

History of Eikandō, Part 3: Transition to Pure Land Buddhism

The third period of Eikandō's history begins with the transition from Jōhen (1166–1224), Eikandō's twelfth abbot, to Shōkū (1177–1247), its thirteenth, and continues until the present day. During this period, Eikandō became a temple of the Pure Land school and was nearly destroyed during the Ōnin War (1467–1477).

Like Eikan before him, Jōhen was originally a member of the Shingon school of Esoteric Buddhism, but he developed a strong interest in Pure Land Buddhism (Jōdoshū). The Pure Land school was founded by the monk Hōnen (1133–1212) and is based around recitation of the *nenbutsu*, a ritual invocation of the name of Amida Buddha. Pure Land followers believe that by practicing the *nenbutsu*, they can be reborn in the Pure Land—a paradise in the west where enlightenment is easily attained.

While studying at Ninnaji Temple, Jōhen read Hōnen's treatise "Collection of Selections on the Nenbutsu and the Original Vow" (*Senchaku hongan nenbutsushū*) with the intention of criticizing it, but instead he found the contents utterly convincing. From then on, Jōhen preached not only Shingon Buddhism but Pure Land Buddhism as well.

It is due to Jōhen that Eikandō is now a temple of the Pure Land school. When Jōhen entered Eikandō to become its abbot, he first inserted Hōnen posthumously into the lineage as the eleventh abbot and then became the twelfth. Upon retirement, he passed the position to Shōkū, one of Hōnen's primary disciples. Shōkū would eventually establish the Seizan branches of Pure Land Buddhism and pass the abbotship to his disciple Jōon (1201–1271). Eikandō has been a temple of the Pure Land school ever since.

In the fifteenth century, Kyoto was at the center of the Ōnin War (1467–1477), an armed conflict that began as a succession dispute over the shogunate and grew into a civil war. During the first year of the war, Eikandō was almost entirely burned down amid the fighting, and most of the buildings were rebuilt between 1472 and 1479.