Religion, Aesthetics, and Superstition in Medieval Japan
Background to Medieval Buddhism

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

- Amida: Salvationist boddhisathva (Tendai)
- “Reliance on others” (tariki) vs. “Reliance on self” (jiriki)
3 Great Advocates of Amida Buddhism

• Genshin (942-1017)
  – Originally Tendai monk
  – *Essentials of Salvation*

• Honen (1133-1212)
  – Monk who broke with Tendai
  – Repetition of “Praise be to Amida”
  – Established Pure Land sect
  – Simplified Buddhism
3 Advocates of Amida Worship

• Shinran (1173-1261)
  – Disciple of Honen
  – One truly sincere invocation of *nembutsu*
  – True reliance on others
  – Establishes True Pure Land Sect
Nichiren (1222-1282)

- Challenged efficacy of *nembutsu*
- Salvationist powers of Lotus Sutra
- Nichiren’s *nembutsu*: “Praise be to the Lotus Sutra”
- Denounced other sects
- Established Nichiren Sect
Literary Expressions of Buddhism

- Recluse Essays
  - *An Account of My Hermitage*
  - *Essays in Idleness*

- War Chronicles
  - *Tales of the Heike*
  - *The Great Peace*
Themes in Literary Accounts

• Evanescence
• Retreat
• Mercy and Compassion (inspired by Amida)
Zen Buddhism

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

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

• Wabi and Sabi together =
  – Rustic simplicity
  – Subtle and aged elegance
  – Asymmetrical earthiness
  – Lonesome melancholy
Common Superstitions

- Shinto-based notion of purity
- Fox-spirits
- Oni

- **Religious-based notions that have gained secular currency**