffering."[76] The Nichiren school attempted to take the problems of the times and create a religion that could respond to them. Death and famine were less frightening when repetitive recitation of the *daimoku* would ensure that people would reach nirvana. It was a religion of comfort in stress even if Nichiren did not appear to be a great comforting figure. Yet Nichiren still did not capture the entirety of the essence of the chaos perspective that dominated the Kamakura period because his character was too confrontational. The last thing people wanted in their lives was another conflict and

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[74] Wm. Theodore De Bary, ed., *The Buddhist Tradition in India. China & Japan* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1969), 345.
[75] Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism*, 417.
[76] *Ibid*, 418.

Nichiren could not help but sew conflict through his personality. A more gentle, welcoming figure was needed; that was for Pure Land to address.

Last of these schools is the Pure Land. Pure Land before the Kamakura period considered contemplative practices to be the ultimate practice of Pure Land Buddhism.[77] In the face of all the problems of the time, however, Pure Land evolved to see the *nembutsu* as the highest form of Pure Land practice. In times of chaos and death, it was difficult to follow contemplative practices effectively. In the face of *mappo*, it became impossible. This is why Pure Land became so preeminent; it recognized the problems of Kamakura Japan and did not back away. Honen completely reshaped Buddhist practices to ones that were no longer only comprehensible by the elite, but accessible to the masses.

Many historical problems contributed to the evolution of Buddhism during the Kamakura period. It was impossible to ignore the outbursts of violence in the Hogen no Ran and the Gempei war. Bloodshed became a marker for the beginning of a new age, an age of chaos. Lawlessness, famine, disease, and death were rampant in contrast to the orderly, aesthetic life of the Heian period. Changing perspectives on life and culture necessitated a change in what religion had to address. All of these problems were addressed with Kamakura Pure Land Buddhism as envisioned by Honen.

Honen: Reformer and Visionary

When speaking of Kamakura period Buddhism, two names inevitably surface, Honen and Shinran. While both of these men changed the face of Japanese Buddhism, opened the door to new interpretations of Pure Land Buddhism, and also paved the way for the aforementioned schools of Zen and Nichiren to flourish, this paper will only address Honen. Shinran's contribution to Kamakura Pure Land Buddhism is undeniable.

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[77] Machida, *Renegade Monk*, 3.

Yet as Shinran's teacher, Honen is indispensible in understanding how and why Pure Land Buddhism developed the way it did during each man's lifetime.

Heian Buddhism could no longer fulfill the needs of the masses, so Honen arose to meet those needs. His was an innovative reinterpretation of an existing school that honored the past of Pure Land, yet reinterpreted it in the ways he found most effective. Honen was a product of the times he lived in; he understood what was missing in Heian Buddhism and worked to address these shortcomings by reinterpreting Pure Land Buddhism.

Life

Honen was born as the Heian period was ending, in 1133. He was the son of a constable and a woman who traced her roots back to a legendary Chinese prince of the third century.[78] At the age of nine, Honen witnessed his father murdered by mercenaries from Kyoto who were sent to forcefully collect taxes from the local warlords. His mother is never mentioned in reliable sources after this, so she likely either committed suicide or was taken as a concubine by the mercenaries.[79] Clearly, Honen experienced the pain of death and loss very early in life. Losing a father and mother at such an early age left an impression on the mind of young Honen. He realized that life was not what the aristocrats had been espousing. It was not a life full of luxury; it was a life full of pain where people were killed for petty reasons. The resistance of the warlords that led to his father's death made the political strife also apparent in his youth. As we have already discussed, the Gempei war occurred due in large part to the resistance of the warlords,

[78] Yusen Kashiwahara and Koyu Sonoda, Ed., *Shapers of Japanese Buddhism*, trans. Gaynor Sekimori (Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1968), 64.
[79] Machida, *Renegade Monk*, 49.

and so it is logical to assume that Honen was aware of what drove the military government, which in turn helped him understand what the masses were going to need.

Like the other great minds of Kamakura Buddhism, Honen studied on Mount Hiei. After the death of his parents, he was sent to an uncle who four years later sent him to study Tendai on Mount Hiei.[80] For over twenty years Honen studied, reading sutras and texts and being instructed by pious Tendai monks. However, "The Tendai organization at that time showed signs of corruption, as scions of the nobility filled the highest ecclesiastical ranks and pursued worldly ambition, and [monks] delighted in conflict, passing the bounds of lawlessness."[81] Even when Honen became a *hijiri* (a monk who removed himself from the main compound of Mount Hiei to study intently) it was impossible for him to ignore the corruption on Mount Hiei.

The fact that monks who wished to study were forced to remove themselves from the compound on a supposedly holy mountain was evidence that the Tendai sect had fallen into the trappings of Heian society. The aristocratic clergy did not want to strive for enlightenment; instead, they desired a place where they could perform deeds unacceptable in court out of sight of the court. Tendai had fallen into the trap of Shingon and the Nara schools before them; they were so tied up in the government that they failed to realize that the masses desired a religion that would address their needs as well. Honen began to feel this vacuum as he observed the lawless monks and it drove him to seek new answers.

During his time on Mount Hiei, Honen began to feel not just disenchantment with the corrupt priests but also that Tendai was not the path to enlightenment. He had "… the

[80] Machida, *Renegade Monk*, 49.
[81] Kashiwahara and Sonoda, *Shapers*, 65.

inner conviction that the threefold training of Buddhism (morality, contemplation, and wisdom) was not for him…."[82] As discussed above, Tendai did not focus attention on any one practice or sutra; rather, it encouraged followers to study all avenues, and so Honen was exposed to all of them. For a long time he wrestled with the varying sutras, attempting to find one that spoke to him. Eventually he came to appreciate Pure Land sutras above all else. Finally, in 1175 he decided to leave Mount Hiei with the conviction that the true path was exemplified through Pure Land.[83] After his departure Honen truly began to crystallize the beliefs that would be so influential in the Kamakura period.

Settling in a region of Kyoto, Honen began to garner followers both inside and outside the capital. Honen's arrival in Kyoto coincided with the escalating violence that led to the Gempei War. During this chaos, the size of his following grew larger and larger, to the point where the established Buddhist sects felt threatened by his presence and sought to control him through petitions to the government.[84] While these petitions were largely ignored during the time that the government was restructuring itself into the *bakufu* system, an incident in 1207 provided a perfect way for the existing orders to remove the threat he presented.

Following the advice of two disciples of Honen, two court women became nuns. This conversion was scandalous because it took aristocratic women away from the court which in turn made the court perceive Honen as direct and real threat. "The case was charged as an act of seduction, and the Government executed the 'seducers,' while the master and his leading disciples were sentenced to banishment."[85] Like many before him,

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[82] Kashiwahara and Sonoda, *Shapers*, 65.
[83] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 173.
[84] Deal, *Handbook*, 30.
[85] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 177.

Honen's banishment led him to the small southern island of Shikoku. It was a rural island yet Honen managed to garner more followers by spreading his message as he travelled. People did not care that he had been banished by the government. It is probable that the banishment helped spread Honen's teaching due to the disenfranchisement of so many with the court.

In 1211, the government realized that resisting Honen and his teachings was impossible and invited him back to Kyoto. But he returned to Kyoto in poor health and died a year later.[86] According to legend, as his body weakened, his sight and hearing sharpened and he died with the *nembutsu* on his lips. "Surrounded by his devoted disciples, the saint ended his life of eighty years, a life which had been eventless in appearance but profoundly significant for his age and the ages to follow."[87]

Honen did little that can be considered remarkable during his life, but what he did mattered to a great number of people. It does not even appear that Honen intended to found a new religious organization as he never attempted to organize his followers into groups or build a temple.[88] His profound influence on Japanese Buddhism and ability to gather so many followers shows how compelling a person he must have been.

Effectiveness

Considering the lack of historically notable events in Honen's life, it seems surprising that he attracted such a large following. Why was Honen so effective in spreading his teaching? Many factors led to Honen's success, including the Gempei War and all the problems of the late Heian and early Kamakura period. Yet this is not enough to explain why Honen was so popular. We must turn to the minds of the populace and

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[86] Dean, *Handbook*, 30.
[87] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 178-179.
[88] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 113.

the defining characteristics of Honen himself. Only then is a picture of Honen's success available.

Most analysis of Honen points to the simplicity of his doctrine as the primary reason for his mass appeal. Prior to Honen's reforms, Pure Land practice considered the mental *nembutsu* (meditation on the *nembutsu*) to be far superior to the vocal *nembutsu* (recitation of the *nembutsu*).[89] But Honen believed that the mental *nembutsu* was too challenging for common people and did not think it superior to the vocal *nembutsu*. In Honen's eyes, having faith and calling on *Amida* through the *nembutsu* was enough to bring a person within the welcoming power of *Amida*'s compassion.[90]

This radical change heralded a form of Buddhism available to all, regardless of religious background and training. "[T]he practice of repeating the Name was transformed by him into a childlike expression of his spirit of prayer, or rather of trustful self-abandonment."[91] In a world characterized by an increasing belief in *mappo* and dominated by the chaos perspective, a simplistic, all-encompassing religion would have appealed greatly to society. Uneducated peasants and aristocrats alike could easily be taught the three words of the *nembutsu* to help them in their spiritual struggles. No great spiritual understanding was necessary to be reborn in the Pure Land, which would have been extremely attractive during these times of constant war and chaos. Also, seeing the degradation in morality of the monks in the Heian schools must have made them appear hypocritical. After spending so much time on Mount Hiei, Honen realized that a simple religion was best rather than getting caught in the trappings of previous forms of Buddhism.

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[89] Alfred Bloom, "Shinran in the Context of Pure Land Tradition", *Japanese Religions*, vol. 17 (1) (1992), 7.
[90] Kashiwahara and Sonoda, *Shapers*, 69.
[91] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Religion*, 174.

Another important reason why Honen was so successful was that he understood how to address the changes in both the government and the people. Like his predecessors and contemporaries, Honen gained religious legitimacy through studying existing religious texts for years before coming up with his interpretation of Pure Land.[92] Studying on Mount Hiei was a traditional way to rise in influence in religious circles and so Honen used this traditional education and hierarchy to legitimize his interpretations. Honen was able to build credibility by referencing his vast knowledge obtained through study on Mount Hiei, even though the ultimate result was rejection of the scholastic pursuit of Buddhism. This connection between the past and present enabled him to appear as a reformer rather than a revolutionary which made him appeal to many people.

While Honen disagreed with the Heian schools of Buddhism, he was also acutely aware of the perspective shift that was taking place within the nation and so catered his actions to reflect that. Honen's primary patron was Kujo Kanezane, a Fujiwara regent.[93] If we will recall, the Fujiwara were the main family in control of the court during the Heian period. Through his connections with the Fujiwara, Honen assured the aristocracy that his Pure Land Buddhism also managed to address their needs. Also, this further legitimized him to the masses because he was patronized by a member of the Fujiwara who, while they were disenchanted with, were still respected on the basis of proximity to the emperor.

Surely this goes against the entire point of this work: that Honen appealed to the disenchanted masses in times of chaos. Yet that is not true; Honen appealed to all levels of society, but unlike his predecessors did not particularly address himself to the nobility.

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[92] Yamamura, *Medieval Japan*, 547.
[93] Kashiwahara and Sonoda, *Shapers*, 67.

> Among the converts there were monks who had been repelled by the scholastic philosophy or ritualism of orthodox Buddhism; nobles and ladies who had been afflicted by the sudden collapse of the pompous court life and aspired after eternal bliss beyond this world; military men who had become disgusted with their warlike pursuits and sought after spiritual refuge; common people who had long been denied the blessings of deeper spiritual satisfaction and found Honen's gospel a new gateway wide open to all.[94]

His religion was meant for all. It acknowledged the aspects of the aristocratic perspective still apparent in early Kamakura society but also addressed the problems and turmoil inherent in the chaos perspective. For the first time, a religious leader addressed himself to the nation as a whole, not just to the nobility. In this way he endeared himself to the masses. Awareness of the shift in perspective and acknowledging the necessity to appeal to everyone helped Honen pass along his vision of Pure Land Buddhism.

This leads directly into another aspect of Honen's philosophy and actions that made him so successful, his awareness and analysis of the society in which he was living. As elucidated earlier, Honen was a child of the late Heian period. He watched the aristocratic order crumble, weathered the Gempei War in Kyoto, and witnessed the famine and death so apparent at beginning of the Kamkura period. He recognized the decline of the court, the rise of the peasants, and the division of central government. Life had never been simple and pure for him; even on Mount Hiei he was forced to deal with the monks' thirst for money and power. "Honen's assertions were based on the pessimistic assumption that the human beings in his time were mired in foolishness and wrongdoings."[95] All of this chaos and unsettlement was what drove him to his interpretation of Pure Land Buddhism.

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[94] Anesaki, *Religion in Japanese History*, 175 – 176.
[95] Yamaura, *Medieval Japan*, 548.

Furthermore, this chaos meant that for the first time in a long while, death began to play a major part in Buddhist practice. As we will recall, since its introduction in Japan, Buddhism had a strong association with death. However, Shingon and Tendai focused on the performance of elaborate rituals to better the life of the aristocracy; their practices focused on the benefits of the here and now. Honen's confrontation with death in the Kamakura period reawakened the association between Buddhism and death that had lain dormant during the Heian period.[96] With the reality of death apparent everywhere, a Buddhism that addressed death was important. In fact, Honen's Buddhism transformed death from something fearful into a welcome release. Knowledge that the Pure Land was waiting on the other side of death would have alleviated some fear of death.

People of all classes were looking for a religion to help explain and begin to resolve all that was happening to them. Constant war and bloodshed made Buddhist schools that focused on arts and beauty seem irrelevant. In response to this, Honen's Pure Land gave an answer that appealed to his experience with the problems of the times. Its simplicity of doctrine addressed the problems that coincided with *mappo* while also addressing specific problems that could not be dealt with by either Tendai or Shingon.[97] Watching the perspective shift from aristocratic to chaos made Honen and his philosophy accessible to the public at large.

In addition, Honen's disposition allowed him to gather more followers. Honen was "extremely mild,"[98] and "…had a remarkable degree of personal charm, which was a

[96] Machida, *Renegade Monk*, 47.
[97] Hall, *Japan*, 97.
[98] Kashiwahara and Sonoda, *Shapers*, 68.

reflection of his broad sympathy and pure faith."[99] We can see that Honen was a powerful, but understated, leader. Rather than condemning other religious practices in the vein of Nichiren, he appealed to the masses by presenting a calm and reserved face. In the eyes of the people, this composed, mild person must have been a relief after the turbulent experiences of the late Heian and early Kamakura period. Certainly, he must have seemed a more pious, holy, faithful, and spiritual person than the monks they were accustomed to who appeared hypocritical, spoiled, and only attentive to the needs of the rich. Even the rich must have found him a relief from the pomp and presentation in Tendai and Shingon. The charming, peaceful Honen likely fulfilled what people imagined a Buddhist monk was supposed be, and it endeared him to them.

Evidence of Honen's tolerant and non-confrontational attitude is apparent in his *Seven-Article Injunction* which was a response to the Tendai monks' angry reception to his rising popularity.

> 1. Do not criticize Shingon or Tendai, or speak ill of any Buddhas or bodhisattvas.
> 2. Do not dispute with learned people or with followers of practices other than *nembutsu*.
> 3. Do not look down with biased minds on people with other beliefs and practices….
> 4. Do not encourage… sexual indulgence….
> 5. Do not, being of shallow learning state personal views without restraint, engage in disputes, or confuse the foolish.
> 6. Do not use popular and emotional styles of preaching or resort to heresies to convert the ignorant laity.
> 7. Do not claim that one's own heretical interpretations are correct or that they are the master's.[100]

While at first glance these articles appear to be more along the vein of the Ten Commandments than words of a mild mannered leader, upon closer inspection Honen's

[99] Anesaki, *History of Japanese Relgion*, 176.
[100] Kashiwahara and Sonoda, *Shapers*, 70-71.

meek and tolerant personality comes to the forefront. Addressed to followers who must have attempted all of these things, these articles merely try to explicate how Pure Land should be taught. Rather than calling for the destruction of other forms of Buddhism, Honen calls for tolerance, intelligence, and conservative practices. Surely this emphasis would be important in a time where people struggled to find normalcy. Defining Pure Land as a tolerant practice would have endeared it to those who did not desire religious conflict added to the chaotic times of the Kamakura period.

Finally, Honen's vision of the Pure Land and *Amida* provided a calm and peaceful basis for how people could relate to the other world and to each other. "At a time when the old order of society was disintegrating, his followers discovered that faith could provide a basis for group cohesion, transcending kinship, class, and all other natural factors that usually divide human society."[101] Faith in *Amida* appealed to all classes and provided a way for people to see their similarities instead of focusing on the differences. All people were equal in the sight of *Amida*, all were saved by the Original Vow, and so people clung to the idea that this faith would bring them together. At a time when death and chaos were so evident, a community formed from all walks of life strengthened followers. The Pure Land was not an individual, personal refuge from the chaos as the other schools of Buddhism must have appeared. Focusing on the power of the *nembutsu* and *Amida*'s universal saving grace were uniting points that transcended the limitations that defined the Heian period.

Pure Land arose for Honen not as a response but as an inspiration. Of course the chaos of the period was extremely influential in how Honen's thought evolved, but he did not see it this way. He discovered a religion that spoke to him and revealed truths he had

[101] Kitagawa, *Japanese History*, 113.

long been searching for. It is probable that the people also did not see Pure Land as a response to anything but felt Honen's interpretation resonate with them. Simplicity of faith and practice were long needed yet not sought. Pure Land provided a comfort to a people weary of death, famine, disease, and separation not because it tried to but because they felt it speaking to them.

Religion in Historical Context

Honen's religious developments help illustrate the relationship between theological discourse and historical events. Often times, religion gives theological justification or explanation for events happening at the time, just as the proliferation of conditions ideal for *mappo* did during the Kamakura period. At the same time, theology can also provide a refuge from these same events, as in the case of Honen's doctrine of the superior vocal *nembutsu*. Yet Honen's theology did not intentionally strive to address the needs of all people but only attempted to address the problems he felt. His incapacity to experience the effectiveness of the mental *nembutsu* enabled him to see the superiority of the vocal *nembutsu* which became the foundation of his philosophy. His recognition of the mental *nembutsu*'s inadequacy ended up affecting many people besides Honen because they underwent the same historical conditioning that inspired him. Theologically speaking, he was an innovator, even if historically speaking he was a reaction-ary.

The Kamakura period's historical circumstances and religious developments are difficult to understand independent of each other. While Pure Land responded to the problems in the Kamakura period, it also calmed the fears and anxiety with teachings that were far older than the period. Enabling people to find an explanation and a solution to the issues that faced them was essential to the spread of Pure Land Buddhism. Shifts in

historical perspectives necessitated a change in religious perspectives; from aristocratic to chaos and esoteric to universal salvation. Both the Heian and the Kamakura schools of Buddhism utilized the Heian and Kamakura historical setting to find the most appropriate religions.

History has a profound effect on how people perceive and practice religion. After all, "… any religion is lived out by specific human beings in a specific cultural, historical tradition."[102] It would be difficult for most people today to take every word of Honen's teaching to heart without first understanding why he said what he did. This occurs is many other religions. For example, it is often difficult to understand Biblical stories without first taking into consideration their historical context. This is often what leads to such strife among those who study the Bible and look to it for guidance. The instances of people's perceptions of religion being influenced by historical setting are seemingly endless, but they all point to the idea that religion needs to be interpreted within a historical context.

Perhaps religion grows best within a social crisis; in times of peace there is no reason to look for different explanations of life because what would be the reason? Period of social crises are often times when religion becomes increasingly important and at the same time malleable. The hole felt during turbulence and change often drives people to help and address these changes through religion. Often they feel as though the old forms of religion are not able to meet the current problems and search for new forms to meet those needs.

What is interesting to note is many the new religions that arise as a response to social crises frequently end up as established sects. Most often, they undergo some

[102] Ellwood and Pilgrim, *Japanese Religion*, 1.

transformation to make them applicable in the relative peace, but the fact that they manage to survive after the crisis attests to the fertile ground of social unrest for religious development.

It is important to recognize the history in religion just as it is important to recognize the religion in history. While only Kamakura period Japan has been addressed by this study, we should remember that religions are always developing in response to crises that many may not even be aware of. Pure Land Buddhism and Kamakura Buddhism in general could not have gained such acceptance without the chaos perspective inherent in the times. Conversely, without the new schools of Buddhism, the chaos perspective could have crushed the emerging societal order by having no way to comfort the fears of the masses.

Appendix A

Figures

Dogen – 1200 – 1253. Founder of Soto Zen Buddhism.

Eshinni – Nun and wife of Shinran.

Fujiwara – Aristocratic family that controlled the imperial family and therefore almost all aspects of life during the Heian period.

Honen – 1133 – 1212. Religious visionary of the Kamakura period whose Pure Land doctrine focused on universal salvation and the vocal *nembutsu*.

Kukai – 774 – 835. Founder of the Shingon school of Buddhism.

Minamoto – Military family that lost the Hogen no Ran but won the Gempei War resulting in the establishment of their line as the leaders of the *bakufu*.

Minamoto no Yoritomo – The head of the Minamoto family who established the *bakufu*.

Nichiren – 1222 – 1282. The founder of Nichiren Buddhim. He was extremely nationalistic who campaigned for the elimination of all other forms of Buddhism.

Saicho – 767 – 822. Founder of the Tendai school of Buddhism.

Shinran – 1173 – 1263. Student of Honen and second great reformer of Pure Land Buddhism in the Kamakura Period. His theology focuses on the vocal *nembutsu* and made an example of its power by giving up precepts and marrying.

Taira – Military family that won the Hogen no Ran but ultimately was eliminated by the Gempei War.

Taira no Kiyomori – 1118– 1181. Leader of the Taira who became the regent after the *Hogen no Ran*. His death enabled the Minamoto to seize power through the Gempei War.

Appendix B

Glossary

Amida (Amitabha) – The Buddha of the Pure Land who is the embodiment of compassion. According to the Original Vow, he vowed to bring anyone into his Pure Land who called his name.

Aristocratic perspective – The perspective relevant during the Heian period that focused on the court, beauty, and refinement in all aspects of life.

Bakufu – The military government established at the end of the Gempei War. Minamoto were the leaders of the *bakufu*. Also known as the shogunate.

Chaos Perspective – The perspective relevant during the Kamakura period. It focuses on the prevalence of death, famine, disease, and disorder during the time.

Daimoku – "Namu myoho rengekyo." It is the recitation of the name of the Lotus Sutra and the most important aspect of Nichiren Buddhism.

Gempei War – 1180 – 1185. War between the Taira and Minamoto that utterly destroyed the Taira and established the *bakufu* led by the Minamoto in Kamakura.

Heian Period – 794 – 1185. Period marked by strong centralized government in Heian ruled by the aristocracy.

Heiankyo – The capital of the Heian period. Also referred to as Miyako or Kyoto.

Hogen no Ran – 1156. War between the Taira and the Minamoto for power after the Insei-system and Fujiwara lost control of the country. The Taira were victorious and established themselves in a rule close to that of the Fujiwara before them.

Insei-system – System whereby an emperor would abdicate but would continue to rule the country from a monastery (also called the Office of Ex-Emperors).

Kamakura – Military capital during the Kamakura period. It is located between present day Kyoto and Tokyo.

Kamakura Period – 1185 – 1333. Period marked by the establishment of dual governments, one in Kyoto and one in Kamakura.

Kyoto – Modern name of Heiankyo. Seat of the imperial family and the aristocracy.

Mandalas – Buddhist pictures that depict the entirety of the universe.

Mappo – Period of the degeneration of Buddhist teaching visible through disasters. During the time of *mappo*, the historical Buddha's teachings are ineffective and so other ways of attaining enlightenment are sought.

Mount Hiei – Main temple of Tendai faith. It was a center of learning and managed to foster all of the reformers of the Kamakura period.

Mount Koya – Main temple of Shingon faith.

Nara – The capital during the Nara period.

Nara Period – 710 – 794. Period that established the first truly central government in Japanese history. It saw the introduction of six schools of Buddhism which became known as the Nara Schools of Buddhism.

Nembutsu – "*Namu amida Butsu*." Literally, "I surrender to *Amida* Buddha." It is the foundational practice of Kamakura period Pure Land Buddhism. There are two primary forms, mental (contemplation) and vocal (recitiation).

Nichiren Buddhism – Kamakura School of Buddhism founded by Nichiren that focused entirely on the saving power of the Lotus Sutra. Main practice was the continual recitation of the *daimoku*.

Original Vow – The 18th vow of *Amida* that states that he will bring anyone into the Pure Land who calls his name.

Pure Land – Worlds created by Buddhas for the express purpose of achieving enlightenment. In Pure Land Buddhism, *Amida* presides over one such Pure Land.

Pure Land Buddhism – Buddhism as created through Amitabha, *Amida*, that utilized salvation and rebirth into the Pure Land.

Shingon – School of Heian Buddhism founded by Kukai. Beliefs are founded around the idea that all religions are simply different manifestations of the same Buddhism. Large emphasis on mandalas and religious ritual. Main temple was located on Mount Koya.

Shogun – Military leader during the Kamakura Period and head of the *bakufu*.

Shogunate – Another name for the *Bakufu*. Comes from the fact that the shogun was the leader of the *bakufu*.

Sohei – Warrior monks from Mount Koya and Mount Hiei.

Soto Zen Buddhism – Kamakura school of Buddhism founded by Dogen that focused on aesthetic simplicity and austerity. It was extremely popular with the military class.

Tendai – School of Heian Buddhism founded by Saicho. It focused on universal enlightenment through the study of various sutras with a special emphasis on the Lotus sutra. Main temple was located on Mount Hiei.

Appendix C

Timeline of Heian and Kamakura Periods

767 – Birth of Saicho.

774 – Birth of Kukai.

794 – Transfer of the capital to Heiankyo.

1068 – Establishment of the *Insei* system.

1118 – Taira no Kiyomori born.

1133 – Birth of Honen.

1156 – *Hogen no Ran*. End of Fujiwara power. Rise of the Taira.

1160 – Taira no Kiyomori receives court titles.

1168 – Taira no Kiyomori falls ill and retires to monastery. Retains power.

1173 – Birth of Shinran.

1175 – Honen leaves Mount Hiei and begins teaching.

1180 – Gempei war begins.

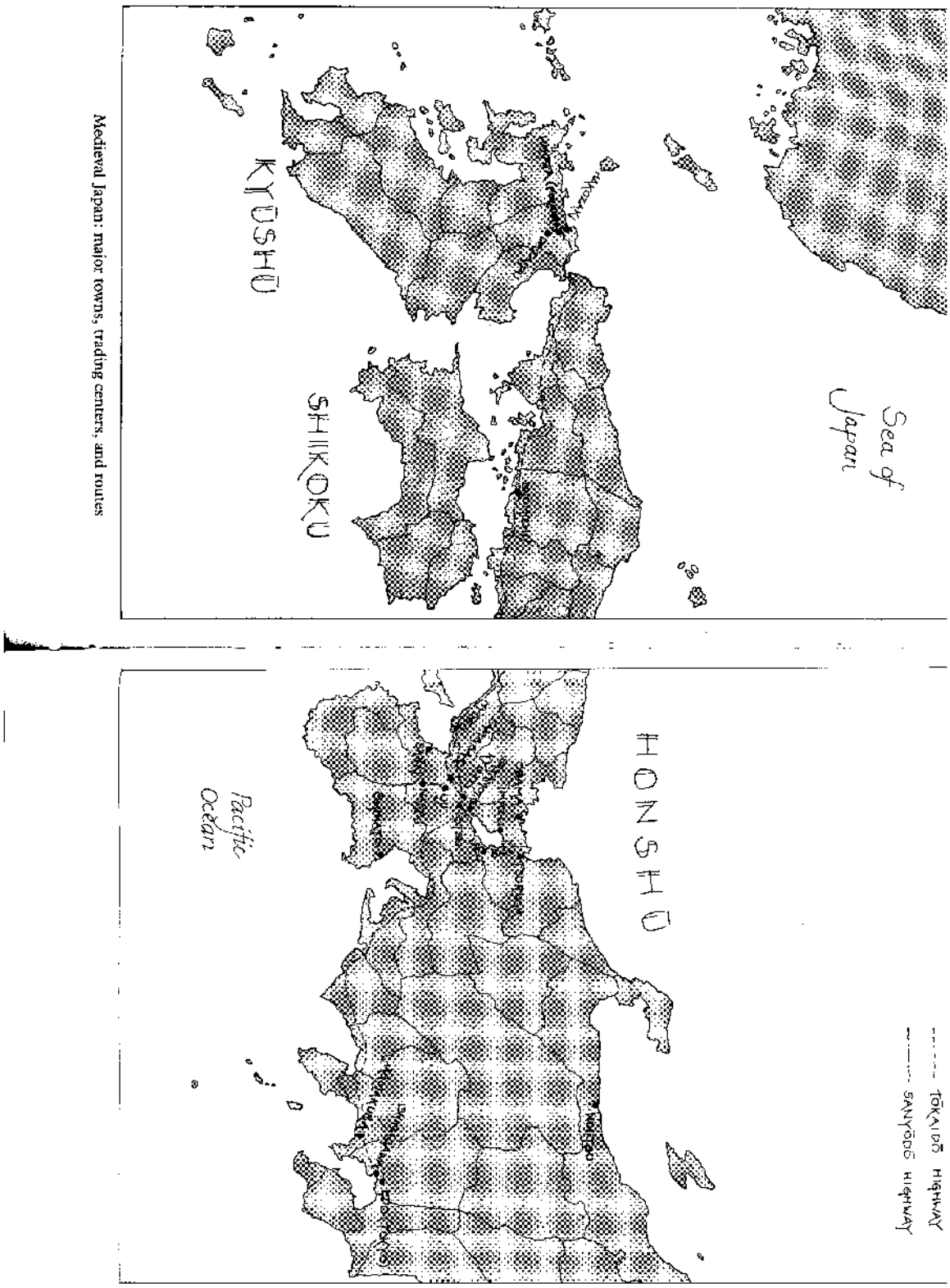
1181 – Taira no Kiyomori dies.

1185 – End of the Gempei war. Establishment of the *bakufu*.

1212 – Death of Honen.

1263 – Death of Shinran.

Appendix D



Medieval Japan: major towns, trading centers, and routes

From: Kozo Yamamura, *Cambridge History of Japan*, "Medieval Japan".

Bibliography

Anesaki, Masaharu. *History of Japanese Religion: With Special Reference to the Social and Moral Life of the Nation*. Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1963.

History of Japanese Religion: With Special Reference to the Social and Moral Life of the Nation, a secondary source, by Masaharu Anesaki, a professor at Harvard University, is considered one of the most important works regarding Japanese history and religion. Its particular emphasis on cultural issues is essential in any attempt to address the social and cultural conditions that affected Japanese religion of any period. While written with an academic audience in mind, Anesaki's book nevertheless attempts to address students with little background in the subject. This book acts as an excellent complement to Kitagawa's book since both attempt to address the social situation of Japan and its relation to religious development. Anesaki fills in the more specific cultural issues while Kitagawa addresses historical issues; together they provide excellent insight into the detailed aspects of the periods addressed in the books. As this thesis spends a significant amount of time analyzing the cultural aspects of religious ferment, *History of Japanese Religion* is an invaluable resource to provide depth to that section of the paper.

Bloom, Alfred. "Shinran in the Context of Pure Land Tradition." *Japanese Religions* 17, no. 1 (1992): 4-30.

Deal, William E. *Handbook to Life in Medieval and Early Modern Japan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Handbook to Life in Medieval and Early Modern Japan, a secondary source, by William E. Deal of Case Western Reserve University is an excellent source of information concerning the social, political, and economic conditions concurrent with the spread of Pure Land Buddhism. Although not an in-depth resource, it helps establish the

background of the period and relates the different sections of society in such a way as to assist the reader in understanding the conditions that helped propagate Pure Land Buddhism. Due to its nature as a handbook, it is largely intended for those unfamiliar with the subject matter which is ideal considering my audience will be mostly unfamiliar with this information. In contrast to Kitagawa, this resource does not focus primarily on religious history so is an appropriate compliment to the information I obtained from *Religion in Japanese History* by giving a better social background to the religious events being described. I use this as a way to convey the different social conditions of the time to establish background.

De Bary, Wm. Theodore, ed. *The Buddhist Tradition: in India, China & Japan*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1969.

Dobbins, James C. *Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.

Letters of the Nun Eshinni: Images of Pure Land Buddhism in Medieval Japan, a primary and secondary source, by James C. Dobbins, a professor at Oberlin College, presents the letters of the Nun Eshinni and explains their relevance in understanding the conditions that helped Pure Land Buddhism flourish in Kamakura era Japan. James C. Dobbins is considered one of the seminal authors of Pure Land Buddhism in Japanese history; a source from him is essential in a paper of this scope. Intended for an academic audience, this book attempts to use the letters of the Nun Eshinni, the wife of Shinran, to construct not only an image of her life, but also an image of Shinran's life and the life of Japan at large. This source complement's Machida by giving first hand accounts of the social and cultural conditions of the time following that of Machida so that together, they form a continuous narrative throughout the end of the Heian into the beginning of the

Kamakura period. Furthermore, the depictions of Japan from a person living in the Kamakura period give a better understanding of what conditions changed that enabled Pure Land to thrive.

Earhart, H. Byron. *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity*. 2nd ed. Belmont, California: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1974.

Eliot, Charles. *Japanese Buddhism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1935.

Japanese Buddhism, a secondary source, by Sir Charles Eliot is one of the decisive books on Japanese Buddhism. Despite its age, it continues to be relevant and is cited in multiple other sources listed in this bibliography. It addresses the different forms of Buddhism in Japan and examines each school's development and change. Written for intellectuals in the 1920s (it was published post-humously), this book attempts to describe Japanese Buddhism to academics with no previous knowledge on the subject. Paired with the more general *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, this book gives some depth of understanding to Pure Land Buddhism. In the paper, it is used to explain Buddhist tenets and also to further examine the historical conditions that produced Pure Land under Honen.

Ellwood, Robert S. and Richard Pilgrim. *Japanese Religion: a cultural perspective*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985.

Foard, James, Mihael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne, ed. *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*. Berkley: Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1996.

Gomez, Luis O. "Pure Lands." *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004.

The *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, a tertiary source, is an extremely useful reference source that covers all sorts of aspects of Buddhism. Of particular relevance to my topic is the article entitled "Pure Lands." As it is a reference work, the information is extremely

general; however, this is useful for my paper in that it addresses the overall basics of Pure Land Buddhism, not only in Japan, but its entire origin. While the *Encyclopedia* makes specific references to Buddhist practices and beliefs, overall it is intended for a general audience who simply wish to know more about Buddhism. It serves as a fitting contrast to Eliot's book about the specifics of Japanese Buddhist development. Eliot and the *Encyclopedia* play off the strengths and weaknesses of each other to present a fuller picture of Pure Land in the context of my paper. In order to help the reader understand the basics of Pure Land philosophy, I use this source to summarize and generalize the important aspects of Pure Land necessary for a complete understanding of my topic.

Griffis, William Elliot. *The Religions of Japan: From the Dawn of History to the Era of Meiji*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895.

Hall, John Whitney. *Japan: From Prehistory to Modern Times*. Delacorte World History Volume XX. New York: Delacorte Press, 1968.

Hall, John W. and Jeffrey P. Mass, ed. *Medieval Japan: Essays in Institutional History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Kashiwahara, Yusen and Koyu Sonoda, ed. *Shapers of Japanese Buddhism*. Translated by Gaynor Sekimori. Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Co., 1994.

Kitagawa, Joseph M. *Religion in Japanese History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966.

Religions in Japanese History by Joseph Kitagawa, a professor of History of Religions at the University of Chicago, is one of the most comprehensive looks at religion throughout Japanese history. Each chapter addresses a different period in history beginning with a brief introduction to the social problems on the time and then moving onto specific religious developments of the period. Its historical analysis of Japanese religion is intended for academics, although not necessarily ones extremely familiar with

the topic. As mentioned when discussing Dean's book, this source provides an analytical look at the religion of the time which will be benefitted by the addition of cultural, social, and economic issues important at the time. This book is used to fit Pure Land within the context of Japanese religion as a whole and develop understanding about the way Japan views religion.

Knox, George William. *The Development of Religion in Japan*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1907.

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Machida, Soho. *Renegade Monk: Honen and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism*. Translated and edited by Ioannis Mentzas. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.

Renegade Monk: Honen and Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, a secondary source, by Soho Machida is a book that addresses Honen and his philosophy during the Kamakura period. Few books are devoted to Honen; most literature is devoted to Shinran with a few preparatory pages addressing Honen. Of the books available on Honen, *Renegade Monk* is considered extremely influential and therefore indispensable in a paper that discusses Honen at length. Machida's book not only examines the beliefs of Honen but sets him within the historical context of the Kamakura period which is essential in this thesis. As this book was written in refutation of Machida's dissertation, the audience is obviously academic and more specifically those familiar with Honen and his teachings. Comparing this book to the Jodo Shu website creates a contrast between what Honen actually said and taught and how his disciples today have interpreted those sayings and teachings. Section three of the thesis is about analyzing Honen within the

Kamakura period and this book is used to explicate Honen's views and how they derived from the conditions of the time.

Mass, Jeffrey P. ed. *Court and Bakufu in Japan: Essays in Kamakura History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982.

Müller, F. Max., ed. *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*. Volume xlix of *Sacred Books of the East*. 1894; reprinted in Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965.

Rhodes, Robert F. "The Beginning of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan: From its Introduction through the Nara Period." *Japanese Religions* 31. no. 1 (2006): 1-22.

"The Beginning of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan: From its Introduction through the Nara Period," a secondary source, by Robert Rhodes, a professor at Otani University in Kyoto, is an article stating that the reason Pure Land Buddhism was accepted in the Nara period was because of its deep ties to the ancestral cults of the time. He sets out to prove why this is true and in doing so provides an window into the beginnings of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan. Also intended as an article for an academic audience familiar with the subject matter, it is extremely useful in presenting the tie between Pure Land Buddhism and death at its inception, even though I do not address Pure Land's growth until the late Heian and Kamakura periods (about 400 years later). This works well with Kitagawa's book which sets the stage for why Pure Land did not reach the heights of popularity until far after the Nara period. Kitagawa's focus on the overarching themes of Japanese religion contrasts with the Rhodes' focus on a specific time and specific events, to encourage the idea that while Pure Land was introduced successfully in the Nara period, it did not gain wide recognition and appreciation until the Kamakura period. Rhodes' work serves as a basis for Pure Land Buddhism in Japan which helps me base the Kamakura developments of Pure Land within its appropriate historical context.

Shively, Donald H. and William H. McCullough, editors. *The Cambridge History of Japan*. "Heian Japan." New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

"Heian Japan" in the series *The Cambridge History of Japan*, a secondary source, edited by leaders in the field of Japanese history, Donald H. Shively and William H. McCullough, is one of the most comprehensive volumes on Heian era history. Addressing almost all aspects of Heian history, culture, and life, this book is extremely helpful in providing the background necessary in establishing the specific characteristics of the Heian period. It is obviously intended for an academic audience due to the comprehensive nature of the contents. Shively and McCullough complement Anesaki well. Anesaki's broad analysis of Japanese history is an excellent contrast to the specificity of Shively and McCullough and together they synthesize a relatively complete picture of Heian Japan. As part of this thesis is to analyze the perspective shift from the Heian to the Kamakura period, this book provides the basis for my explication of Heian culture and history.

Sho-On Hattori. "The Essence of Pure Land Buddhism" Jodo Shu USA. http://www.jodo.org/index.html (accessed March 8, 2009).

The Jodo Shu is the school of Buddhism in Japan today that descends from Honen's teachings and this website is a translation of the original Jodo Shu organization's website from Japanese. As it is simply an informational website, this is intended for the public at large to be introduced to the ideas and teachings of the Jodo Shu. It covers the basic tenets of their teachings and places them within the greater tradition of Honen's teachings. Machida's book about Honen is a wonderful contrast to the simplicity of this website and its information; comparing the intellectual and specific ideas presented by Machida with the simplistic and intended to be universal ideas of the

website creates a welcome contrast. For the thesis, this website provides some much needed concise information about Honen and his teachings. Also, it provides a lens through which to examine which aspects of Honen's teachings were important enough to survive to the present day.

Souyri, Pierre Francois. *The World Turned Upside Down: Medieval Japanese Society*. Translated by Käthe Roth. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

The Tannisho Kenkyukai. *Perfect Freedom in Buddhism: An Exposition of the Shin Sect, the Larges Buddhist School in Japan*. Translated by Shinji Takuwa. Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1968.

Yamamura, Kozo, ed. *The Cambridge History of Japan*. "Medieval Japan." New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.