Zen Buddhism

Rise of Japanese Buddhism
Pre-Buddhist Religion

- Religion in Japanese islands not well structured
- Religion focused on nature and the cosmos
- Japanese felt they were an integral part of the cosmos
- Cosmos made of living beings who all share sacred nature (*kami*)
“Kami” refers to a material thing or spirit that possesses sacred power. Kami are all things worthy of reverence. Can include good or evil beings.
Kami

- Kami dwell in different beings and objects
- Kami fundamentally identified with the sacred nature of the universe
Kami
Clan (우지)

- The notion of “clan” (우지) also a central religious concept in pre-Buddhist Japanese islands
- Clans provided basic framework for social solidarity
- Clans not based on a strict blood relationship
- Some blood relationship, whether real or fictitious, considered essential
Clans (uji)

- Each clan was a social, economic, political, and religious unit
- Clans based on a specific kami of the clan, who is attended by the chieftain
- Sharing the same kami considered more important than blood relationships
Izanagi and Izanami
Early Religion

- Early *kami* cults had no formalized worship
- Most religious functions took place at home or around a sacred tree or rock
Early Religion
Early Religion

- Emperor said to be descended from Sun God Amaterasu
- Emperor’s duty to maintain close contact with this kami
- Emperor was both chief priest and supreme political leader
Impact of China

• 5th-6th Centuries, Chinese and Korean civilizations and Buddhism arrive in Japan
• The term “Shintō” is created to distinguish native Japanese culture from the new alien forms
• “Shintō” borrowed from the Chinese characters shin (kami) and tao (“the way”)
Impact of China

• Introduction of Chinese Script and Buddhist images
• Educated classes start to use literary Chinese for historical and official records, as well as poetry
• Japanese accept written Chinese but not spoken
Impact of China

- Through Chinese texts, Japanese learn about a variety of concepts:
  - Taoism
  - Yin-Yang
  - Five elements
  - Confucian ethics, social and political theories, law and education
Impact of Buddhism

• Introduction of Buddhist art has major impact
• No prior artistic images of kami in Japan
• Image of the Buddha was controversial
Impact of Buddhism

• Anti-Buddhist factions argued that “foreign” *kami* would offend “native” *kami*

• Powerful Soga clan built temple to enshrine Buddhist images
Impact of Buddhism

• Thanks to the Soga clan, other families begin to accept Buddhism
• Buddhist statues thought to have magic properties
• Not much belief or interest in doctrine
• Buddhas and bodhisattvas considered a new kind of *kami*
Buddhism in the Nara and Heian

• Buddhism flourishes during the Nara Period (710-784)
• Japanese monks travel to China to study
• Important lineages of Tendai and Shingon formed
Nara and Heian Buddhism

• Kūkai (774-835) founds the esoteric school of Buddhism called Shingon
• Emphasizes mantra and ritual
Nara and Heian Buddhism

• Saichō (767-822) founds the Tendai School.

• Emphasizes “original enlightenment” (hongaku)
Kamakura Buddhism

• In the Kamakura Period (1185-1333) several new schools emerge
• Among the most important are:
  – Pure Land
  – Nichiren
  – Zen
Kamakura Buddhism: Pure Land

- Hōnen (1133-1212) founds the Pure Land School
- Teaches only chanting the name of Amida Buddha
- Emphasizes the concept of “end times” (mappō)
Kamakura Buddhism: Nichiren

- Nichiren (1222-1282) founded the Lotus Sutra School
- Promotes chanting of the title of the Lotus Sutra
- Calls for the establishment of a “Buddhocracy”
Kamakura Buddhism: Zen

• Other traditions focusing on sitting meditation (ch’an, zen) emerge
• The monk Eisai (1141-1215) traditionally held to have founded the Rinzai School
• Dōgen (1200-1253) founds the Sōtō School of Zen
Eisai (1141-1215)

- Started as a Tendai monk
- Became dissatisfied and went to China to study
- Became interested in Zen
- Returned to Japan and formed the Rinzai School
Dōgen (1200-1253)

- Started as a Tendai monk
- Went to study with Eisai
- Went to China at age 24 to study Zen
- Returned and founded the Sōtō School