

The late Heian era(794–1192) saw the collapse of the code system(律令体制) accompanied by the decay of society. Under the situation, The Ojoyoshu (往生要集,=The Essentials of Rebirth in the Pure Land, composed by 源信(Genshin) in 985) was an influential Buddhist text, which became a bestseller. It expounded on Pure Land Buddhist thought saying "How dirty this world is!" and "How beautiful the next world (Pure Land) after passing away is!" with emphasis on methods to attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha:visual meditation practices, where later Pure Land sects favored verbal acts such as the nembutsu(念仏). At that time the nenbutsu was thought to see Buddha in the mind's eye through hard practice, which meant only Buddhist monks could attain Buddhahood. Well, how about seculars? At that time, seculars who gave lots of donations to the Buddhist monk circle could only become buddhas. Therefore it was thought that only a few Buddhist monks and aristocrats could attain rebirth in the Pure Land: most commoners would not be saved. The desire of lots of commoners was not satisfied, whereas 法然(ほうねん=Honen, 1133–1212) found a way to solve their frustration. When studying on Mt.Hiei, Honen remained unconvinced and dissatisfied. One day when he was reading 観無量寿経疏(the Commentary on the Meditation Sutra), his eyes came to a striking passage. It said one should awaken to the fact that one is an ordinary being without the ability to achieve enlightenment, and that one need only rely upon Amida Buddha. He recognized his conceit in attempting to get enlightenment by his own strength was actually impeding his emancipation. Honen then left Mt.Hiei and began preaching to the people 専修念仏 (senjunenbutsu=the exclusive practice of the nembutsu), which means that if one but practices invocation of the name of the Buddha one will unfailingly attain rebirth in the Pure Land. That received wide support from the general populace for whom practices dependent on their own strength were formerly impossible.



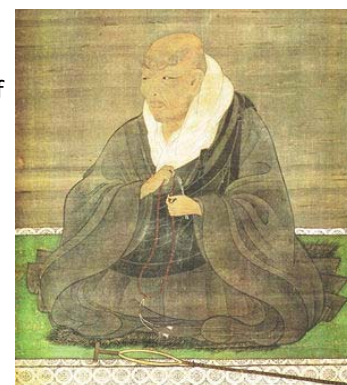
Honen

In other words, he changed the interpretation of the nembutsu saying "The nembutsu is not a difficult matter. Chanting Namu Amida Butsu with one's mouth is the true nembutsu. So, all you need to do is chant Namu Amida Butsu 10 times with your mouth when passing away, then all of you can become buddhas in the Pure Land."

最澄(さいちょう=Saicho,767–822) preached 悉皆成仏(all become buddhas), however, there was no way for anyone to become a buddha. It wasn't until Honen that anyone could become a buddha with the method preached by him.

親鸞(しんらん=Shinran, 1173–1262), a disciple of Honen, took further steps. While Honen laid emphasis on the repetition of Amida's name, as a meritorious act, Shinran professed "We call the Name, Namu Amida Butsu, in happiness and thankfulness for His mercy," based on his creed "Men are inherently evil and sinful, and so all the good we're capable of doing is only to satisfy our selfish desires. We can be saved only by faith in Amida, relying upon *His divine promise. The faithful are already saved by faith, and the calling of the name of Amida is nothing but the expression of the overflow of happiness of the saved."

*In the Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra is the story of Amida Buddha before he became a buddha. It was while Amida was this bodhisattva that he made 48 vows and pledged not to become a buddha until he had fulfilled them.The 18th vow was to have all sentient beings born in his own Pure Land, and if he couldn't bring this about with ten prayers then he wouldn't become a buddha. Shinran focused on this vow. Amida had already become a buddha, which meant that the vow was already fulfilled. In other words, if we but have faith in Amida, we have already been saved.

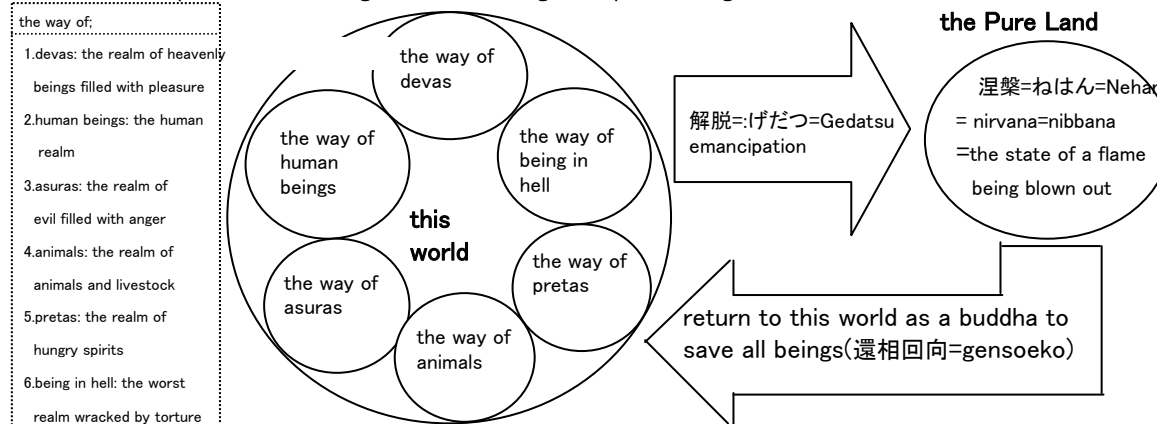


Shinran

他力本願(tarikhongan) Taking the nembutsu as an invocation of gratitude to the Buddha, Shinran categorically denied practices of "one's own power" as superfluous. He preached absolute reliance on "power of the other(=Amida)."

還相回向(gensoeko) Shinran stressed 還相回向(gensoeko): When karmic bonds to this life end with death, people of the nembutsu go to the Pure Land. But with their fulfillment of perfect wisdom–compassion, they return immediately to this world in the dynamic activity of bringing all beings to awakening.

I think he had Japanese Buddhism go back to the original Japanese religious sense. See:http://www.tourguidejd.com/tourguidejd/deploy/infoPacks/docs/jd.infoPack_350.pdf



reincarnation within the 6 realms = the world of suffering

懺悔(zange=repentance) Shinran sublated Buddhist precept to an individual's internalized conflict as a form of repentance. Shinran, thus, showed respect for the dignity of each individual.