



Key concepts

- Generally accepted that Buddhism entered Japan from China via Korea in the 6th century CE: it adapted, adopted and absorbed Shinto, and over the subsequent decades became popular with the ruling class.
- The development of Buddhism was linked with the internal politics of Japan and the feuds and wars that took place alongside a belief in mappo – the age of the decay of the dhamma.
- Networking monks travelling to and from different parts of Japan, China and Korea brought with them different interpretations of the dhamma whilst their monasteries became powerful and influential institutions.
- During the Kamakura period of Japanese history (1185–1333) the founders of three key Buddhist traditions in Japan – Zen, Pure Land and Nichiren – each had close associations with the Buddhism practised at the Enryaku-ji monastery and temple complex.
- Returning from China in 1191, Eisai founded the first form of Zen known as Rinzai which cultivated martial arts, observance of ceremonial rules and defence of the state - it quickly found favour with the educated warrior and political classes.
- Returning from China in 1227, Dogen founded the second form of Zen known as Soto which upheld a life of poverty and zazen (sitting meditation).
- The use of koans – such as the Mu Koan - is a central practice in Zen traditions – based on the Flower and Smile Sermon when Mahakasyapa smiled at the teaching of the Buddha thus receiving the dhamma through a mind to mind transmission – not through explicit teaching and explanation.
- From being a monk since the age of nine, Honen left the monastery aged 43 to preach the Pure Land message of devotion to Amida because following the dhamma was too difficult especially in the age of mappo.
- Honen followed by Shinran, taught that people could not be saved through jiriki (own power), but only through tariki (other power) and that could only be offered by devotion to Amida shown through recitation of the nembutsu: namu amida butsu.
- Nichiren's entire focus was on the Lotus Sutra as providing the perfect and final truth with all other forms of Buddhism being wrong.
- Honen taught the Three Great Secret Laws with the most important being the second: the daimoku inscribed in the middle of the Gohonzon.
- The daimoku itself is: 'namu myoho renge kyo' which can be translated as: 'I take refuge in the mystic law of the Lotus Sutra'.
- Shodai (prolonged chanting of the daikmoku) is the highest Buddhist practice for Nichiren Buddhists.

'Japanese Buddhism is...multiple Buddhism(s) deployed in different times and places to meet a variety of needs and purposes.' (Deal and Ruppert)

'What Mahakasyapa understood I, alas, do not know! The story, however, indicates the direct, wordless nature of much Zen teaching, cutting through the trappings of discursive thought.' (Williams)

'The Buddhas teach the Dhamma with myriads of uncountable skilful means, according to the capacities of sentient beings; the inexperienced cannot understand this.' (The Lotus Sutra)

'By reciting Amida's name, I do not mean meditation, or reciting it as a result of studying and understanding its deep meaning...simply reciting the Buddha's name, with no doubt that this will lead to rebirth in the Pure Land.' (Honen)

'We can see that Nichiren ... wove the narrative of the Lotus Sutra into his own age, reinterpreting the absolute Buddha as an historical actor capable of engagement with the very conduct of the realm.' (Deal and Ruppert)

Key words

Buddhisms	Amida
Pure Land	Rinzai
koan	Shinto
Soto	Zazen
Gohonzon	Enryaku-ji

Key arguments/debates

Some focus on the links between Buddhism in Japan and Mahayana Buddhism.

Others focus on Japanese culture and history in relation to its Buddhism(s).

Key questions

Mahayana Buddhism is concerned with 'teaching universal liberation and compassion' – is that not what the three types of Japanese Buddhism do? Does the focus on the koan, nembutsu and daikmoku distract from more recognisable forms of Buddhism as seen in the practice of meditation and following the Noble Eightfold Path?

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key quotes