Eighth Edition

Topics in Japanese History

Gregory Smits

Topics in Japanese History

Primary textbook on Japan for HIST 104
Supplementary textbook for HIST 415

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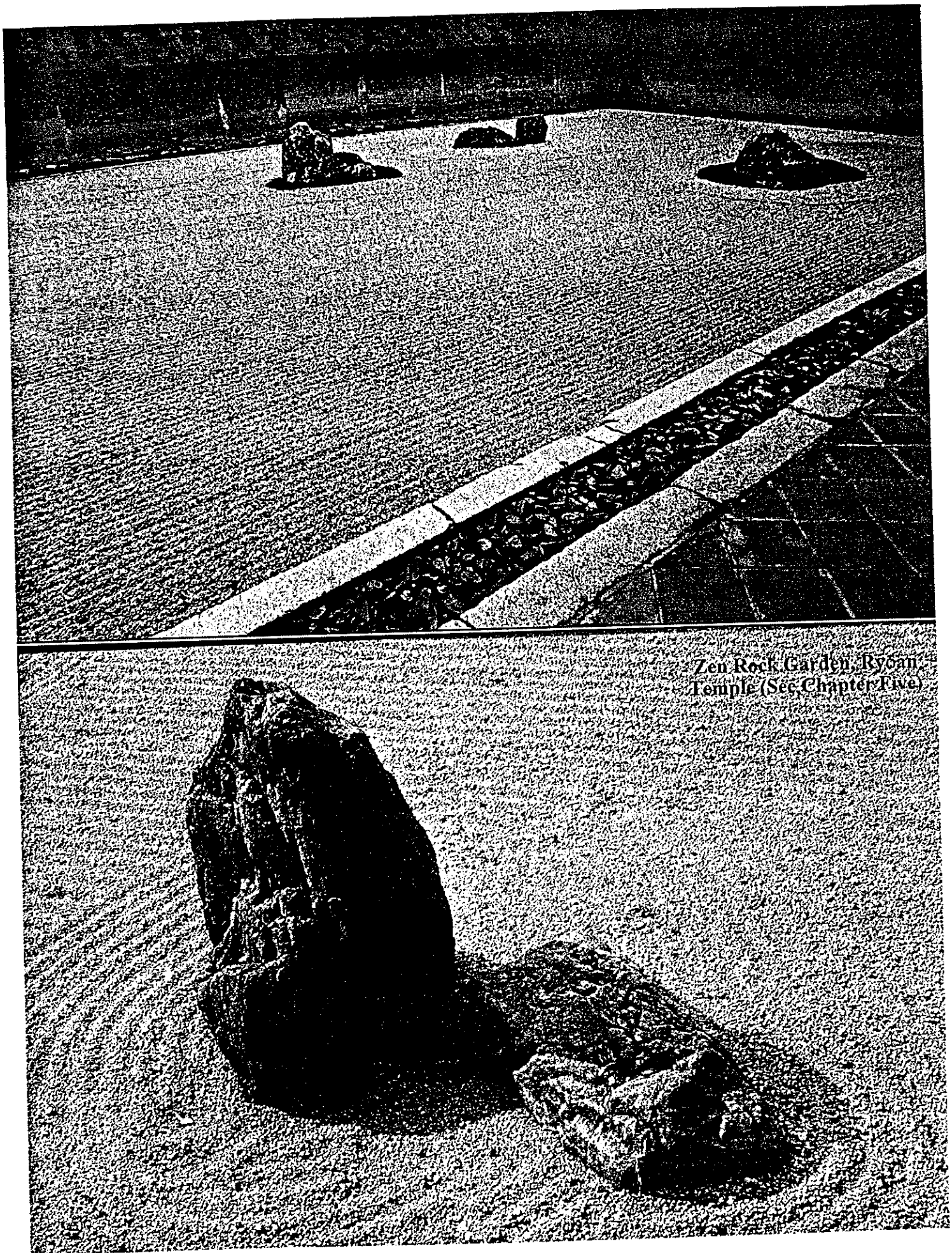

Zen Rock Garden, Ryoan-ji Temple (See Chapter Five)

Read This
INTRODUCTION

This book began four years ago as a collection of visual aids and study materials. It has gone through seven major revisions and numerous minor adjustments and will continue to change as the years go by. These pages contain nearly everything you need to know about Japan for HIST 104 at Eastern Washington University. There is a companion volume for China, *Topics in Chinese History* and a short textbook on Buddhism, both of which you will have worked through by now if you are in HIST 104. This book is also intended as a supplementary text for students in HIST 415.

Note: This book is now being used in courses at colleges and universities other than Eastern Washington University. For non-EWU students, of course, some of the information in this introduction may not apply to your particular situation—rely on your instructor to put this book in its proper context within your course. Naturally, references to other courses (HIST 415, 416, etc.) and the occasional mention of material in *Topics in Chinese History* would also not apply. In all important respects, however, this book is written so that it can stand alone, and I hope that you will find it interesting and useful.

This book versus commercial textbooks

For the most part, commercial history textbooks are disappointing to both students and instructors alike. A main drawback is that these books try to include a little of everything. The result is an overwhelming quantity of information, only some of which is directly relevant to any given course. Another problem with commercial history textbooks is that they tend to avoid controversy, unpleasant topics, and difficult intellectual issues—the very things with which students and instructors should be dealing (many instructors, of course, do include such material in their classes despite its absence in the textbook). Most commercial history textbooks do not encourage readers to think about *history* itself, that is, the process of fashioning and refashioning pasts. It is entirely possible for undergraduate history majors to go through their entire coursework without ever having seriously to think about historiographical issues. I, for example, was one such history major.

This book does not solve all the problems of commercial textbooks, but it is different in several respects. First, the textbook and day-to-day classes are almost completely congruent. In fact, by mastering the contents of this book, a student could *theoretically* get an "A" in the course without ever coming to class. I do not recommend, however, that anyone try doing so. For one thing, much of the material in the course is sufficiently difficult that many students need all the help they can get. Class presentations feature additional visual aids and alterna-

tive explanations and allow for asking questions at any time. They are, therefore, a key component in the process of mastering the course material. The best students typically do not miss class, but in the event of missing a class for whatever reason, you can be assured that this book covers the material discussed in class. Because this book covers the content of the course nearly 100 percent, *there is little or no need to take notes.* Note taking, in my view, is one of the greatest hindrances to learning because all the scribbling detracts from *thinking,* and frequent, regular bouts of deep, undistracted thinking are essential for mastering the material in HIST 104.[1] A suggestion: let the book itself serve as your notes.

A set of topics, themes, and concepts recurs throughout the pages of this book and the companion volume on China. Short-term memorization of basic facts and information is indeed essential, but simply memorizing a large quantity of facts is not sufficient for success in this course. The book, and the course as a whole, encourages you go beyond mere rote memorization and *think* about questions and issues of broad importance—questions and issues that will also inform many exam questions. Beyond exams, it is hoped that you will integrate the material and ideas from this course into your broader base of knowledge.

This book contains extensive visual aids. *Study them.* Some topics and concepts may be impossible to comprehend without a close examination of accompanying diagrams, charts and works of art. In many cases, diagrams provide a visual representation of abstract concepts or complex phenomena. Here is an excellent way to study. After you have read a chapter, go back through it. Stop at each picture or diagram and write a short essay (one or two paragraphs) about it, without looking at any of the text in the book. Then, compare what you wrote with what is in the book. Writing short essays about the terms appearing in bold type is also a tried and proven study method. Another excellent way to study is to draw *your own* diagrams of key concepts, historical relationships, et cetera. In short, get out pens and pencils and write and draw. Active methods of study are the keys to mastery.

This book contains the characters 漢字 for most Japanese terms, concepts and names. The characters are mainly for the benefit of students from Japan. Students from Taiwan, of course, as well as other countries of East Asia will probably also find the characters a helpful aid to the memory. Readers studying Japanese may also benefit from the presence of characters for key names and terms. Please note that the program used to produce the characters in Chapter Three is Chinese-language software, which is why the characters in those chapters often appear in their older forms. The other chapters feature ordinary, modern Japanese characters. Of course, for the majority of readers, the characters will be of no particular significance. Nothing is lost by ignoring them. For those who do not read the characters, they do serve one useful purpose: they are constant reminders that we are dealing with the history of a foreign culture.

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[1] Note-taking, of course, is a venerable practice within university culture, and, not surprisingly, its efficacy is supported by a host of academic studies and personal testimonials. I realize, therefore, that to call into question the efficacy of note-taking is iconoclastic and perhaps irreverent.

More about how to use this book

Much of the material in this book is *difficult,* and you are expected to *master* it. These two facts mean that to do well in the course, a substantial amount of high-quality *hard work* is inevitable. There is no way around this hard work. For students with solid, college-level reading and thinking skills, about one hour of high-quality study for each hour of class may be sufficient. Others will require up to two hours (note that two hours is the general university standard). The reading load in this course is heavy, not in terms of total pages, but in terms of high expectations of mastery.

Even those with strong reading skills will probably not be able to master the material here with only a single reading. Multiple readings are the norm. The ideal scenario is to read ahead before class, think through the material again during class, and then re-read the relevant section(s) as soon as possible after class. The worst approach is to delude yourself into thinking that you can miss class and put off the reading until a few days before the exam. Do you really think you can master 50-75 hours' worth of complex material (class time plus outside study time for five weeks) in two or three days? The choice is yours. Steady, regular, disciplined study produces vastly better results than does last minute cramming.

This book contains college-level vocabulary. For most readers, the probability of encountering unfamiliar words is high. In some cases, you will figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word from context. If, however, the presence of an unfamiliar word prevents you from understanding a sentence, read to a convenient stopping point like the end of the paragraph, get out a thick dictionary, look up the word, and re-read the whole paragraph. Remember that words often have multiple meanings, so even a seemingly familiar word might require some work with the dictionary. Looking up words is time consuming and cumbersome, but in many cases it is the only way to rectify deficiencies in vocabulary. From informal discussions with students, it seems that vocabulary limitations cause more difficulty in reading comprehension than anything else. Effort spent hefting the dictionary now will pay dividends in this class and in future endeavors. Again, the choice is yours.

Pay close attention to several other aspects of language while reading this book and throughout the whole course. First, be conscious of your own use of words and terms. Avoid vague, imprecise or misleading expressions like "the Japanese." Train yourself, at least to some extent, to talk about Japanese history in clear, concrete and accurate terms, and use the language of this book as a model. Also, pay close attention to issues of *rhetoric.* Rhetoric is the art of verbal persuasion and was once the center of university curricula. Parts of this book, and the book on China, ask you to be aware of techniques of persuasion, argumentation and representation—key elements, past and present, of history as an academic and political practice.

Many who take HIST 104 are social science education majors. Should you go on to teach at the junior or senior high school level, hold on to this book. Former students who are now teachers frequently tell me that earlier editions of this book have proven useful for their class preparation. **Should any reader**

want to use any part of this book, as is or with modification, for classroom or other non-profit educational purposes, feel free to do so without asking permission.

The production of this book

Chapters One, Seven and Eight were produced with WordPerfect™ 6.0a (MS Windows™ version). WordPerfect 5.1 for MS-DOS™ was the best word processor in its day, and I have fond memories of writing my dissertation with it. In my view, however, version 6.0a for windows is a slug masquerading as a computer program. Upgrading to 6.1 produced only the slightest increase in speed and reliability. Even on a well-configured 486/100 machine with 16 megabytes of RAM, it plodded and oozed along at a painfully slow pace. Even worse, it often crashed. Each chapter normally consists of its own file, and these files are very large—from two to nine megabytes. Files of this size admittedly place a strain on any system and any software. Still, when, in desperation, I switched to Microsoft Word for Windows™ version 6.0, I was pleasantly surprised to find substantially greater speed and reliability with no loss of features. Word is far from perfect (its built-in image editor, for example, usually mangles anything complex; files larger than seven megabytes are liable to generate "Integer Divide by Zero" errors upon saving to disk), but for producing a book such as this one, Word has proven superior to WordPerfect. Unfortunately, there are no real competitors to Word and WordPerfect for a project like putting this book together. Chapters Two and Four through Eight were produced with Word; Chapters One and Three with Word Perfect.

Numerous other programs contributed to this book. TwinBridge,™ for example, did a fine job of producing the needed Japanese characters. PhotoFinish,™ a cheap but effective bitmap image editor, did an admirable job of cleaning up scanned images and then converting them into the appropriate halftones for inclusion in the text. WordPerfect Presentations version 2.0 (and its successor, Corel Presentations, version 3.0) and Microsoft Powerpoint™ version 4.0 helped in the assembling of complex diagrams for inclusion in this book and for display on the overhead projector.

I would be happy to discuss the technical details of producing a book like this with anyone so interested. Surprising results can be had from a very modest investment in equipment and software.

Thanks

Special thanks to Mary Putzier, who copy-edited earlier versions of all the chapters of this book except Eight. Thanks to her professional editing skills, time and effort, this book is much better than it otherwise would have been. Any remaining errors large or small are the sole responsibility of the author. Your pointing them out is appreciated.

CHAPTER ONE

BASIC ORIENTATIONS

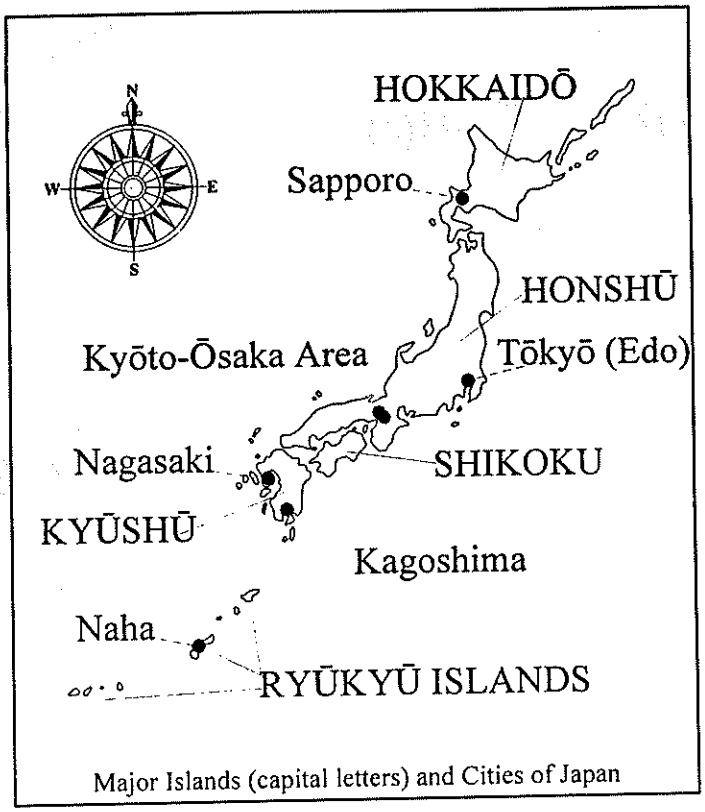
Prior to looking at the specifics of Japan's history, we should become familiar with some important preliminary information. Many of the general points about the study of China in *Topics in Chinese History* also apply to the study of Japan. For example, we should recognize the social and cultural diversity within Japan throughout its past (and present) and avoid overly general expressions like "the Japanese." We should also avoid—as much as possible—imposing our present view of the world on an alien past—for example, calling Japanese peasants in the Kamakura period "citizens." As with our study of China, some memorization of basic facts of geography and the major historical periods is essential. Do this right away. The historical periods form the temporal framework around which we organize our investigation of Japan's past.

TIMES AND PLACES

The major eras of Japan's history are provided here. The most important periods for this course are listed in bold, and you should memorize them and their terminal dates. You should also remember the time periods not listed in bold, though you need not worry about their precise dates. As with memorizing China's dynasties, the best approach is first to memorize the *order* of the relevant periods. Once the names in their proper order are firmly in mind, then fill in the dates. Exact dates are fine, or you might find it easier to round the dates off to the nearest century. Notice that the Muromachi and Tokugawa periods have common alternative names. From the Meiji period, it has been customary in Japan to use the "reign name" 年号 (*nengō*) of the reigning emperor—not the "Western" calendar—as official time periods. A

Major Eras of Japan's History

Jōmon Period	10,000-300 B.C.
Yayoi Period	300 B.C.-200 A.D.
Tomb Period	250-500
Asuka Period	500-710
(All dates to this point are approximations)	
Nara Period	**710-784**
Heian Period	**794-1191**
Kamakura "	**1192-1333**
Muromachi "	**1334-1573**
(A.K.A. Ashikaga Period)	
Tokugawa "	**1603-1867**
(A.K.A. Edo Period)	
Meiji Period	**1867-1912**
Taishō Period	1912-1926
Shōwa Period	1926-1989
Heisei Period	1989-present

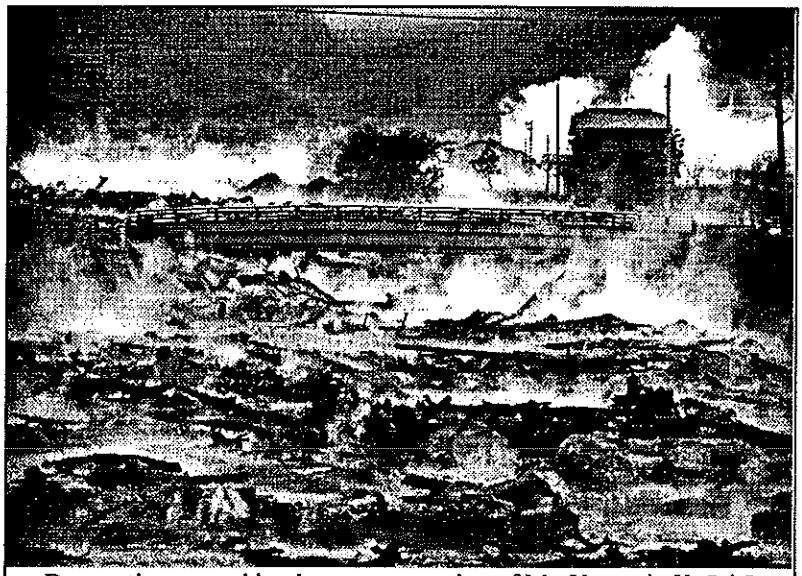


Major Islands (capital letters) and Cities of Japan

government document dated 1990, for example, would be "Heisei 2."

Today, Japan consists of four main islands and many smaller ones. Japan's territory occupies roughly the same latitude as the eastern United States from the New England states through central Florida. Most of Japan has a four-season climate. The surrounding seas moderate the extremes of climate in most regions. The total land area of Japan is about the size of California. The population is around 130 million, about half that of the United States. Japan is, therefore, a crowded place compared with the United States. There are, however, other countries in the world (e.g., Belgium) that have higher population densities. Many Japanese like to think of Japan as a "small" country, and it does seem small when compared with China, Russia, or the United States. On the other hand, we do not usually speak of Britain, France, Germany, or Saudi Arabia as "small" countries, yet Japan is larger than any of these places both in terms of square miles and population. Japan is roughly twice the physical size of Britain, for example, and has four times the population. So the notion that Japan is a "small" country is inaccurate when viewed in a global perspective, for Japan is actually a relatively large country in the world. It is also an economic superpower whose corporations conduct business around the globe. Japan has the highest per capita GNP in the world and the second largest total GNP.

Japan is highly urbanized, and most of its people live in cities. The capital and largest city is Tōkyō 東京, which was known as Edo 江戸 until 1868. The second largest city is Ōsaka, which is a major commercial center. Ōsaka 大阪 is located about 45 minutes by train or bus from the former capital of Kyōto 京都. Sapporo 札幌 is the largest city in the northern island of Hokkaidō 北海道 and is probably most famous in this country for the beer that bears its name. On the island of Kyūshū 九州, Nagasaki 長崎 was Japan's major port for trade with China and other foreign countries in premodern times. Kagoshima 鹿児島 is the largest city in the south of the island. The Ryūkyū Islands 琉球群島 comprised a separate kingdom until 1879, the year Japan annexed them. From 1945 until 1972, most of these islands were under U.S. military occupation. Even today, they contain a disproportionately large number of military installations. The major city in the Ryūkyū islands is Naha 那覇, on the island of Okinawa 沖縄. You should memorize



Destruction caused by the recent eruption of Mt. Unzen in Kyūshū

the location of the islands and cities shown here.

The Japanese islands are volcanic, and they are home to several active volcanoes. Earthquakes go hand-in-hand with volcanoes, and the Japanese islands continue to experience a large number of quakes, some of which have caused massive loss of life and property. Because of Japan's volcanic origins, much of its land is mountainous. The mountains provide excellent scenery, though they limit the space available for agriculture and housing.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT JAPANESE

Recall that China is home to several different languages, the most common of which has privileged political status as "common speech" and is what today we commonly call "Chinese." The situation in Japan is roughly similar. The variety of Japanese that was once spoken by the well-to-do residents of Edo (Tōkyō) became the country-wide standard in the late 19th century and is today called *kokugo* 国語 ("national language") in Japan. When we say "Japanese," we usually mean this standard "national language." There are, however, several major varieties of Japanese, some of which are so different from the "national language" they constitute separate languages (e.g., Okinawan 沖縄語 ウチナーグチ). Partly for political reasons, even these separate languages are called "dialects" (*ben* 弁, *hōgen* 方言) in Japan. Such terminology helps de-emphasize the significant cultural diversity that still exists throughout the Japanese islands. Owing to several generations of nearly universal education and the influence of television and similar media, almost everyone in Japan understands the "national language." Also, nearly everyone can speak it, though in their daily or private lives many Japanese still prefer to speak their local dialects/languages.

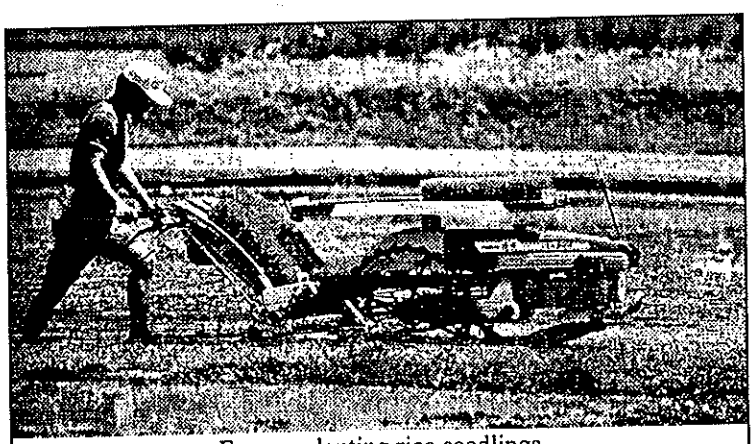
Compared with other major languages of the world, standard Japanese has a relatively small and simple inventory of sounds. With only two or three exceptions, all of the basic sounds of Japanese are found within English. Japanese is also relatively flat in terms of intonation and lacks anything like the tones of Chinese. Native speakers of English can, therefore, learn to pronounce Japanese words with near native accuracy in a short time (provided, of course, that they make the effort to do so, which few do). In fact, Japanese pronunciation is easier for a native speaker of English to master than that of most European languages.

Pictured here is a chart of the basic sounds of modern Japanese. Classical Japanese had a few additional sounds such as "wi" and "we." Those sounds that differ significantly from anything found in English are in bold type. The "fu" as in "Mt. Fuji" sounds more like "hu" with a strong outward flow of air, permitted by not closing the lips completely as one would do for the English "f" sound. The "r" in Japanese sounds like a cross between an English "l," "d," and "r." It is made by tapping the tip of the tongue against the roof of the mouth and then letting it drop immediately. With a couple of weeks' training, most native speakers of English can learn to pronounce the Japanese "r" without too much difficulty. For most native speakers of Japanese, however, it is extremely difficult to distinguish between "r"s and "l"s in English, even after several years of study. If a native speaker of Japanese says something to you that does not quite make sense (e.g., "I pray the fruit." or "How did you like the outcome of the presidential erection?"), switch the "r"s and "l"s around in your mind ("I play the flute." / "How did you like the outcome of the presidential election?").

Basic Sounds of Modern Japanese

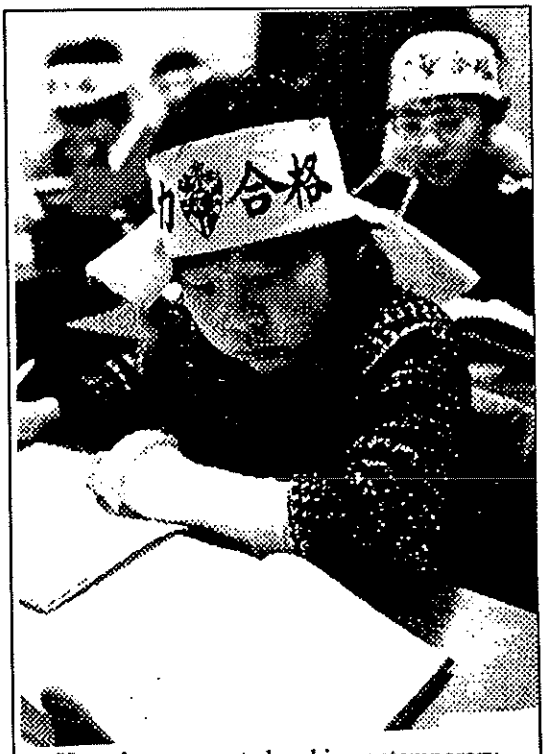
a	ka	sa	ta	na	ha	ma	ya	**ra**	wa
i	ki	shi	chi	ni	hi	mi		**ri**	
u	ku	su	tsu	nu	**fu**	mu	yu	**ru**	
e	ke	se	te	ne	he	me		**re**	
o	ko	so	to	no	ho	mo	yo	**ro**	$_{w}$o
									n

There are some additional sounds in Japanese that derive from those shown in the chart. It is possible to "muddy" (to use Japanese terminology) the sounds so that, for example, "ka, ki, ku, ke, ko" become "ga, gi, gu, ge, go." From the point of view of Japanese, the latter sequence of sounds is but a slight variation on the former sequence, and it is the former sequence that is most basic. Another sound not in the table and not in English is the glottal stop. Notice the spelling of the island Hokkaidō. The two "k"s (or any two consonants in a row) indicate the glottal stop. The resulting sound comes from stopping the "k" sound momentarily in the glottal area of the throat. This glottal stop can be very important. The word "*hakken*" 派遣, for example, means "dispatching" or "sending;" "*hakkken*" 発見, on the other hand, means "discovery." Notice also the small line over the last vowel in Hokkaidō. This line is called a macron, and it indicates that the vowel should be pronounced for an extended length of time, roughly 1.7 times the ordinary length. English does not make distinctions between the length of vowels, but it is very important in Japanese. If, for example, you are explaining to someone in Japanese that you are so-and-so's advisor, be careful about vowel length. "*Komon*" 顧問 means "advisor," but "*kōmon*" 肛門 means "anus."



Farmer planting rice seedlings

Although these points may seem difficult to learn all at once, Japanese pronunciation is not very hard for English speakers who make an effort to learn it. English pronunciation, on the other hand, is extremely difficult for native speakers of Japanese because there are so many sounds in English that have no Japanese counterpart. For native speakers of English or Chinese, it is the grammar of Japanese that presents the greatest challenge. Native speakers of Korean would have a comparative advantage in learning Japanese grammar because the general word order of Japanese and Korean are similar (recall that Japanese and Korean are distantly related languages). Some of the features of Japanese grammar that differ from English include: 1) the main verb or predicate always comes at the end of a Japanese sentence; 2) English relies on **pre**positions; Japanese relies on **post**positions; 3) levels of formality and politeness are built into verb "conjugations" and other aspects of Japanese grammar. For those who want to delve into this topic further, do not hesitate to enroll in a Japanese language class.



How does one get ahead in contemporary Japanese society? Study! Study! Study!

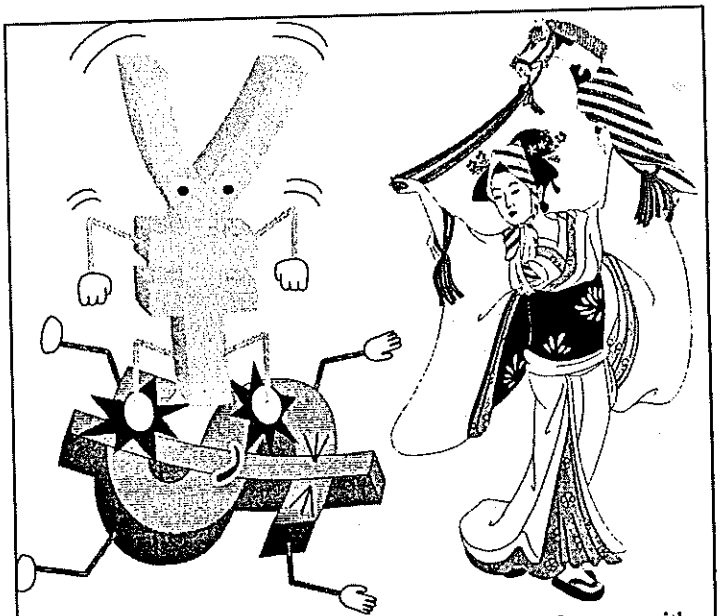
One final, interesting point about Japanese pertains to the realm of sociolinguistics, the study of language as a social instrument. In popular publications, scholarly publications, and in the conversations of ordinary people, one often reads or hears Japanese describing their language as unusually "difficult." Indeed, for many in Japan this alleged difficulty is a mild source of pride in one's national identity (e.g., "Yes, I speak a very difficult language—how impressive"). According to linguists, however, it does not make any sense to say that a particular language is "difficult" in absolute terms. If that were really the case, children in some parts of the world would master the stages of language acquisition significantly faster or slower than children in other places. If, for example, Japanese is


An urban golf course. Because space is scarce in Japan, golf is a highly expensive, and therefore highly prestigious, form of recreation.

really an unusually "difficult" language in absolute terms, Japanese children would learn to speak at a slower pace than children in places where an "easy" language is spoken. In fact, though, children all around the world acquire language in the same sequence of states, and, on average, at the same speed.

Learning a foreign language is, of course, terribly difficult for anyone above the age of about twelve. It does make sense to speak of degrees of difficulty involved in acquiring a specific language. We can, in other words, speak of the *relative* difficulty of languages. For example, a native speaker of English will be able to learn German more quickly than Turkish because German is closely related to English, and Turkish is not related to English at all. Similarly, a native speaker of Korean will generally be able to learn Japanese faster than Chinese, because Japanese is related to Korean and Chinese is not related to Korean at all. But it is still an extremely difficult task to learn *any* foreign language, even those closely related to one's native tongue.

Much of the talk in Japan about the alleged "difficulty" of Japanese is actually not about the *language* itself but about the *writing system.* Recall from earlier material that writing is not language but a system for representing language in a durable medium. Unlike the case of languages, which are all about equally "difficult," at least in terms of the speed children acquire mastery of them, there is wide variation in the efficiency of writing systems. As it is written today, Japanese is saddled with a highly inefficient writing system. A simple alphabetic script could handle Japanese quite well, but owing to the early contact with China, the first Japanese exposure to writing was Chinese characters. Chinese characters are not even ideal for writing Chinese and are even less suited for writing Japanese. Modern Japanese writing employs a mixture of two syllabaries (alphabet-like scripts) and several thousand Chinese characters, many of which have multiple readings. It is to this complex and inefficient writing system that most Japanese refer when they speak with pride about how "difficult" their "language" is. Foreign residents in Japan often reinforce stereotypes about the alleged "difficulty" of Japanese by citing it as an excuse for not learning the language of the country in which they reside. Laziness and/or cultural arrogance, however, are more relevant to most cases of foreign residents' ignorance of Japanese than any mysterious difficulty supposedly inherent in the language itself.



There is a tendency in the U.S. & Europe to view Japan as either an economic competitor or a land of quaint customs. Japan is a major economic power in the world, and any society contains peculiar cultural forms. A fuller, more balanced view of Japan and the daily life of its people, however, would be ideal.

CHAPTER TWO

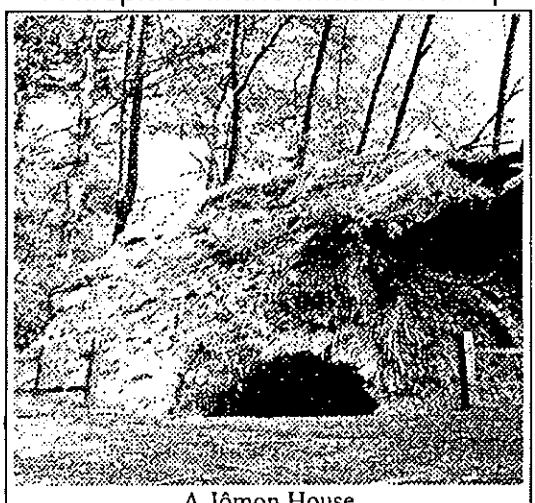
DAWN OF HISTORY THROUGH THE NARA PERIOD


Typical Jômon pottery

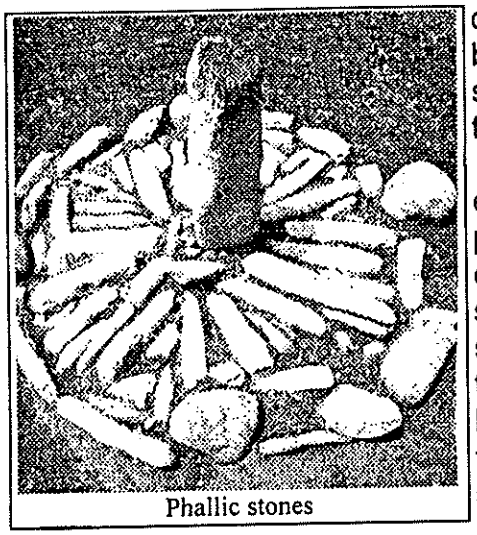
This chapter provides an overview of ancient developments in the Japanese islands from the stone age through the end of the Nara period. We present this early material in somewhat greater detail than might at first seem necessary. The reason is that Japan's ancient past turns out to be *a very present past* in modern constructions of national identity, and we will return to this material in Chapter Three. Please note that throughout this and all later Chapters produced with Microsoft Word™ (2, 4-7), long vowels in Japanese words are indicated by "ô" and "û."

THE JÔMON PERIOD 縄文時代

Archaeologists estimate the Jômon period spanned roughly the years 10,000 B.C. through 300 B.C. Jômon culture is an example of the late stone age. The period derives its name from a distinctive rope-pattern pottery characteristic of the age, "*jô*" meaning "rope;" "*mon*" meaning "pattern." Jômon-era houses consisted mainly of pits dug into the ground with a central wooden beam supporting a thatched roof and walls. A fireplace in the middle of the pit served the dual purposes of heating and cooking, the smoke seeping out through the roof. Hunting, gathering and limited agriculture were the means of obtaining food. The best estimates of archaeologists put the peak population of the Japanese islands during Jômon times at around 262,000.

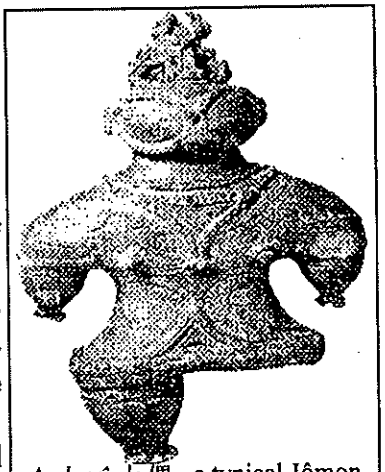

A Jômon House

Excavations of Jômon village sites suggest that most human communities were small, consisting of but a few households each. Whether there was any political or social organization more extensive than these small villages remains an ongoing question. Some archaeologists propose that multiple villages sometimes formed themselves into small confederations. Even if so, there is no indication of large-scale political organization in Jômon times. There


Phallic stones

does, however, seem to have been substantial trade between groups of people living in different areas. Obsidian may have served as a medium of exchange in this trade.

The details of religious life in Jômon times remain elusive. Researchers have unearthed clay figures, probably depictions of female shamans, with snakes coiled around their heads. This discovery suggests some sort of snake worship or snake cult, but, without additional data, it is impossible to know with certainty what these figures represented. Phallic stones of all sizes have been common finds at excavations of Jômon village sites. If indeed these stones are phallic symbols (likely, but not certain), their presence suggests fertility worship in which males played a significant role. As we see in Chapter Three, sexual imagery was common in the native Japanese religion of later ages.


A *dogû* 土偶, a typical Jômon cultural object that may have played a role in fertility or shamanic rites.

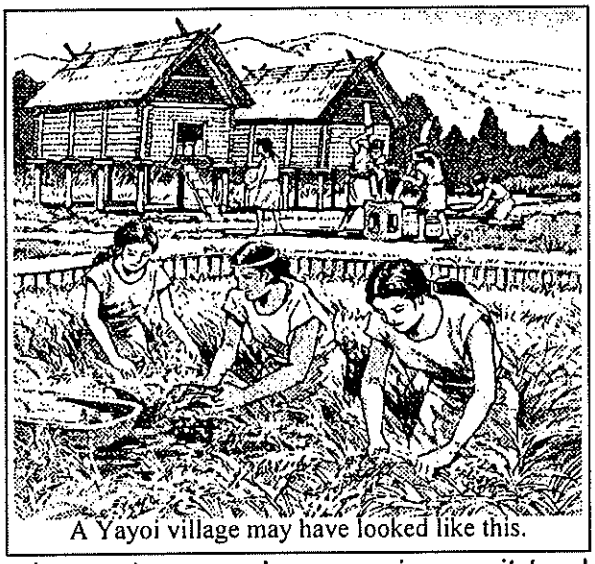
Rice appeared in the Japanese islands at the very end of the Jômon period. There were also changes in the style of pottery at this time. These developments signaled the gradual dawn of a new era, now called Yayoi.

THE YAYOI PERIOD 弥生時代

The **Yayoi period** began around 300 B.C. and ended around 200 A.D. Yayoi culture did not spread to all parts of the Japanese islands at the same time. **Four major developments** characterize the Yayoi period: 1) the use of ceramic pottery; 2) the use of iron tools and weapons (bronze later in the period); 3) wet rice agriculture; and 4) contact and trade with the Asian continent. The last development helped bring about the other three.

That the major characteristics of Yayoi culture came from the Asian continent is probably beyond dispute. The precise circumstances of their arrival in the Japanese islands, though, is still a matter of debate. Some theories posit an invasion from the continent, while others see trade and/or migration as the major vehicle by which Yayoi cultural forms came into the Japanese islands. The early Yayoi period corresponded to the final years of China's Warring States era. This continental warfare generated widespread unrest and movements of people. Whether as invaders, traders, explorers, refugees, or whatever, the early Yayoi period was a time when significant numbers of people moved from the Asian continent to the Japanese

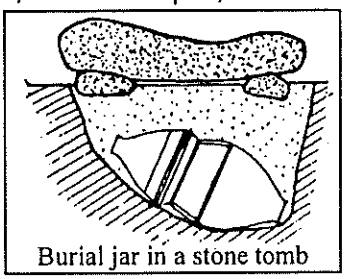

Yayoi house


A Yayoi village may have looked like this.

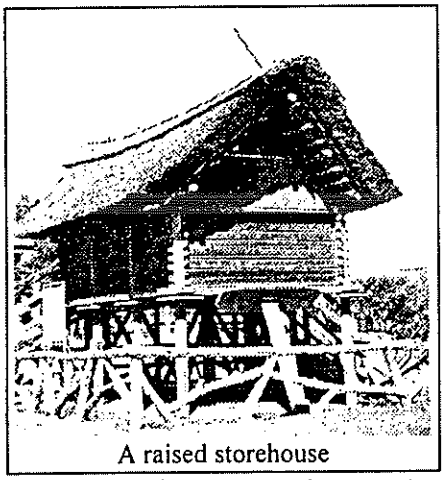
islands.

Yayoi culture was more complex and technically advanced than that of the previous Jômon age. Iron farming implements, combined with the techniques of wet rice cultivation, resulted in greater crop yields than had previously been possible. Hunting and gathering increasingly served only to supplement agriculture, which became the main sustenance activity in Yayoi times.

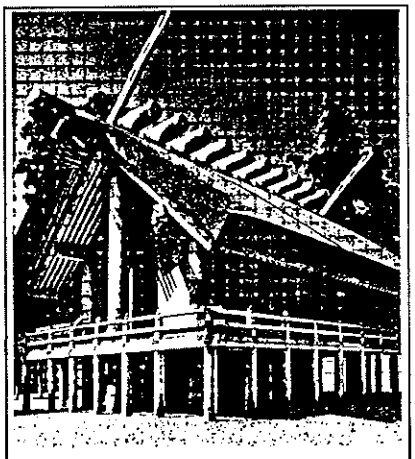
Agriculture led to a settled lifestyle. Villages became larger and social stratification more complex. Analysis of burial sites indicates different degrees of status. A skeleton encased in an elaborate burial jar, for example, with a large stone marker covering a pit tomb containing large quantities of valuable objects, would have been a person of high social standing. While alive, this person would likely have commanded a higher than average degree of political and economic power. Some of the objects found in the tombs include bronze mirrors, daggers and halberds. Mirrors were of particularly high value. The number of mirrors, if any, found in a tomb is a rough index of the social status of the person interred there.


Burial jar in a stone tomb

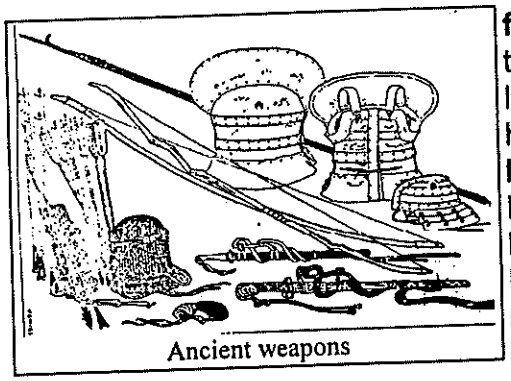
Agricultural communities were the basic political unit during the Yayoi period. These communities were largely self-sufficient, though they often traded with each other. The typical Yayoi house was a substantially more sophisticated version of the Jômon pit dwelling. Yayoi houses featured four main support pillars, thatched roofs, and earthen benches surrounding the inside wall.


A raised storehouse

An important new development in architecture was the raised storehouse (*kura* 倉). The purpose of such a storehouse was to keep rice and other grains safe from water, insects and animals. Perhaps because these storehouses were associated with control of wealth and power, or perhaps simply because they were more comfortable to live in than ordinary pit houses, village elites began to modify some of them into palaces (*miya* 宮) for themselves. These palaces later became the earliest shrines (*gû* 宮). Early shrines were places connected with political power as well as religious rites. In the Japanese islands, as in many ancient societies, religion and politics were nearly indistinguishable.


Typical shrine architecture of the 7th century. Notice how closely it resembles the raised storehouse.

The Yayoi period was a time of **violence and war-**

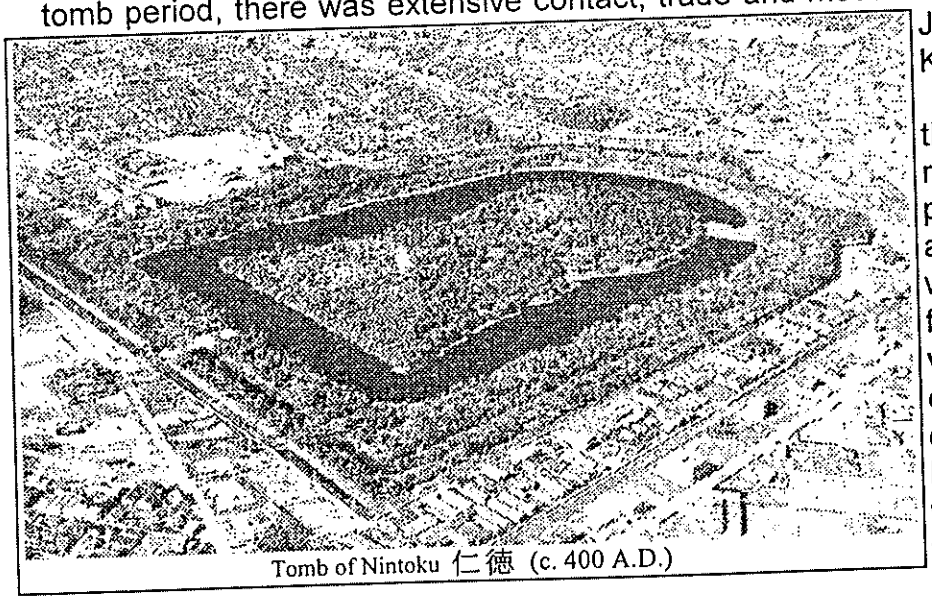

Ancient weapons

fare. Increased agricultural productivity allowed for the possibility of a surplus of wealth. This surplus allowed some members of a village society to attain a higher material standard of living than others. On a larger scale, some villages, owing to a good location, hard or efficient work, luck, or other factors, enjoyed a higher overall material standard of living than others. Uneven distribution of wealth and the possibility of attaining a greater share of available wealth from someone else was undoubtedly a major impetus to warfare.

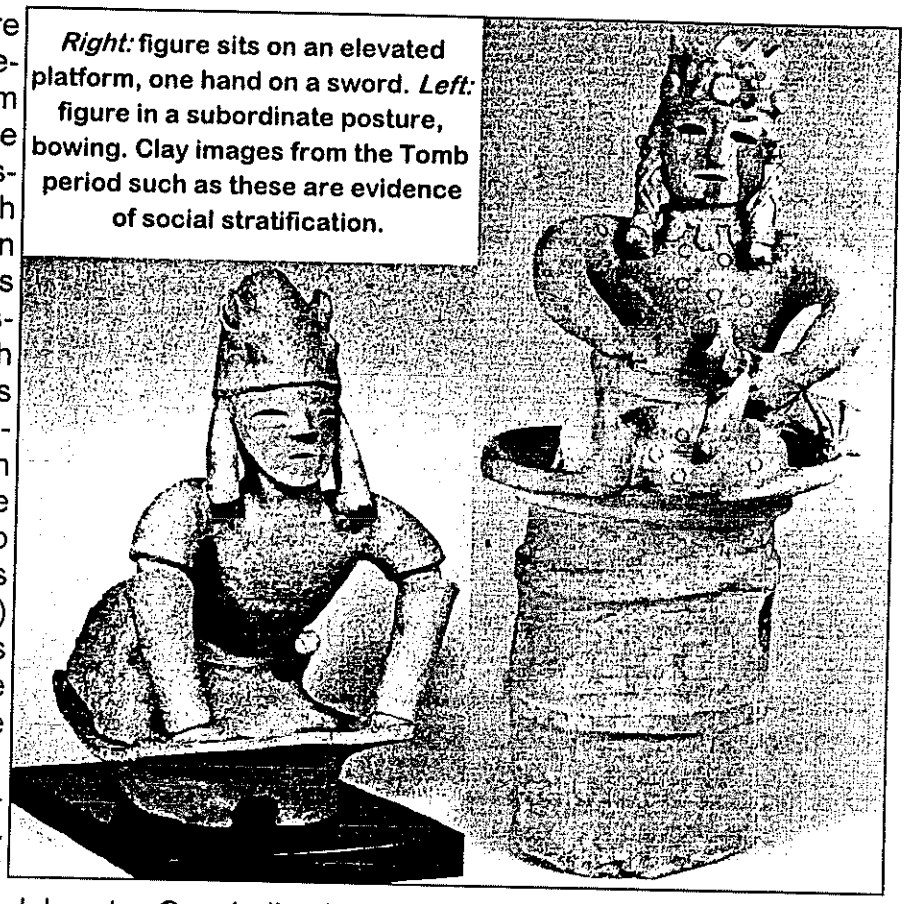
Whatever the reasons for its cause, there is strong archaeological evidence of widespread warfare. Researchers have excavated from Yayoi sites weapons better suited for killing people than for killing game. Several skeletons have been unearthed with arrowheads penetrating their skulls. Others were completely headless. Yayoi villages were often surrounded by fortified walls, some with moats. Excavations have found that some villages were located at inconveniently high altitudes, which is an indication that their residents gave highest priority to considerations of defense. Keep this data in mind when we examine modern claims in the next chapter of ancient Japan as a peaceful, cooperative society. The warfare that characterized the Yayoi period continued, and sometimes intensified, throughout later historical periods.

THE TOMB PERIOD 古墳時代

Around 250 A.D., new, elaborate tombs began to appear in the Japanese islands. Construction of these tombs required resources that only elite members of society could command. The tombs varied in size, but many were as large as several modern city blocks. They generally had the shape of a keyhole and contained valuable items within their vaults. This type of tomb was also common on the Korean peninsula at the time, and its appearance in the Japanese islands was no coincidence. During the tomb period, there was extensive contact, trade and movement of people between the Japanese islands and the Korean peninsula.


Tomb of Nintoku 仁徳 (c. 400 A.D.)

The presence of these tombs in the Japanese islands indicate a previously unprecedented ability to amass surplus wealth. This surplus came from **technological advances** and **increased centralization of political power**. One technological advance was the widespread use of **iron tools** in agriculture. Al-



Right: **figure sits on an elevated platform, one hand on a sword.** ***Left:*** **figure in a subordinate posture, bowing. Clay images from the Tomb period such as these are evidence of social stratification.**

though iron tools were available in the Yayoi period, the use of iron farm tools was rare. During the tomb period, many peasants still farmed with wooden implements, but, in some areas, local rulers were able to provide peasants under their control with iron tools. The iron tools helped create greater agricultural surpluses, which made local rulers more powerful. During the tomb period, various clans (extended family networks) took control of territories throughout the Japanese islands. The size of these territories varied.

During the Tomb period, the **social stratification** evident in the Yayoi period became even more elaborate. One indication of this development comes from clay figures. Artisans in the Yayoi and Tomb periods created a number of different clay figures (*haniwa* 埴輪), which depict persons in various social roles. Figures from the Tomb period often convey a clear sense of superior-inferior social relations. Accounts by Chinese visitors to the Japanese islands at the time also indicate significant social stratification. The late third-century *History of the Kingdom of Wei,* for example, points out that in the Japanese islands:

> there are class distinctions among the people, and some are vassals of others. Taxes are collected. . . .
>
> When the lowly meet men of importance on the road, they stop and withdraw to the roadside. In conveying messages to them or addressing them, they either squat or kneel, with both hands on the ground.[1]

Such descriptions by Chinese visitors are in close accord with archaeological artifacts from the time.

During the Yayoi period, the major political unit was the agricultural village. As mentioned above, in the tomb period, many areas of the Japanese islands came under the control of one or another locally-powerful clans. These clans consisted of a group of people related to each other biologically or through adoption. Many clans controlled territory consisting of several villages, from which they extracted taxes in the form of goods and produce and/or labor services.

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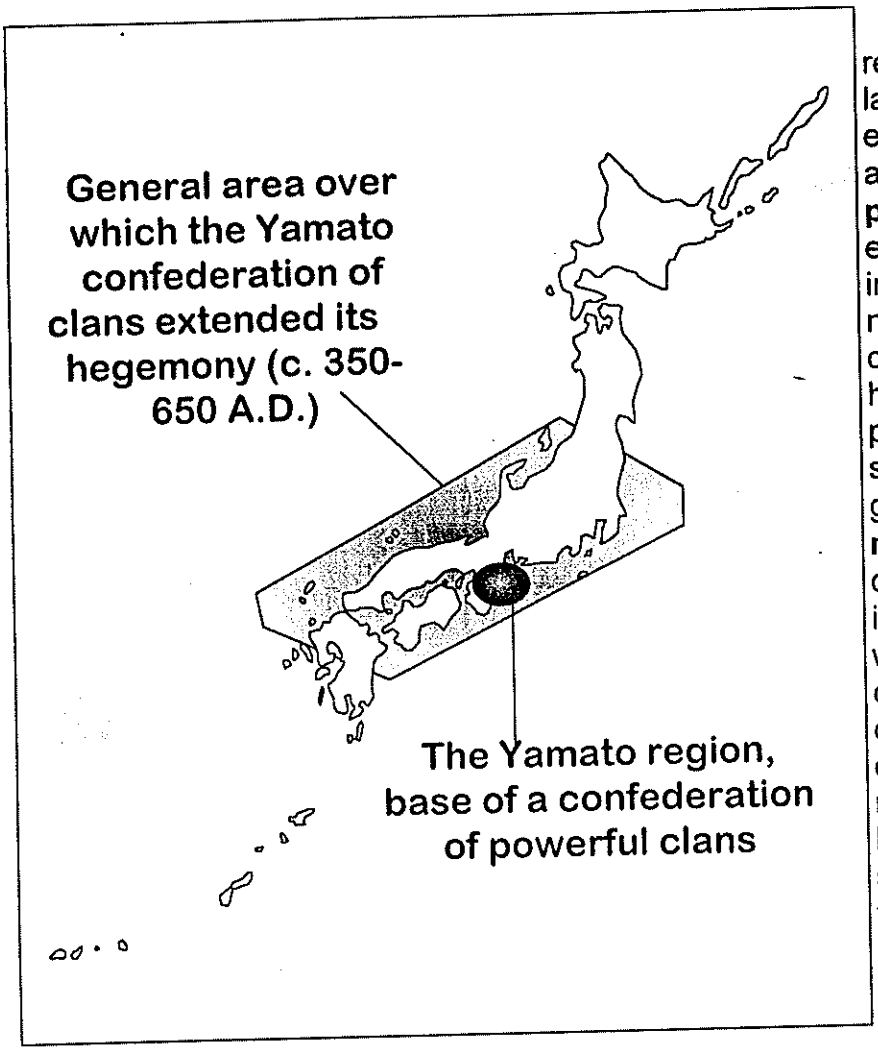
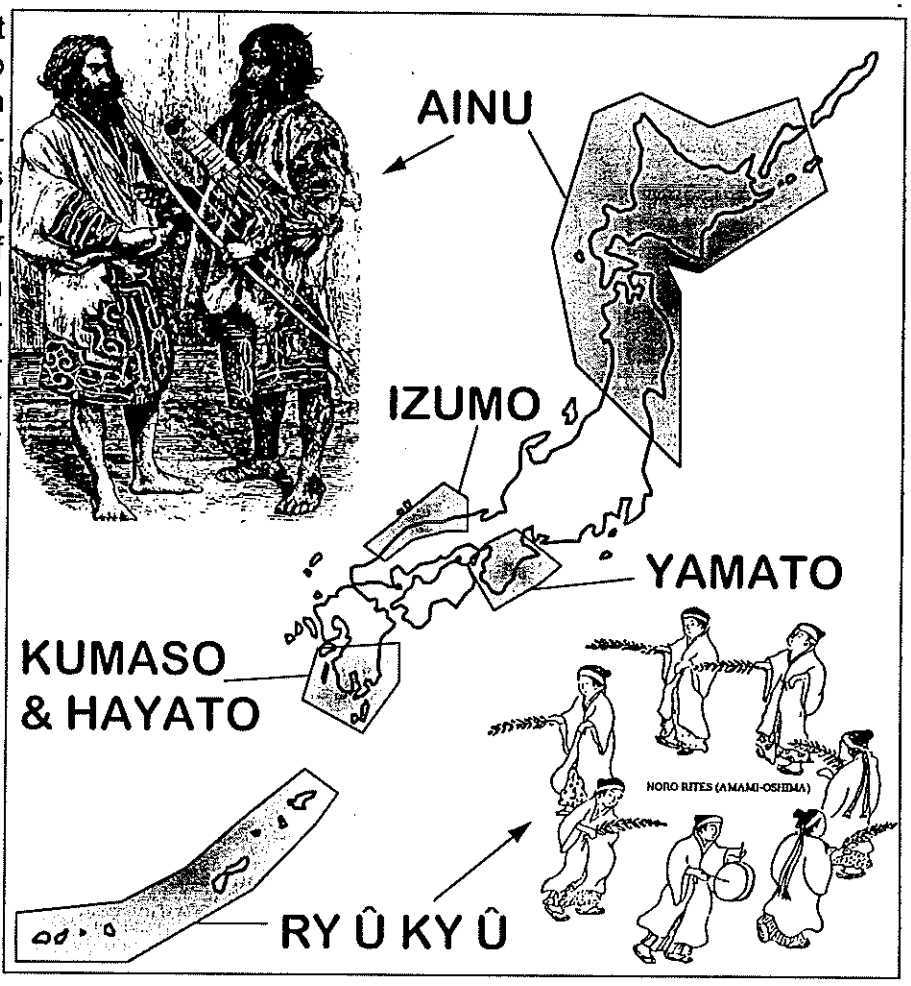
[1] Quoted in Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene, comps., *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p. 5.



In the **Yamato** 大和 region of the Japanese islands (located to the southeast of the Kyôto-Ôsaka area), a **confederation of powerful clans** began to exert hegemony over clans in other parts of Honshû and northern Kyûshû. By the fifth century, this confederation had become sufficiently powerful that we could reasonably call it, and the regions it dominated, the **Yamato Kingdom**. This kingdom was not highly centralized, and its boundaries were not always clear. The confederation of clans that controlled the kingdom dominated, but generally did not eliminate, the other lesser clans, whose leaders still controlled their local territories. The Yamato confederation of clans bestowed **formal titles of rank** (姓 or 加波禰 = ***kabane***, a term we revisit below in discussing Prince Shôtoku) on the leaders of the other clans under its domination. In return for these titles of rank, the other clans pledged support for the Yamato confederation. The Yamato confederation of clans became the nucleus of the strong, centralized state that emerged late in the seventh century.

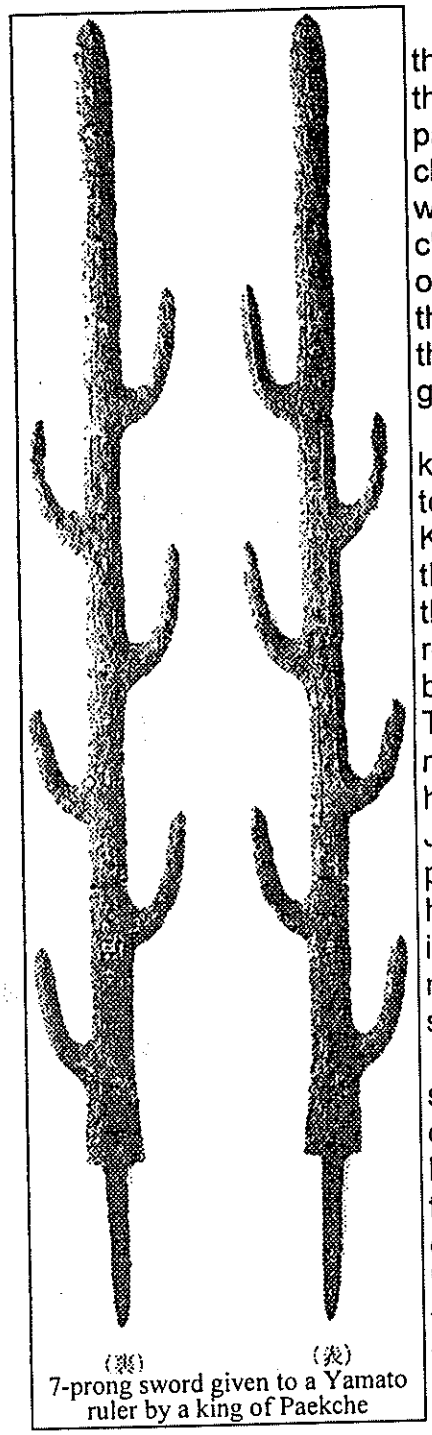
The Yamato confederation, along with the lesser clans it controlled, was not the only political entity in the Japanese islands. There were several major political, cultural and ethnic groups during the tomb period, the most important of which are shown below. The **Ainu** アイヌ inhabited the island of Hokkaidô and the northern part of Honshû at this time. Originally from Siberia, the Ainu were probably the earliest inhabitants of the Japanese islands. In the 800s, the Ainu fought a series of bloody wars against an expanding Yamato state. They eventually lost, relinquishing their territory on Honshû. Today, most Ainu have assimilated into the larger Japanese population, but a few still remain in Hokkaidô. The **Izumo** 出雲 region resembled the Yamato region in terms of its culture, but it was home to clans that often took a hostile posture toward the Yamato confederation. It was not until the late Asuka period that the Yamato Kingdom gained firm control over the Izumo region. The Kumaso (熊襲 or 熊曾) and Hayato 隼人 were two tribes that lived in southern Kyûshû. Both resisted control by the Yamato Kingdom

into the seventh or eight centuries. Neither group exists today except in popular imagination. Finally, the **Ryûkyû Islands** were home to several cultures and groups of people. In the fourteenth century, a series of powerful rulers united these islands into a single kingdom. This Ryukyu Kingdom 琉球王国 traded extensively with the regions to the north. It did not become a formal part of Japan, however, until the 1870s, and then only by force.



In the study of Japanese history, there is a tendency to look only at the Yamato clans. This tendency is understandable because it was these clans that eventually subdued rival peoples throughout the Japanese islands and created "Japan," the centralized state (notice that we have avoided the word "Japan" thus far). History usually highlights the activities of the victorious and the powerful, and today, "Yamato" is synonymous with "Japan." Bear in mind, however, that originally the Japanese islands were home to a wide variety of cultural, ethnic and political entities.

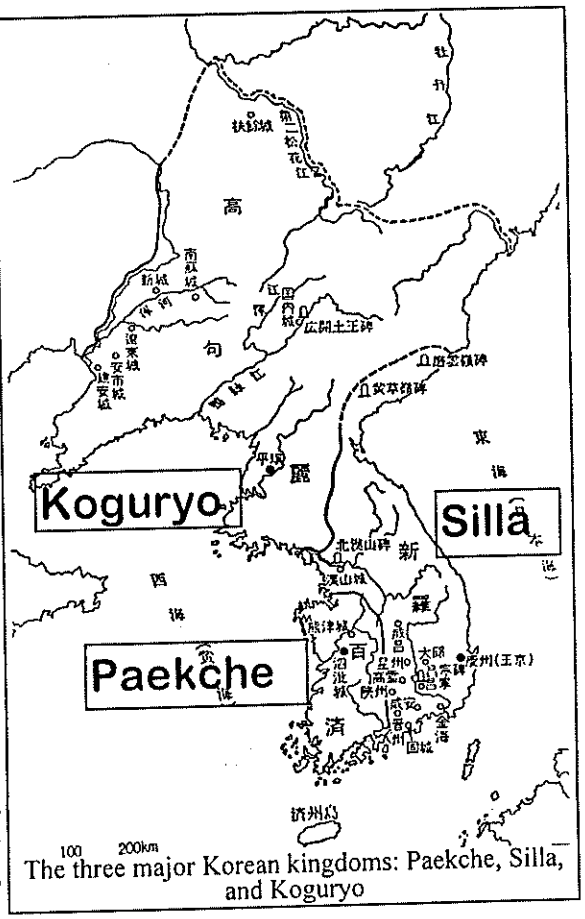
One of the reasons the Yamato confederation of clans became so powerful relative to other groups in the Japanese islands was because of **extensive contact with the Korean peninsula**. It was through the Korean kingdoms (several co-existed on the peninsula) that technology and other aspects of China's advanced culture came into the Japanese islands. Today, of course, Korea and Japan are two distinct and quite different countries. The situation during the Tomb period, however, was more complex and vague. It is probably best to think of the Korean peninsula and the Japanese islands of this time *together,* as a single geographical region. As we have seen, this region was home to different cultural and ethnic groups, as well as different political entities (clan territories, kingdoms, etc.). These different groups interacted with each other through trade, diplomacy, warfare and migration. The different peoples of the Japanese islands and the Korean peninsula had extensive contact with each other during the tomb period. This contact encouraged the spread of material and non-material culture among these peoples.


(裏) (表)
7-prong sword given to a Yamato ruler by a king of Paekche

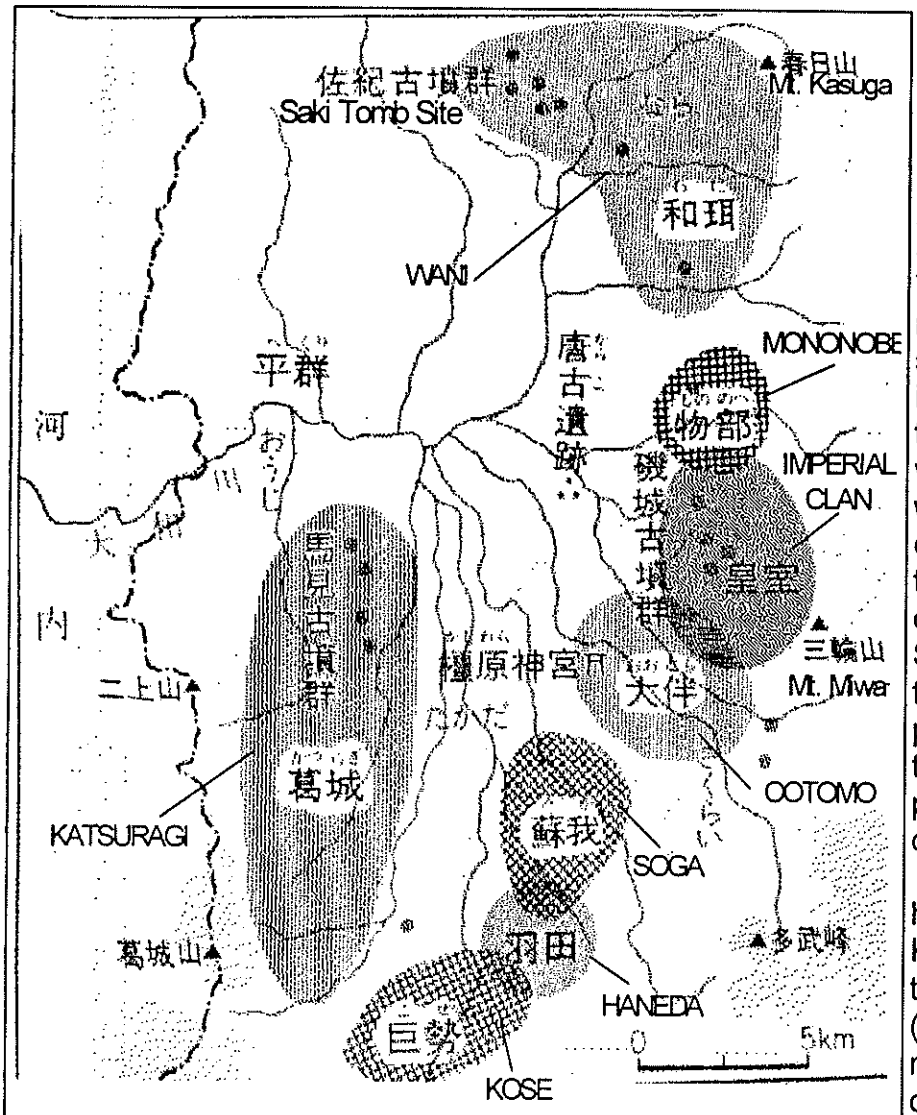
The most important of these inter-group contacts was the relationship between the emerging Yamato Kingdom and the Korean kingdom of **Paekche** 百済, located in the southwest part of the Korean peninsula. Paekche provided the Yamato clans with much of the iron and other metals it needed for weapons and agricultural tools. It also provided the Yamato clans access to knowledge of advanced techniques of political organization and control. Many of the small number of people in the Yamato area who knew how to write (in classical Chinese, the major written language in East Asia at this time) were immigrants from Paekche.

Wars on the Korean peninsula between the three major kingdoms (shown here) provided a steady stream of immigrants to the Japanese islands in the form of refugees. The Yamato Kingdom participated in some of this warfare. There is evidence that Yamato controlled a small part of the Korean peninsula in the sixth century. For ideological reasons, contemporary Korean scholars vigorously deny that this could have been possible (we explore this and related issues in the next chapter). There is also evidence that the particular clan within the Yamato confederation that later became Japan's **imperial family** had its origins in continental invaders who swept through the Japanese islands. This point is debatable, and here too, contemporary ideological concerns color much of the scholarly research and argument.

Thus far, we have spoken of the Yamato confederation of clans but have not examined any of the specific groups in the confederation. Of particular importance is one clan that stood at the head of the others in the confederation. The heads of this leading clan served as the *highest religious functionaries* in Yamato. The "head" clan, however, often lacked independent military power and typically had to depend on support from the other allied clans in the federation. The politics of gaining and maintaining this support were often tricky because the other clans in the confederation often competed with each other. It is



The three major Korean kingdoms: Paekche, Silla, and Koguryo



Major Clans of the Yamato Region

The map above is a close up of the Yamato region, derived from a Japanese high school history text. Names of the major clans forming the ruling confederation appear in capital letters. The "IMPERIAL CLAN" should really be called the "royal clan," since this map depicts pre-645 conditions. Except for SOGA and MONONOBE, do not bother remembering these names. Just remember the general situation depicted here.

important to bear in mind that the head clan of the confederation ("IMPERIAL CLAN" in the accompanying map) *did not* rule over the other clans in an absolute way. The head clan of the Yamato Kingdom lacked sufficient power to rule by itself. Even in the best of times, from its point of view, it had to cooperate with the other leading clans. In the worst of times, some of these other clans (e.g., the Soga) became so powerful that, for all practical purposes, they took for themselves many of the prerogatives of the "head" clan.

After 645, this head clan of the Yamato Kingdom took for itself the lofty title "**Emperor**" (*tennô* 天皇). It is for this reason that the head clan of the ruling Yamato confederation is usually called the "imperial clan," "imperial family," or "imperial line." Properly speaking, however, we should only apply terms like "emperor" or "imperial" to this clan and its head *after* 645, not before. In modern times, this emperor became a potent political and emotional symbol of the Japanese "nation." The custom developed, therefore, of assuming that the imperial lineage stretched back, in an unbroken line of succession, to prehistoric times, a matter we examine in the next chapter. For present purposes, we refer to the head of the leading clan of the Yamato confederation as "king" prior to 645 and "emperor" after this time. Likewise, this leading clan is the "royal clan" before 645 and the "imperial clan" after 645.

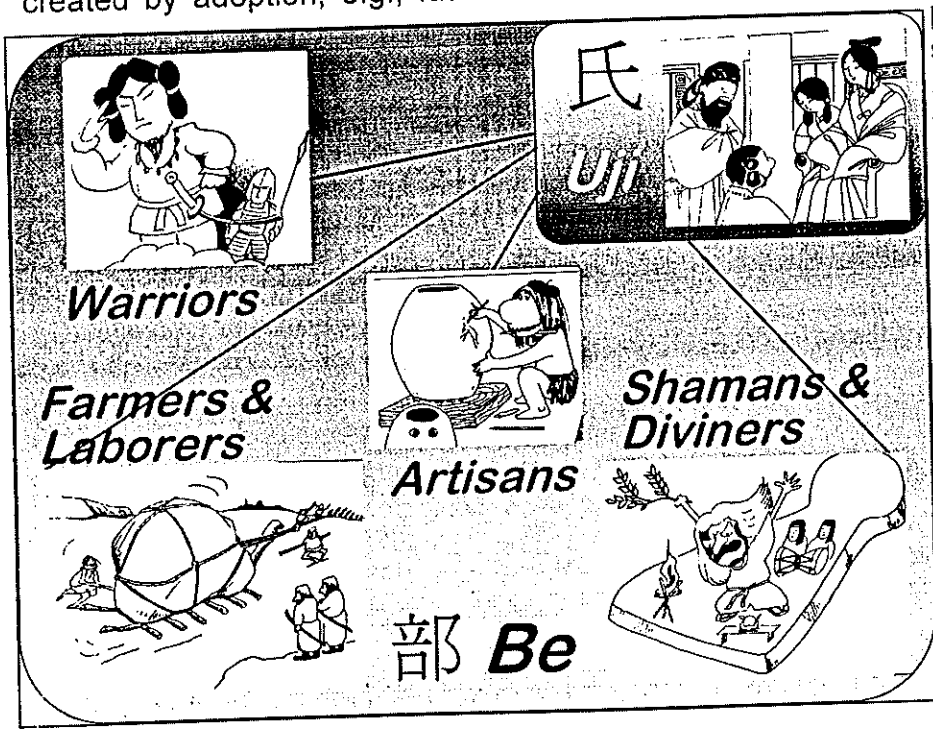
THE ASUKA PERIOD 飛鳥時代

The Asuka period was not a radical break with the previous tomb period. Most historians place the beginning of the Asuka period around the year 500. It ended in 710 with the founding of a new capital in the city of Nara (near Kyôto). By the end of the Asuka period, we can speak of Japan as a distinct political entity with a strong central government. This section examines the following characteristics of the Asuka period:

1. the importance of *uji* 氏 and *be* 部 as units of social, political and economic organization;
2. the coming of Buddhism 仏教;
3. the rise and fall of the Soga clan 蘇我氏;
4. the activities of Prince Shôtoku (Shôtoku Taishi 聖徳太子);
5. the Taika Reforms 大化改新 of 645;
6. the establishment of a strong central government between the years 645 and 718.

Thus far, we have used the term "clan" to indicate large extended family organizations that ruled over specific areas of the Japanese islands. As we have seen, by the end of the tomb period, many clans throughout the Japanese islands had submitted—at least in theory—to the authority of the confederation of clans that ruled the Yamato kingdom. The Yamato confederation then bestowed formal titles of rank on those clans, precise rank depending on the importance of the particular clan in question. We now introduce the proper Japanese term for the clans that comprised the Yamato confederation and their formal, rank-holding allies in outlying areas: ***uji***.

Uji were extended families held together by real or fictive kinship ties. A "real" kinship tie means a biological family relationship, e.g., father-son in which the father is a biological parent of his son. A "fictive" kinship tie is a non-biological family relationship created by adoption, e.g., father-son in which a man adopts an otherwise unrelated person as his son. In such a case, this adopted son would often come into the *uji* by marrying one of his "father's" daughters. *Uji* were patrilineal descent groups, but adoption of sons from outside the *uji* was common. This phenomenon gave added importance to female members of the clan, whom these adopted sons would typically marry. Interestingly, adoption of sons (婿養子) into families through marriage to a daughter



is still fairly common in today's Japan.

All the *uji* claimed to have originated from a deity, and this **claim of divine descent** was an important characteristic of *uji* in ancient times. The specific deity in any particular case differed with each *uji*. The generic term for the founding deity of an *uji* is *ujigami* 氏神, literally, "the deity of the *uji*." Perhaps the most important function of the head of each *uji* was the worship of the group's *ujigami*.

Uji generally controlled specific areas of territory, and, within that territory, its members formed the elite stratum of society. As Japan became a clearly-defined, centralized state, descendants of *uji* became the aristocracy during the Nara and Heian periods; though, by this time, the *uji* technically did not exist. Although formally abolished in 645, *uji* continued, albeit unofficially, to exert a strong influence on social and political matters into the Kamakura period.

Another important term is ***be***, hereditary occupational castes that worked for and under the *uji*. Each *be* specialized in a skilled task, service, or craft, including agriculture and fishing. Some *be*, for example, made weapons. Others made pottery, tools and other necessities of daily life. Some *be* specialized in the military arts; others memorized and recited ancient lore. *Be* had their own internal hierarchy of organization. Gradually, some *be*, such as those that specialized in warfare, metallurgy or other highly-skilled areas, became more powerful and important than others. Many of these types of *be* consisted of recent immigrants from the Korean peninsula. Indeed, the term "*be*" itself is of Korean origin, and a similar system of occupational castes existed in Paekche at the time. Although subordinate to the *uji*, the leaders of certain *be* became quite powerful. Descendants of these powerful *be* leaders joined the lower ranks of the aristocracy during the Nara and Heian periods.

The changes of 645 that did away with the *uji* also did away with the *be*. Although the *be* did indeed cease to exist after 645, the new system of taxation relied heavily on labor service and the payment of specialized local products—the main tasks the *be* had previously performed. Most historians, therefore, see the post-645 taxation system as having derived in large part from the older networks of *be*.

The **arrival of Buddhism in the Japanese islands** and its gradual acceptance by elite members of society was a matter of the utmost importance for subsequent cultural and political development. We have already examined the basic teachings of Buddhism (in *Buddhism*), so there is no need to repeat them here. The first known reference to Buddhism in Japanese chronicles is dated 538. King Songmyong 聖明王 of Paekche had come under strong military pressure from another of the Korean kingdoms (refer back to the map above). This military pressure became so serious that he had to move Paekche's capital to a safer location. King Songmyong sought military assistance from the Yamato Kingdom, and, in connection with this matter, sent a Buddhist statue and several volumes of Buddhist scripture to Kinmei 欽明, the Yamato king. King Songmyong sent his own memorial about Buddhism to accompany these gifts. In this memorial he stated:

> This doctrine [Buddhism] is amongst all doctrines the most excellent, but it is hard to explain and hard to comprehend. Even the Duke of Zhou and Confucius had not attained knowledge of it. This doctrine can create religious merit and rewards without measure and without bounds, and so lead to a full appreciation of higher wisdom. Imagine a man in possession of treasures to his heart's content, so

> that he might satisfy all his wishes in proportion as he used them. Thus it is with the treasure of this wonderful doctrine. Every prayer is fulfilled and nothing is wanting. Moreover, from distant India it has extended here to the three [kingdoms of Korea], where there are none who do not receive it with reverence as it is preached to them.[2]

It is important to notice the view of Buddhism presented here. The Buddhism of King Songmyong's court was *not* a method of delving deep into one's mind or psyche and ridding one's self of desires. To the Paekche king, Buddhism was a **powerful form of magic**, a set of esoteric practices that rulers could employ as a potent supplement to their power. It was a set of practices that would allow one to "satisfy all his wishes," not eliminate them.

At this time, and for several centuries afterward, most Korean elites regarded Buddhism as a device for strengthening the power of the state. In early Japan, too, the dominant view of Buddhism regarded it as a potent form of magic for use by the state for its own political ends. This view of Buddhism, of course, runs contrary to the original teachings of Shakyamuni, but, just as Confucianism changed in ways Confucius would not have approved or even recognized, so too did Buddhism change. It was not until the late Heian period that Buddhism began to spread into the ranks of ordinary people as a significant religious or spiritual force.

When Kinmei received these gifts, he "leapt for joy," at least according to the ancient chronicles. He consulted with the heads of the other Yamato clans about the best course of action. Soga-no-Iname 蘇我稲目 was head of the **Soga** *uji,* an increasingly powerful clan of relatively recent immigrants from Korea. He argued that Kinmei should worship the Buddhist image, saying: "All the Western frontier lands without exception worship it. Shall Yamato alone refuse to do so?"[3] The head of the older **Mononobe** 物部 *uji,* however, argued against worshipping the Buddhist image. He claimed that doing so would offend the local Japanese deities, saying:

> Those who have ruled the empire in this our state have always made it their care to worship in spring, summer, autumn and winter the 180 deities of heaven and earth, and the deities of the land and of grain. If just at this time we were to worship foreign deities in their stead, it may be feared that we should incur the wrath of our local deities.[4]

The Soga favored trying the new, apparently powerful foreign religion. The Mononobe took a conservative stand.

There was more going on here than first meets the eye. The ostensible issue was whether to worship the image of the Buddha, with the Soga answering in the affirmative and the Mononobe answering in the negative. But beneath the surface of this religious issue was a struggle for political power between two strong clans. As relatively recent immigrants from the Korean peninsula, the Soga had weaker ties to the native religious practices of the Japanese islands. They supported the introduction of new technology from the continent, which in this case included Buddhism. In the struggle for power in the Yamato heartland, the Soga aligned themselves with continental innova-

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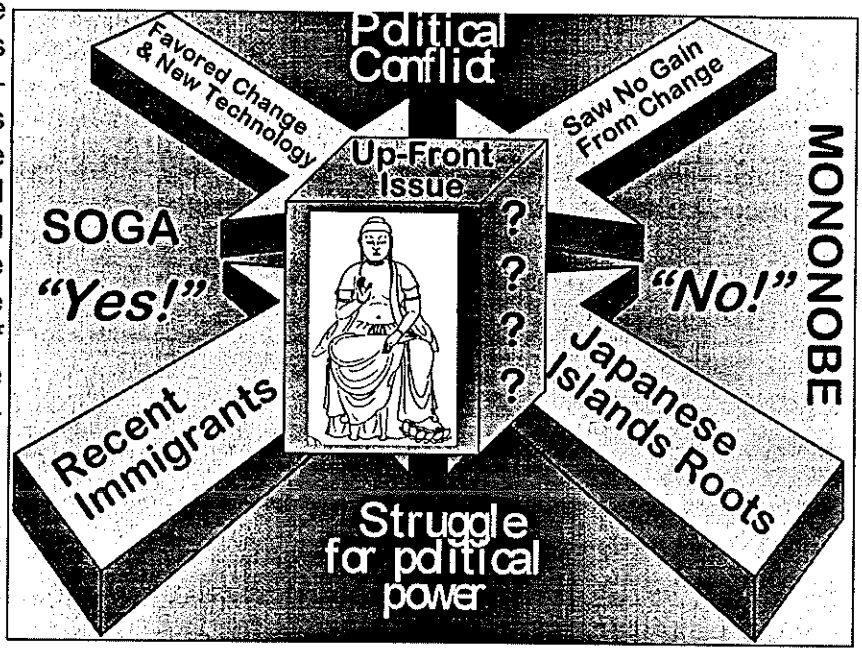
[2] Quoted in W.G. Aston, trans., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from Earliest Times to A.D. 697* (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1972), p. 66, with minor modification.
[3] Adapted from Ibid.
[4] Adapted from Ibid., pp. 66-7.

tions. The Mononobe, on the other hand, traced their roots back to the Japanese islands, not Korea. In its struggle for power with the Soga, the Mononobe aligned itself with the religious and cultural traditions of its native place. Had the Mononobe favored the importation of Buddhism, such a stance would likely have strengthened the hand of the Soga, who were in a better position to act as cultural mediators between the Japanese islands and the Korean peninsula.



King Kinmei decided to give the statue to Soga-no-Iname for his clan to worship as an "experiment." The Yamato king apparently wanted to proceed with caution before taking a stand on the matter. The Soga *uji* accepted the image and began worshipping it. Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga point out the nature of this Soga acceptance of Buddhism:

> The Soga acceptance of Buddhism was far from a conversion in our ordinary sense of the term. They had no philosophical understanding of the new religion and merely regarded it as a superior form of magic long practiced by advanced civilizations they respected and sought to emulate.[5]

It bears repeating that, for its first few centuries in the Japanese islands, Buddhism functioned as a set of ritual practices of power to be used for political purposes. Japanese Buddhists generally had little knowledge of the fine points of theology or Buddhist spirituality until well into the Heian period. It was not until the Kamakura period that Buddhism became a major religion among common people.

Soga worship of the image caused controversy, and Buddhism went through several ups and downs as a result. The conflict finally came to a head in 587, when the Soga and Mononobe assembled their soldiers and fought it out on the battlefield. The Soga won. Soon afterward, the victorious *uji* brought in Buddhist monks, nuns, relics (sacred remains), temple builders, and related artisans. These specialists came mainly from Korea. They began work on a great temple, Asuka-dera, which eventually gave its name to the entire historical period. By 596 Asuka-dera was complete. Soon the other major *uji* began to construct temples for their own benefit. As a result of these actions, Buddhism took firm root in Japan. By the close of the Asuka period, it was, for all practical purposes, the official religion of the state.

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[5] Daigan and Alicia Matsunaga, *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism Volume 1: The Aristocratic Age* (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1974), p. 10.

Magnificent bronze Sakyamuni Triad in the Hôryû Temple. Finished in 623, it is perhaps the greatest work of Asuka-period art.

Notice in the above account the high degree of independence the powerful Yamato clans exercised. The Yamato King lacked the power to keep the major clans from fighting each other. There was still no strong, centralized Japanese state.

By 624, there were forty-six Buddhist temple compounds throughout Japan and nearly 1,400 Buddhist monks and nuns, most of Korean origin. Japanese and immigrant Korean artisans were soon producing Buddhist art of the highest quality. Indeed, it seems to have been the *art* of Buddhism that Japanese mastered first. Comprehension of the fine points of Buddhist doctrines, scripture and theology took place much later. In the Asuka period, it was the external trappings of Buddhism that impressed most Japanese.

Most historians of ancient Japan view the victory of the "progressive" Soga over the "conservative" Mononobe as a boon for Japan's early cultural development. Along with Buddhism, all manner of advanced cultural forms from Korea and China poured into the Japanese islands after 587. At the same time, the Soga became the most powerful of the Yamato clans, even overshadowing the power of the Yamato royal clan. The rise of **Prince Shôtoku** (575-622) to prominence served as a temporary check on Soga power.

Shôtoku was the son of King Yômei 用明, who died the year the Soga and Mononobe went to war. In 592 at age 19, Shôtoku became regent (*sesshô* 摂政) for Suiko 推古 (r. 592-628), a female sovereign installed at the urging of the Soga. "Regent" here means that Shôtoku ruled on behalf of, or in the name of, Suiko, who was in effect a titular sovereign. Both Suiko and Shôtoku were avid promoters of Buddhism, which was undoubtedly one reason the leaders of the Soga *uji* favored them. Another was that both Suiko and Shôtoku were blood relatives of the Soga clan, which had connected itself to the Yamato royal clan through marriage. Soon after rising to power, however, Shôtoku began to overshadow the leaders of the Soga clan. It also became apparent that Prince Shôtoku was firmly on the side of the Yamato royal clan, his biological connection with the Soga notwithstanding.

Shôtoku Taishi,
Prince Shôtoku & sons

Throughout later ages, Prince Shôtoku's stature in Japan, like that of Confucius in China, grew ever greater. By the Heian period, his deeds had become legendary, and modern nationalists used the prince as a symbol of an ideal Japanese. More recently, Shôtoku's image graced the 10,000-*yen* notes of the pre-1985 currency—a supreme honor in a society that has elevated the consumption of goods to the status of a quasi-religious act. Because of his fame, later historians attributed all manner of cultural creations to Shôtoku, and it is often difficult to separate tall tales from reliable information. What follows is a brief description of Prince Shôtoku's major accomplishments.

In 607, Prince Shôtoku initiated the first **official Japanese embassy to China** 遣唐使. A series of additional embassies followed this initial voyage, continuing until the early Heian period. Each consisting of several hundred people, these voyages were a major conduit for Chinese culture coming into the Japanese islands. They were the first systematic attempt by Japanese to gain direct access to Chinese culture unmediated by Korea.

Prince Shôtoku adopted from the continent several methods of government and court ceremony in an effort to strengthen the state and the royal family. Most important was a **system of twelve court ranks** 冠位, established in 603. Shôtoku's system closely resembled that which prevailed in two of the three major Korean kingdoms, and most scholars agree that the resemblance was no coincidence. Recall that there was already a system of status ranks in Japan, the *kabane* rank titles that the Yamato royal *uji* granted the other *uji.* Over the years, these *kabane* rank titles had become the hereditary property of each *uji* and were not subject to change. In Shôtoku's new system, rank was tied to service and ability, not heredity (though these ranks, too, gradually became hereditary after Shôtoku's time). Sometimes holders of low *kabane* rank titles received high court rank during Shôtoku's administration. The new system of court ranks did not eliminate the old *kabane* rank titles, which remained prestigious. Instead, the court ranks formed an additional layer, adding greater complexity to the question of a person's precise aristocratic status. The system of court ranks was a tool the royal family could use to confer additional status on its supporters, thereby strengthening its power.

In 604, Prince Shôtoku issued the **Seventeen Injunctions** 十七条憲法 (sometimes called the Seventeen-Article Constitution). There is some doubt among scholars about who actually wrote these articles, but they were, in any event, closely connected with Shôtoku's administration. The articles had both Confucian and Buddhist aspects, but their major basis is genealogical thought. The articles exhort the upper classes (members of *uji* and important *be*) to work together in harmony and accept the rule of the royal house. Each article consists of roughly a paragraph of explanation, but, except for #12, only the first sentence of each is supplied here, which is sufficient for understanding their general import:

1. Harmony is to be valued, and an avoidance of wanton opposition to be honored.
2. Sincerely reverence the three treasures [i.e., Buddhism].

3. When you receive royal commands, fail not scrupulously to obey them.
4. The ministers and functionaries should make decorous behavior their leading principle. . . .
5. Ceasing from gluttony and abandoning covetous desires, deal impartially with the suits [i.e., litigation] which are submitted to you.
6. Chastise that which is evil and encourage that which is good.
7. Let every man have his own charge, and let not the spheres of duty be confused.
8. Let the ministers and the functionaries attend the royal court early in the morning and retire late.
9. Good faith is the foundation of right.
10. Let us cease from wrath and refrain from angry looks.
11. Give clear appreciation to merit and demerit, and deal out to each its sure reward and punishment.
12. Let not the provincial authorities and local nobles levy exaction on the people. In a country there are not two lords; the people have not two masters. The sovereign is the master of the people of the whole country. The officials to whom he gives charge are all his vassals. How can they, as well as the government, presume to levy taxes on the people?
13. Let all persons entrusted with office attend equally to their functions.
14. Ye ministers and functionaries! Be not envious.
15. To turn away from that which is private, and to set our faces towards that which is public—this is the path of a minister.
16. Let the people be employed [as part of their labor tax] [only] at seasonable times. [famous passage from the Confucian *Analects*]
17. Decisions on important matters should not be decided by one person. They should be discussed with many.

That Prince Shôtoku or others around him issued these articles does not necessarily mean anyone followed them. First, many of them are vague moral pronouncements, not specific directives. A few, like the important **article #12**, explain specific principles and practices of government. Even #12, however, did not actually change anything at the time Shôtoku's government issued the articles. The local *uji* continued to rule their territories largely as they wanted. The importance of the article is that it foreshadowed later changes. Rhetoric (words intended to persuade) may sometimes seem "empty," but it rarely is. If principles such as those embodied in #12 are talked about often enough, and if they face no major rhetorical challenge from opponents, then people will gradually accept them as truth. This acceptance is often a prerequisite for actually putting the principle(s) into practice. In the Japanese islands, #12 was put into practice about a century after the time of the Seventeen Injunctions.

Prince Shôtoku was a patron of Buddhism, though scholars disagree over the extent of his Buddhist activities. Tradition claims that he wrote learned commentaries on each of three important Buddhist scriptures of his day, including the influential *Lotus Sutra* 法華経. Tradition also credits the prince with building several temples, some under his own personal supervision. There is no doubt that Shôtoku was a supporter of Buddhism, but it is unlikely he wrote the commentaries on the scriptures. While he was probably associated with the extensive temple building that went on at the time, it is also doubtful that he personally constructed all the temples tradition accords to him.


Nakatomi-no-Kamatari

It appears that Shôtoku's policies and strong leadership eventually led to tension between the royal family and the Soga. There is archaeological evidence indicating the prince moved his residence away from the Asuka capital, which was in the heart of Soga-controlled territory, around the year 600. He moved to Ikaruga 斑鳩, quite distant from the Asuka capital and in the territory of a different *uji*. Although we cannot know for sure, it is likely that this move was Prince Shôtoku's attempt to escape the power of the Soga in order to pursue his own policies.

After Prince Shôtoku's death in 622, the Soga *uji* and their allies reasserted themselves. The Soga opposed Shôtoku's son becoming king and eventually had him killed. Soga ministers in the royal court began to behave in an arbitrary and autocratic manner, and the Soga *uji* began to perform ceremonies traditionally the sole prerogative of the Yamato royal family. The Soga, in other words, appeared on the verge of installing themselves as the new royal family of Yamato. Around the year 642, leadership of the Soga came into the hands of Iruka 入鹿, who was even more aggressive than his predecessors. Once when criticized by a member of the royal family, he responded by forcing twenty-three descendants of Prince Shôtoku to commit suicide.

Such behavior aroused the opposition of remaining members of the Yamato royal family and those aristocratic *uji* not allied with the Soga. Two figures emerged to lead the opposition to the Soga. The first was **Nakatomi-no-Kamatari** 中臣鎌足 (614-669), who founded the important **Fujiwara** 藤原 *uji* (he received the clan name Fujiwara in 669 as an honor, thus changing from Nakatomi to Fujiwara). The second was **Naka-no-Ôe** 中大兄 (626-671), a royal prince who in 661 took the throne as Emperor Tenji 天智 (also pronounced Tenchi). These two also worked with some elements of the Soga clan who were dissatisfied with Iruka's leadership. They planned to do **two things** at once: 1) assassinate Soga-no-Iruka and his top allies, and 2) establish the Yamato royal family as absolute rulers in the style of Chinese emperors. In 645, they assassinated Soga-no-Iruka at a court ceremony. The same year they proclaimed a new age, the era of "Great Change" (*Taika* 大化). The coup of 645 against the Soga, and subsequent changes in the theory and structure of government, is generally known in English as the **Taika Reforms**. What follows is the main text of the Taika declaration that the triumphant Yamato royal family and their allies put forth after Iruka's death:

> Heaven covers Us. Earth upbears Us. The imperial way is but one. But in the last degenerate age, the order of Lord and Vassal was destroyed, until Supreme Heaven by Our hands put to death its traitors. Now, from this time forward, both parties shedding their heart's blood, the Lord will eschew double methods of government, and the Vassal will avoid duplicity in his service of the sovereign! On him who breaks this oath, Heaven will send a curse and earth a plague, demons

> will slay them, and humans will smite them. This is as manifest as the sun and moon.[6]

(To what specific events and circumstances might the above sentences refer? Who destroyed "the order of Lord and Vassal?" Think of a specific example of "duplicity in his service to the sovereign.")

Because the overall intent of the Taika Reforms was to create a strong emperor in Japan, similar in degree of independent authority to the Chinese emperor, it is reasonable to call the Yamato kings "emperors" and the royal family the "imperial family" from 645 onward. The Taika Reforms declared several major changes in the political and economic order, the most important of which were:

1. The new "emperor" asserted that all the land of the Japanese islands was his possession.
2. The *uji*, *be* and old *kabane* rank title system were abolished, to be replaced with new government offices and titles of nobility granted by the emperor.
3. The emperor appointed governors to each of the provinces and charged them with reforming local administration in various ways.
4. The old taxation systems and customary practices were abolished and replaced by a uniform system of taxation controlled from the capital.

In reality, however, little changed, at least not right away. Typically, the new government simply re-appointed the old local *uji* heads as "governors" of the same areas they previously controlled as chief of their *uji*. Their old *kabane* rank titles converted over to the new system of court ranks.

Although the Taika Reform leaders did have some military support from a dissident faction of the Soga clan, they did not have their own independent military forces. They therefore had to proceed cautiously, without impinging on too many vested interests. In 645 and for two decades thereafter, the Taika Reforms were more reforms on paper than real, significant changes in the government and social structure. This is not to say, however, that the reforms were unimportant or meaningless. As with Prince Shôtoku's Seventeen Injunctions, there was no challenge to the theory behind the Taika Reforms. Therefore, when an emperor finally came to the throne who did have significant military power in his hands, the process of transforming the "paper" reforms in to concrete policies, laws, systems, and practices proceeded rapidly.


Emp. Tenji

That emperor was **Tenmu** 天武 (r. 673-686). Although a younger brother of Emperor Tenji, Tenmu was not the legitimate heir to the throne. Instead, he seized the throne through military force, deposing Prince Ôtomo 大友, Tenji's son and designated heir. After he took the throne, Tenmu commissioned the writing of official histories that portrayed him as the legitimate sovereign and Ôtomo as a rebel. By comparison, this is how one version of Japanese history, written in the *18th century*, describes Tenmu's rise to power:

[6] Quoted in Tsunoda, de Bary, and Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition, Vol. 1,* p. 69, with minor modification.

> The fortieth emperor, Tenmu, raised an armed rebellion against the Emperor Ôtomo, the heir of Tenmu's elder brother Tenji, but this operation [the Jinshin War] cannot be regarded as of the same kind as ordinary punitive expeditions. When Ôtomo was defeated in battle and Tenmu gained supreme control of affairs, the incident was generally reported as if Ôtomo had revolted against his sovereign, but since Tenji had appointed Ôtomo as his successor, Ôtomo was undoubtedly the rightful emperor.[7]


Emp. Tenmu

The Tokugawa-period scholar who wrote this passage understood that it was the victors who wrote Japan's earlier history. In the case of the civil war of 672 between the forces of Ôtomo and Tenmu, the latter won. This victory assured that official historical chronicles at the time would portray Tenmu as the legitimate emperor and Ôtomo as the rebel against him, not vice versa. We see here that by the much later time of the Tokugawa period, at least some critical historians did not take the official chronicles at face value—nor should we do so today.

Tenmu had the military might at his command to enforce the Taika Reform principles to a greater extent than was previously possible. The ultimate result was the establishment of a strong central government, although the process of doing so extended several decades beyond Tenmu's death. Historian Naoki Kôjirô has identified three "waves of change" connected with this process:

> The first, beginning with Emperor Tenmu's victory in the civil war of 672 and ending with the drafting of the Yôrô code in 718, saw the laying of the foundation for a strong and centralized imperium. The second, starting with the completion of the Nara capital in 710 and ending with the dedication of the imposing statue of Rushana Buddha in 752, was marked by the erection of spectacular symbols of imperial authority. The third, dating roughly from the Fujiwara no Hirotsugu rebellion of 740 and continuing to the removal of the capital from Nara in 784, witnessed a continuing erosion of imperial control.[8]

Our concern in this section is with the first of the three waves. We deal with the other two below.

Two major **law and administrative codes** specified the general structure of the new imperial government. The first of these codes was the Taihô-Ritsuryô 大宝律令 Code of 701, supplemented by the Yôrô 養老 Code of 718. The basic structure of government that resulted from these codes is shown here. At its head, of course, was the emperor. During the Nara period and the first decades of the Heian period, the emperor had significant, though not absolute, political power. Throughout the Heian period, however, the actual political power of the emperor declined. By the Muromachi period, the emperors were little more than figureheads, though they remained abstract symbols of state authority. Emperors also served as religious heads of state, a function they never lost even during times when their political authority was weak or non-existent.

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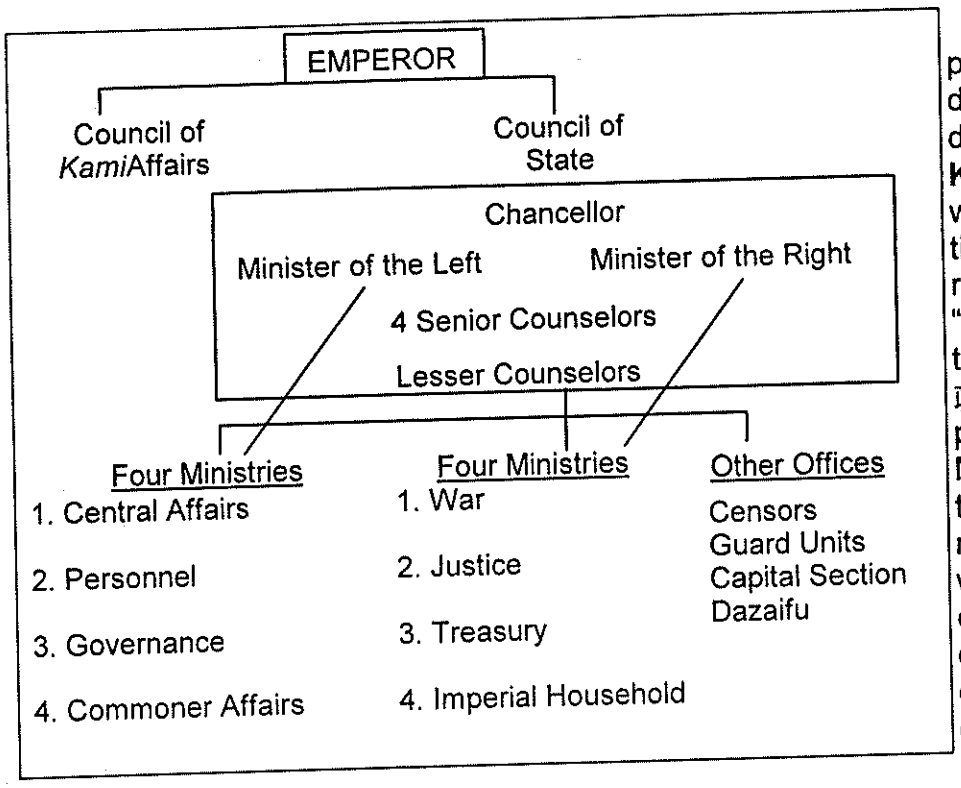
[7] Joyce Ackroyd, translator and commentator, *Lessons from History: The* Tokushi Yoron *by Arai Hakuseki* (New York: University of Queensland Press, 1982), p. 113, with minor modification.

[8] Delmer M. Brown, ed., *The Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 1: Ancient Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 221-222, with minor modification.



Below the emperor were two major divisions of equal standing, the **Council of Kami Affairs** 神祇官, which dealt with divination and state religious rites (for now, regard "*kami*" as "deity"), and the **Council of State** 太政官, which dealt with political administration. Many textbooks claim that Japan's government in the Nara period was a direct copy of that of Tang China. Government in China, however, never included equal divisions of religious and political administration. Notice also that there are eight major ministries of state in the Japanese system, but six was the norm in China's government. China may have been a general inspiration, and Japan's leaders no doubt borrowed some Chinese institutions. Nevertheless, the Nara-period government structure (also called the "Taihô-Ritsuryô State") was designed for Japanese needs. It was not a copy of Tang China's government.

The core of the Council of State consisted of seven powerful ministers, the Chancellor 太政大臣, **Minister of the Left** 左大臣, **Minister of the Right** 右大臣, and four Senior Counselors 大納言. It was this group that made major policy decisions. As time went on, the Minister of the Left became the most powerful of these officials. The Minster of the Left supervised four of the **eight ministries**. The Ministry of Central Affairs (Nakatsukasa-shô 中務省) was the highest ranking ministry. Its main duties were communication between the emperor and Council of State. It drafted imperial edicts and gave advice on various affairs pertaining to the court. The Ministry of Personnel (Shikibu-shô 式部省), as its name implies, supervised government personnel, including students at the state university and rank-holding nobles without any particular government post. The Governance Ministry (Jibu-shô 治部省) supervised Buddhist clerics (monks & nuns) and foreigners. It also supervised court music. The Ministry of Commoner Affairs (Minbu-shô 民部省) administered household tax, population and land registers. It supervised the collection of taxes and the allotment of rice fields to peasants, and it also oversaw the state's budget.

The other four ministries were under the supervision of the Minister of the Right. The Ministry of War (Hyôbu-shô 兵部省) took care of all military matters. The Ministry of Justice (Gyôbu-shô 刑部省) handled legal matters and the administration of punishments (its name literally means "Punishment Ministry"). The Treasury Ministry (Ôkura-shô 大蔵省) kept watch over state property and assets. It also oversaw standards of

weights and measures and took care of other matters related to economic exchange. The Imperial Household Ministry (Kunai-shô 宮内省) took care of supplying the palace with food, clothing and other items required by its inhabitants. There were a number of additional offices not directly under a ministry. Of particular importance was Dazaifu 太宰府, which administered the nine provinces of the island of Kyûshû.

Outside the capital, the Japanese islands consisted of over sixty **provinces** 国, each headed by a governor (*kuni-no-miyatsuko* 国造) who served for a six-year appointed term. A province would typically contain about ten districts 郡, each with its own supervisor (*gunji* 郡司) who worked under the governor. Each district contained several villages (*sato* 里), each of which had its own customary form of local government. A typical village contained fifty households. In the early part of the Nara period, the central government undertook a periodic census to update the registers of each household, and agricultural land was periodically redistributed on the basis of the census results. This system, however, proved so difficult to administer and keep up to date that, by the end of the Nara period, it had fallen into disuse. Another early and overly ambitious system was military conscription. After the last of the wars with the Ainu were over in the ninth century, this system too fell into disuse.

A decade after the start of the Nara period, Japan was a state with a central bureaucratic government headed by an emperor with theoretically absolute authority. Despite the new institutions, however, old customs and modes of social organization (e.g., the *uji*) continued to live on, in spirit if not in name. It was not long before these and other forces began significantly to modify the institutions of the eighth century. Despite these modifications, the basic institutional structure of the imperial government continued to be based on the institutions described above, even into modern times.

THE NARA PERIOD 奈良時代

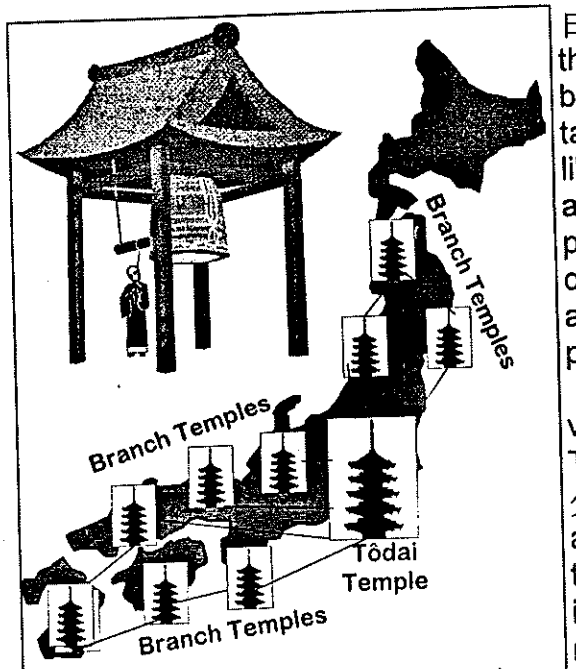
In 708, Empress Genmei 元明 declared that the capital would move to Nara, claiming that sacred signs had marked the location as ideal. Two years later, the new capital, constructed along the lines of Tang China's capital at Chang'an, though only one-fourth as large, was ready for the imperial move. The move to Nara in 710 begins a short but important period in Japan's history. This section examines the following topics:

1. the creation of spectacular symbols of imperial authority;
2. political conflict and the partial erosion of imperial authority;
3. the question of Chinese cultural influence.

The first two of these topics correspond roughly with the second and third "waves of change" that Naoki described in the previous section.

The first symbol of imperial authority was the new capital itself, carefully laid out in Chinese style, designed spatially to enhance the emperor's authority. The Nara state also sponsored the construction of a system of Buddhist temples throughout Japan. During the Nara period, Buddhism became even more important as a symbol of central government power and authority than it had been in the Asuka period. A system of official temples centered on the great temple **Tôdaiji** 東大寺[9] in Nara. The distinctive feature of Tôdaiji was a giant bronze statue of Rushana 盧舎那 Buddha (=Vairocana 大

[9] Japanese Buddhist temple names normally end in "ji," which means "temple." "Tôdaiji," therefore, means "Tôdai Temple," or, for a more literal translation, "Eastern Great Temple."

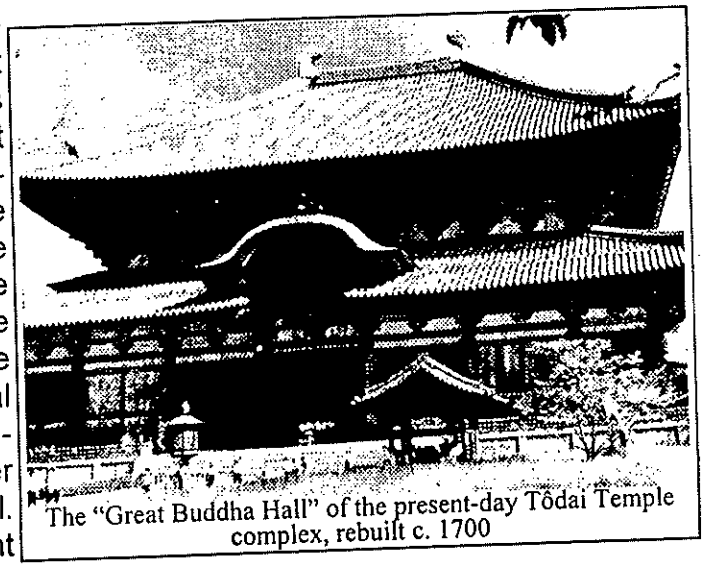


In the Nara period, the Tôdai Temple system helped spread central government authority.

日), fifty-three feet in height. Completed in 749, the initial motivation for the statue was an outbreak of smallpox in 735. Although no longer extant, we can get an idea of what this image looked like from drawings of it etched into ceramic tiles and bronze surfaces from other parts of the temple. The giant statue and the surrounding Tôdaiji compound served as graphic symbols of imperial authority, an authority bolstered by the perceived power of Buddhism.

The Nara court also ordered that smaller versions of Tôdaiji be erected in each province. These **provincial branch temples** (*kokubunji* 国分寺) were also a graphic symbol of imperial authority, which radiated outward from the main temple in the capital and extended to each province. Emperor Shômu 聖武 issued an edict in 741, requiring each province to build a monastery and nunnery. Ordained priests and nuns were to conduct regular Buddhist rites in these provincial centers, which were also to house copies of Buddhist scriptures. Most Buddhists at the time regarded these scriptures less as texts for study than as powerful magic objects. The purpose of these moves, according to the edict, was to "protect the country against all calamity, prevent sorrow and pestilence, and cause the hearts of believers to be filled with joy."[10] Buddhism and all its external trappings had became the most important symbol of imperial authority.[11]

Although not a "symbol" in the narrow sense of the term, written materials also served to enhance imperial authority in the early part of the Nara period. The earliest writing appeared in the Japanese islands during the fifth century. It was, for the most part, classical Chinese. There was no convenient way to write in Japanese until the Heian period, prior to which time Japanese words had to be "spelled" out in Chinese characters used for their phonetic value (called *manyôgana* 万葉仮名). Prince Shôtoku was thoroughly literate in classical Chinese, the language in which he composed the Seventeen Injunctions and other edicts. Shôtoku was somewhat exceptional. In the Asuka period, it was mainly recent


The "Great Buddha Hall" of the present-day Tôdai Temple complex, rebuilt c. 1700

[10] Quoted in Brown, ed., *Cambridge History*, p. 255.
[11] Buddhism was not the only form of religion in Japan at this time, nor was it the only form of religion in which the imperial family participated. We examine native Japanese, pre-Buddhist forms of religion in the next chapter.

Image of Rushana Buddha from Tôdaiji, suggesting something of what the statue would have looked like.

Chinese and (especially) Korean immigrants who served as scribes and produced most of the written materials. By the Nara period, a knowledge of classical Chinese had become *de rigueur* among aristocratic Japanese males, although skill in composition varied widely from one individual to the next.

In the 680s, Emperor Tenmu ordered work started on two official histories. Having seized the throne by force, Tenmu was most interested in setting the historical record "straight," that is, in using history books to show that he, not Ôtomo, was the legitimate heir to the throne. More broadly, Tenmu saw the value of history in legitimizing the power and authority of the Yamato imperial clan vis-à-vis the other powerful clans of the Yamato region.

Tenmu's projects bore fruit in the early Nara period. Japan's oldest extant official history is ***Kojiki*** 古事記, ***Record of Ancient Matters***, completed in 712. The narrative in *Record of Ancient Matters* starts in the ancient, mythical past, with explanations of how the Japanese islands and their various peoples came into being. The narrative ends with the death of Empress Suiko in 628. *Record of Ancient Matters* was written in a hybrid of classical Chinese and ancient Japanese, the latter language being represented by the complex writing system of *manyôgana* mentioned above. Edwin A. Cranston describes *Record of Ancient Matters* as:

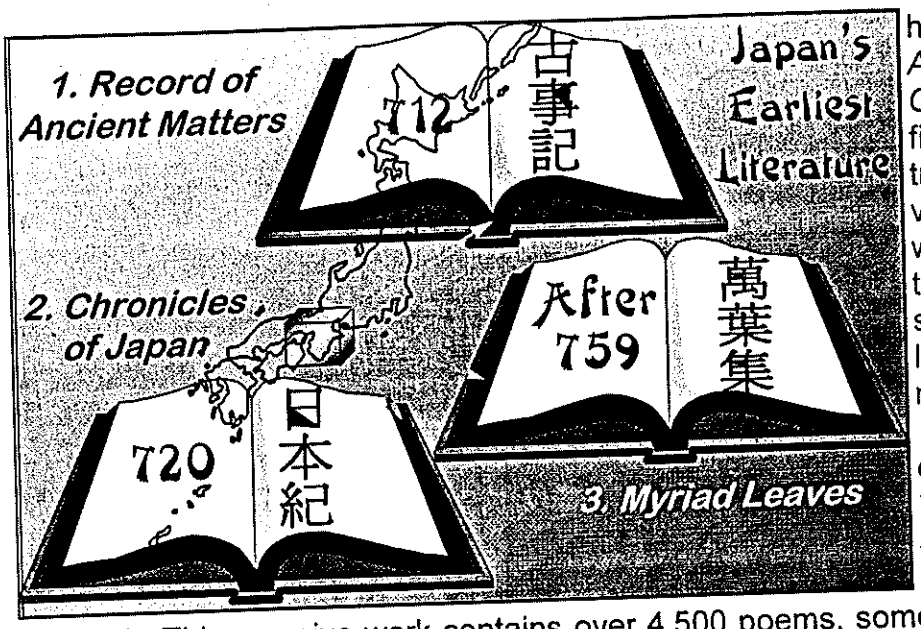
> a heady brew of history, myth, folktale, and poetry, in which the historical narrative asserts itself as the main organizational thrust, dragging along a great accumulation of traditions, all of which are treated with equal credence. It is as if George Washington's chopping down his father's cherry tree received equal billing with the signing of the Declaration of Independence, or King Arthur and the Round Table were treated as historical in the same sense as King John and *Magna Carta.*[12]

The text has a rough, unpolished quality, and is positively ribald in many of its descriptions of the sexual activities of the deities.

By contrast, the second official history, ***Nihongi*** 日本紀 (also called *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀), ***Chronicles of Japan***, is refined and restrained. Written entirely in classical Chinese, *Chronicles of Japan* reflects Chinese concepts of historiography and resembles official Chinese dynastic histories in both content and format. This work is much longer and more thorough than *Record of Ancient Matters*. Court historians completed this second history in 720.

Bear in mind that the primary purpose behind both of these histories was *justification and legitimization of the imperial family*. Recall from our study of the Sage Kings and culture heroes in China that the writing of history is, at least in part, a political act. Normally, the victorious or dominant group portrays its side of the story as what "really"

[12] Ibid., p. 467.



happened. *Record of Ancient Matters* and *Chronicles of Japan* definitely fall within this tradition of history by the victors. In Chapter Three we shall read portions of these works, and it is essential to keep these political considerations in mind when doing so.

A third major work of literature is ***Manyôshû*** 万葉集, a collection of ancient poetry often rendered ***Myriad Leaves*** in English. This massive work contains over 4,500 poems, some in classical Chinese (漢詩), most in Japanese (和歌). The most recent poem in the collection is dated at 759, and the others go as far back as a century earlier. It is commonly said that *Myriad Leaves* reflects Japanese life and sentiments prior to the coming of Chinese influence. Chinese models of collected poetry, however, inspired the production of the book itself, and a small number of the poems in *Myriad Leaves* are in Chinese. Nevertheless, this early poetic anthology does contain many of Japan's oldest extant songs and verse, many of which probably reflect the sentiments of Japanese of many different walks of life prior to the large-scale influx of Chinese culture that took place after Prince Shôtoku's time.

Most of the poems in *Myriad Leaves* depict various human sentiments such as awe, sorrow, longing, and love, often in combination with descriptions of scenery intended to evoke one or another of these sentiments. The following short poem by Prince Kadobe is typical:

Gazing out,
I see the points of fires
that fishermen have lit
in Akashi Bay,
like the yearning for my wife
that has flared from me.[13]

見渡せば明石
の浦にたける
火の秀<ほ>にぞ
出でぬる妹に
恋ふらく

Many of the poems contain hints of the political issues of the Asuka period. For example, the first poem in the anthology is attributed to the late fifth-century Yamato king, Yûryaku 雄略. Though more likely of later vintage, it has the king declaring all of Yamato to be his rightful domain:

Girl with your basket,

[13] Quoted in Ian Hideo Levy, *The Ten Thousand Leaves: A Translation of the* Man'yôshû, *Japan's Premier Anthology of Classical Poetry, Volume One* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 183.

籠<こ>もよ、み籠持ち、ふくしもよ、ふぶくし持ち、この丘<おか>に、菜摘ます児<こ>、家聞かな、名告<の>らせね、そらみつ、やまとの国は、おしなべて、吾こそをれ、しきなべて、吾こそませ、我こそは、告らめ、家をも名をも

with your pretty basket,
with your shovel,
with your pretty shovel,
gathering shoots on the hillside here,
I want to ask your home,
Tell me your name!
This land of Yamato,
seen by the gods on high—
it is all my realm,
in all of it I am supreme,
I will tell you
my home and my name.[14]

Again we see concern with legitimizing the rule of the imperial family.

Behind-the-scenes **struggles for power between two groups**, the Fujiwara family and the Imperial family, characterized political life at the Nara court. Recall that the Fujiwara were the former Nakatomi clan. **The Fujiwara** therefore enjoyed high prestige because of Nakatomi-no-Kamatari's instrumental role on the coup that destroyed Soga power. Fujiwara prestige in Nara was second only to that of the imperial family itself. As we shall see, conflict between these two powerful elite families continued into the Heian period.

In all of Chinese history, only one woman, Empress Wu, ever sat on the imperial throne. In pre-Heian Japan, female sovereigns were common. Politics in the Nara period in particular, were dominated by a succession of **strong female sovereigns**. The box below shows the emperors of the Nara period and the dates of their reigns. Those appearing in bold were women, all of whom were powerful rulers (among the men, Shômu and Kanmu were also quite powerful). Kôken and Shôtoku were *the same person* who reigned on two different occasions, each under a different name.

Genmei opposed the interests of the Fujiwara family, appointing imperial princes to as many high government posts as possible. She gave high priority to the compilation of historical records, and it was under her reign that *Records of Ancient Matters* was completed. She also ordered each of the provincial governments to compile records about local geographical conditions and customs. These records became a series of local gazetteers (*fudoki* 風土記), which today comprise the only information we have on ordinary life in ancient Japan. Probably owing to Fujiwara pressure, Genmei appointed Shômu, who had pro-Fujiwara leanings, as crown prince. She did not favor his becoming emperor, however, and used her power to block his enthronement in favor of

[14] Quoted in Ibid., p. 37.

her own daughter Genshô. It was not until three years after Genmei's death that Shômu was able to ascend the throne.[15]

Genmei 元明 (r. 707-715)
Genshô 元正 (r. 715-724)
Shômu 聖武 (r. 724-749)
Kôken 孝謙 (r. 749-758)
Junnin 淳仁 (r. 758-764)
Shôtoku 称徳 (r. 764-770)
Kônin 光仁 (r. 770-781)
Kanmu 桓武 (r. 781-806)

Genshô continued her mother's policy of appointing imperial princes, not members of the Fujiwara family, to high offices. She stepped down in 724, and her nephew Shômu took the throne. Emperor Shômu's principal wife, Empress (here meaning wife of the emperor) Kômyô 光明, was a daughter of the head of the Fujiwara family. She tried to use her influence to help Shômu reverse the policy of his predecessors and appoint Fujiwara family members to top offices within the government. Shômu and Kômyô encountered strong resistance, however, from retired Empress (here meaning the actual sovereign) Genshô. It was not until Genshô's death in 748 that Fujiwara aristocrats began a rapid rise through the ranks of government.

Shômu appointed his daughter Kôken as his successor, and in 749 retired from office to devote his life to Buddhism. On the throne, Kôken continued the pro-Fujiwara policies of her parents. Kôken was a particularly strong-willed ruler, and there is good evidence that she explicitly modeled her administration after that of Empress Wu of China. For example, Kôken created a powerful government office outside of the regular bureaucratic structure and staffed it with her supporters. The name of this office was similar to the same office Empress Wu set up to administer state affairs. More significantly, four-character era names (年号) appeared in China only during Empress Wu's reign. Similarly, all Japanese era names consisted of two characters, except the five names under Kôken/Shôtoku, which all consisted of four.[16] Era names were a matter of the utmost symbolic importance in Japan and throughout East Asia, and the use of four-character names in Japan could not have been a coincidence. Kôken's use of such names, therefore, was a public signal that she intended to rule with a strong hand.

Kôken, an avid supporter of Buddhism, supervised the completion of the giant statue of Rushana Buddha at Tôdaiji. She had additional Buddhist icons and copies of scripture produced and distributed to the network of branch temples in the provinces. Shômu, living in retirement, selected his daughter Kôken's successor. The strong-willed daughter, however, disregarded Shômu's choice. Shômu died in 756, and two years later Kôken retired, placing her choice for heir, Junnin, on the throne. The relationship between Junnin and Kôken soon became strained, as the new emperor refused to heed the behind-the scenes directives of the retired Kôken. The conflict became serious, and in 764 Kôken deposed Junnin by military force. That same year, she ascended the throne for the second time, taking the name Shôtoku (not to be confused with Prince Shôtoku).

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[15] Note that the end of an emperor's reign did not necessarily mean that he or she had died. In the Nara, Heian and early Kamakura periods in particular it was common for emperors to retire from office. Some of these retired emperors wielded considerable political power.
[16] Brown, ed., *Cambridge History*, pp. 260, 261.

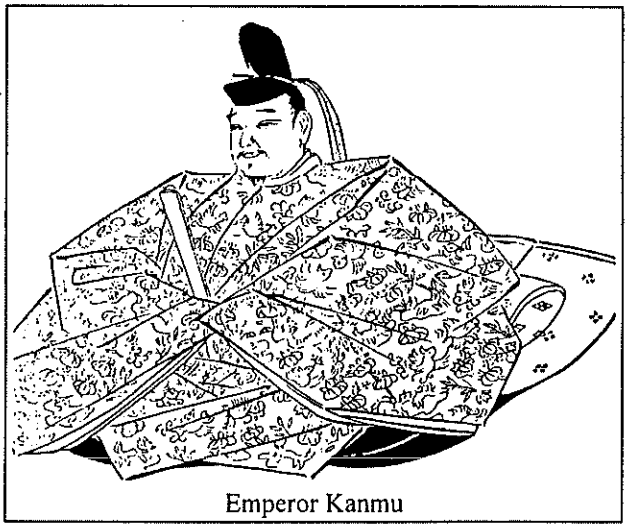

Dôkyô

While still in her first reign, Kôken/Shôtoku came under the influence of a handsome Buddhist Monk and physician, Dôkyô 道鏡, who cured her of a serious illness. As Shôtoku, she appointed Dôkyô, a commoner by birth, to ever higher offices. Shôtoku and Dôkyô began spending much time together, ostensibly to discuss Buddhism and affairs of state. Rumors at court, however, made the two out to be lovers, a relationship that would have been improper for a number of reasons. As Dôkyô entered the highest offices of government owing to Shôtoku's personal support, her government began to give favorable economic treatment to Buddhist temples, allowing them to circumvent certain restrictions on the amount of land they could hold. Not surprisingly, such policies led to grumbling and criticism within the ranks of the aristocracy.

Things came to a head in 769, when the chief priest of a major shrine in Kyûshû (we examine shrines, as opposed to temples, in the next chapter) claimed that the deity of that shrine declared that Dôkyô should be the next emperor. Many suspected, of course, that Dôkyô had arranged for the chief priest to announce this remarkable and convenient oracle. Even Shôtoku was suspicious, and she sent her own envoy to the shrine to investigate. The envoy returned with an updated message from the deity, this time stating that Dôkyô should *not* become emperor. Shôtoku died the next year in 770, and the new administration removed Dôkyô from all his offices and exiled him to a remote province.

The near succession of a monk of commoner origins to the throne generated a counter-reaction within the imperial family and the capital aristocracy. Owing to the Dôkyô affair, a consensus developed that only men should occupy the throne as emperors, the troubles of Shôtoku's reign apparently having been blamed on the fact of her being female.

Factionalism in government intensified during Shôtoku's reign, which, along with the increased power of the Buddhist clergy, seriously eroded imperial power. The strong-willed emperor Kanmu became so concerned with escaping from the political interference of the Buddhist clergy that he decided to move the capital to get away from the Buddhist monasteries. His court left Nara in 784 and after ten years settled into a new permanent capital, Heian-kyô 平安京 (later Kyôto). Thus began the Heian period, during which time Japan's classical culture reached its zenith.


Emperor Kanmu

Before examining the Heian period, we must briefly consider the **question of Chinese influence on Japan** during the Nara period. There is no doubt that at this time, Japan received a heavy dose of Chinese cultural influence. Japanese Buddhist students and monks, who often went to China for study, served as the main agents of cultural transfer. Chinese cultural influence was particularly strong in the following areas: Buddhism, writing and literature, music, medicine and painting. There was also sig-

nificant but limited influence in the following areas: science and technology, architecture, government, popular beliefs and superstitions. There was little or no Chinese influence with respect to: Confucianism (most aristocrats had some exposure to Confucian books, but the philosophy was nowhere near as important in Japan as it was in China), civil service examinations, most clothing styles, most forms of drama, family and social organization, military affairs, and most aspects of the lives of ordinary people.

It was *not* the case, in other words, that the Japanese aristocracy, set out to make their country into a small replica of China. There is no doubt that Chinese cultural influence was important, but some historians have exaggerated this importance owing in part to a persistent, inaccurate stereotype about Japan: that it is and always has been a country of imitators. In more recent times, the claim has been that Japan has been in the process of transforming itself into a small-scale replica of "the West" (whatever that is), an equally misleading assertion.

How, therefore, should we view cultural borrowing by Japan? Perhaps the "**rational shopper**" model is best. The following description of this model by John Hunter Boyle refers to Japan in the late 19th century, but it also applies with complete accuracy to Japan of the Nara period:

> [Japanese travelers abroad during the late 19th century] paid attention to signal achievements of the various countries they visited: centralized banking establishment in Belgium, naval engineering in Britain, the police system in France, public schools in Boston, silk-reeling technology in Switzerland, and military service in Bismarck's new German state. Upon returning to Japan, then, the new oligarchy carefully applied to Japan the national model, or elements from various national models, they felt best in each endeavor. In describing Japan's image as a borrower of Western culture and technology, some social scientists have used the phrase 'rational shopper' to suggest that the Meiji leadership [or the Nara leadership] did not merely borrow but borrowed *selectively.* It examined numerous models from many 'advanced' countries [Korea and China in the Nara period] and after much 'painstaking comparative shopping' selected what would best suit Japan. The 'rational' emphasizes that the process was complex, involving extensive trial and error, shifting of models (in education, for example, from France at first, to the United States, and later to Germany). The word 'rational' also emphasizes the fact that the borrowing also involved extensive adaptation to ensure that the transplanted model fit in with the special conditions or needs of Japan.[17]

The structure of the Nara government, for example, while probably inspired by Chinese models in a general way, looked unlike any government that had existed in China, the Council of *Kami* Affairs being an excellent example of a uniquely Japanese institution.

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[17] John Hunter Boyle, *Modern Japan: The American Nexus* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1993), p. 93.

CHAPTER THREE

A POLITICALLY (IN)CORRECT INTERPRETATION OF ANCIENT JAPAN, A VERY PRESENT PAST

This unusual chapter addresses issues of nationalism and historical interpretation relevant to modern and contemporary Japan. Its overall purpose, like Chapter Nine in *Topics in Chinese History,* is to examine the **political implications of historical narratives**. We begin with an examination of native religion in ancient Japan, followed by selections from early Japanese mythology. It is important to read the early mythology *in a critical fashion,* drawing on your knowledge of nationalism from earlier in the course (for those in HIST 104). This critical reading is preparation for examining some of the modern controversies surrounding Japan's ancient past. As we examine these controversies, you should pay particularly close attention to the vocabulary and rhetoric of nationalism. Toward the end of the final section, we examine a letter from a professor in Japan criticizing this chapter's interpretation of ancient Japanese religion.

RELIGION IN ANCIENT JAPAN

In ancient times, religion was perhaps the most important aspect of life at all levels of Japanese society, from local villages to imperial court. In this section, we first look at native religious traditions in the Japanese islands prior to the coming of Buddhism and then look more closely at early forms of Japanese Buddhism and how Buddhism merged with native religious traditions. In terms of time, our coverage ranges from the tomb period (4th century) to the end of the Nara period (8th century).

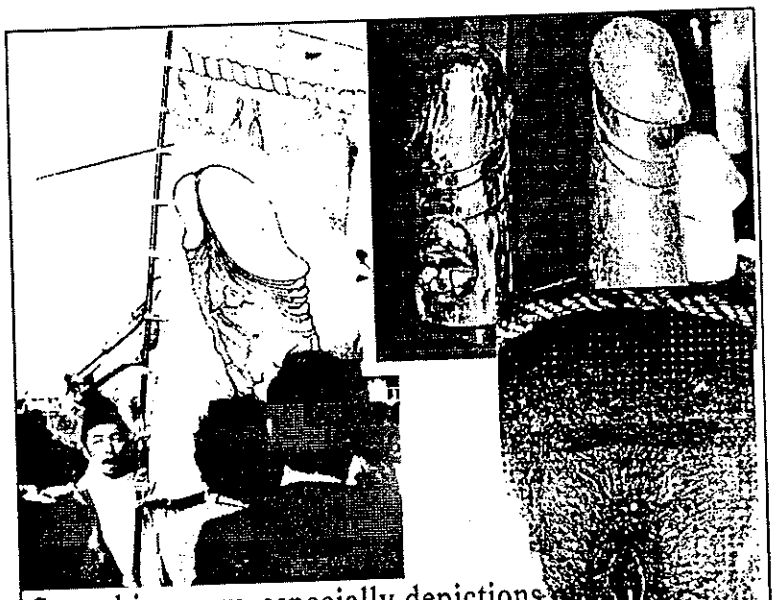
It cannot be overemphasized that our knowledge of Japanese religious practices prior to the coming of Buddhism is extremely limited. Because it was Buddhism that produced written religious materials, all existing accounts of native religious activities reflect at least some Buddhist influence. Furthermore, as early as the Nara period, Buddhism and native religious traditions began to merge. By the Heian period, it became virtually impossible to separate native religious practices from those of Buddhism.

The details of native religious practices varied from one part of the Japanese islands to another. One concept common to nearly all such practices was that of ***kami*** 神. The word *kami* is often translated as "spirit," "nature spirit," "god" or "deity," but there is no precise equivalent in English. The word *kami* 上 also means "above" in premodern and modern Japanese, and it is likely that the *kami* meaning "deity" and *kami* meaning

"above" were once a single term. Combining these two meanings, ancient *kami* were things that stood out to the people of ancient Japan as distinctive in a superior fashion. They stood out as being better than other examples of items in the same category. Pine trees were quite common in ancient Japan, as they are today, but a particularly large pine tree, or one with distinctive beauty or a peculiar shape, might be designated a *kami.* Ancient Japanese designated other distinctive, beautiful, or powerful features of the natural world as *kami.* Human beings were also eligible for *kami* status. A person with an unusual talent for singing and poetry, for example, might come to be regarded as a *kami* of verse after his death. Those wanting to become proficient at this art might offer prayers to this deceased bard, now a *kami,* for that purpose. As in most animistic religions, the world of the *kami* and the world of humans were not regarded as two completely separate places. There was substantial overlap. *Kami,* in other words, were part of the daily life of humans in ancient Japan.

How would one have offered prayers to *kami* in ancient times? Although there is a general format for praying at shrines today, we cannot be sure how such things were done in the remote past. There would have been a designated place for the *kami.* In the case of a rock, tree, waterfall, etcetera, the object itself would have been the site of worship. If it were small enough, the *kami*-object might be encircled with a simple enclosure or fence. In the case of a person, a simple wooden structure might be constructed to house his or her spirit. In many cases, these simple **shrines** 神社 gradually became the focal point for local community activities and festivals.

The arrival of Buddhism in the Japanese islands resulted in the construction of elaborate Buddhist **temples** 寺. These elaborate temples influenced shrine construction, which also became more elaborate. As is customary, we use the word "shrine" to designate a structure associated mainly with native religious traditions and "temple" to designate a structure associated mainly with Buddhism. In practice, however, the two were not always distinct. Buddhist temple compounds in Japan often contained shrines within them. In such cases, the *kami* of the shrines were thought to be protectors of the Buddhist temple. Although Buddhism was controversial when the Soga first began worshiping the image sent by the king of Paekche, the sense of conflict between native *kami* and Buddhism faded rather quickly, never to return until the days of Japan's nation building process starting in the 1860s.



Sexual imagery, especially depictions of male and female organs, is still an important part of Japanese folk religion.

Agriculture was the foundation of all economic activity in Ja-

Male and female agricultural deities are carved into the face of this phallus-like stone.

pan until the start of this century. The most important *kami,* therefore, were those associated with agriculture. In many localities during the Tomb period and later, villagers worshiped a pair of *kami,* one male and the other female. The thinking was that the fertility of these *kami* was closely connected with the fertility of the land and that such worship would help ensure a bountiful harvest. Sexual imagery in the form of depictions of male and female organs, often carved out of stone, was common in such worship. This imagery is still seen in numerous local festivals, although with the diminished importance of agriculture, religious depictions of sexual organs today are often regarded as aids for couples trying to conceive.

The leaders of locally powerful clans worshiped these agricultural deities since the livelihood of everyone in the area depended on good harvests. In time, many of these clans (*uji*) came to regard these agricultural deities as their ancestral founders. Local agricultural deities, in other words, became the ***ujigami*** (*uji*-founding *kami*) of the major local clans. As the confederation of clans in the Yamato area extended its hegemony over the other *uji* and peoples of the Japanese islands, their *ujigami* became more widely known. Of particular importance, of course, was the Yamato royal family, whose *ujigami* was **Amaterasu** 天照, a female solar deity (sometimes called the "sun goddess"). Worship of Amaterasu was an important duty of the Yamato king, who was as much a religious leader as he was a secular leader.[1] After the Taika Reforms of 645, Amaterasu became a *kami* of great importance for all of Japan.

Moving a few centuries back in time to the early tomb period, religious life seems to have been **dominated by women** with special spiritual powers. These women functioned as shamans and were often political leaders as well. Female leadership in religious and political life was common throughout many parts of East Asia prior to the spread of Confucianism and Buddhism. In Ryūkyū, for example, female shamans (*noro* 巫女 in Japanese; *nuru* in Okinawan) played a major role in local religious and political life until this century. The head priestess of Ryūkyū (Kikoe-Ōgimi 聞得大君) was nearly as

[1]Although today we typically make a clear distinction between religious authority and secular authority, it would not be appropriate to make this distinction in the case of ancient Japan. The term for "governing" or "government" at the time was *matsurigoto* 祭事, which means "performance of religious rites." Secular and religious authority were closely interrelated in ancient Japan.

powerful as the king until the seventeenth century. In Japan, by the time of the Taika Reforms, female shamans no longer played a role in the official state religious ceremonies. A few centuries earlier, however, female shamans sometimes served as leaders of the Yamato Kingdom.

The most famous such ruler was **Queen Pimiko** 卑彌呼 (also pronounced Himiko or Himeko), the ruler of the country of Yamatai 邪馬台国 in the Japanese islands around the beginning of the third century. According to Chinese records, the country of Yamatai:

> formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the people agreed upon a woman for their ruler. Her name was Pimiko. She occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people. Though mature in age, she remained unmarried. She had a younger brother that assisted her in ruling the country. After she became the ruler, there were few who saw her. She had one thousand women as attendants, but only one man. He served her food and drink and acted as a medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockades, with armed guards in a state of constant vigilance.[2]

Most Japanese scholars think that Yamatai was located either in northern Kyūshū or in the Yamato region of Honshū. Notice, at least in this account, the close connection between religious power and political power. Notice also the additional evidence of widespread warfare in the Japanese islands in ancient times (refer back to Chapter Two for more on this point).

As we have seen, the appeal of Buddhism to Japanese in the sixth century was as a superior, more powerful form of magic than native shamanism. As Buddhism spread during the Asuka period and later, it permanently altered native religious traditions. Under Buddhist influence, for example, women no longer played a major role in religious life (at least in the major urban areas–the situation in the countryside may have been different), even in native religious rites at shrines. Buddhism also began to absorb elements of Japan's native religions into itself. Native *kami,* for example became protectors of Buddhist temples in their area, and many Buddhist temples contained shrines to these *kami* within their compounds. It was only after Buddhism became established that scribes recorded native Japanese prayers and religious practices. Documents purporting to describe Japan's native religious practices *before* the coming of Buddhism were actually written *after* the coming of Buddhism. We cannot be sure, therefore, which elements in these documents were purely Japanese and which were Buddhist. Many were undoubtedly a mixture of the two religious traditions.

By the Nara period, the process of combining native Japanese forms of religion with Buddhism was well underway. The idea developed that Japanese *kami* were **local manifestations** (*suijaku* 垂跡, *gongen* 權現, or *keshin* 化身) of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. In such a relationship, the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas were known as *honji* 本地, or "original ground." All major Japanese *kami* became formally linked with Buddhist counterparts. For example, the great solar Buddha, Vairocana 大日, became linked with the Japanese solar deity Amaterasu (see illustration below). Specifically, Amaterasu came to be re-

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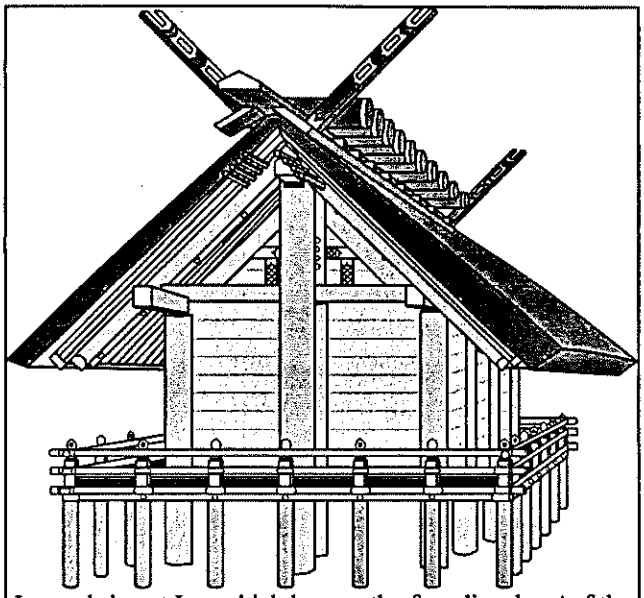
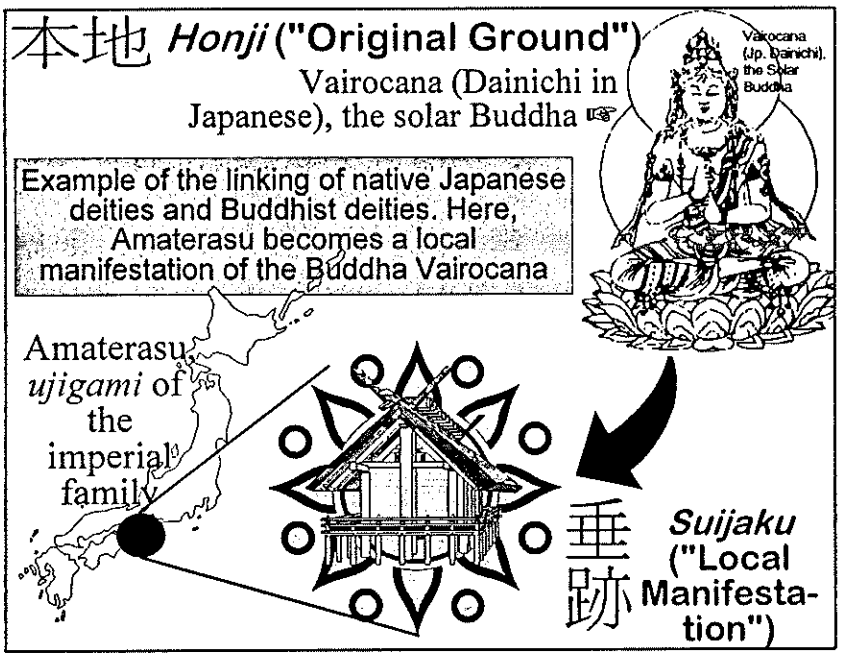
[2]Quoted in Tsunoda, De Bary, and Keene, *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* vol. 1, pp. 5-6.

garded as the local Japanese manifestation of the solar Buddha. In this way, Buddhism absorbed native Japanese religion, and the two became thoroughly interconnected. Many books call Japan's ancient native religions "Shintō" 神道, but this term is so problematic that we do not use it in this chapter. We examine "Shintō" in the creation of this religion in modern times in HIST 416, Modern Japan.

We have seen that religion was a major part of the politics and symbolism of imperial rule following the Taika Reforms. The religion of the emperor and his or her court was a mixture of Buddhist and native elements. A large portion of the emperor's time and energy was taken up with religious rites. As the political power of the emperors grew after 645, what was once the religion of one particular *uji* (albeit a particularly prominent one) gradually became the official religion of the new Japanese state. The emperors established a large shrine at Ise 伊勢, in the Yamato area, to house the spirit of Amaterasu. This shrine became an important symbol of the imperial family. In modern times, it became an important symbol of Japan as a nation. Traditionally, the shrine buildings were torn down and rebuilt every twenty years. The following is the text of an official "grain-petitioning" prayer said during the second month at the Ise shrine:



Inner shrine at Ise, which houses the founding *kami* of the imperial line, Amaterasu. The Building is an excellent example of the oldest known style of Japanese architecture.



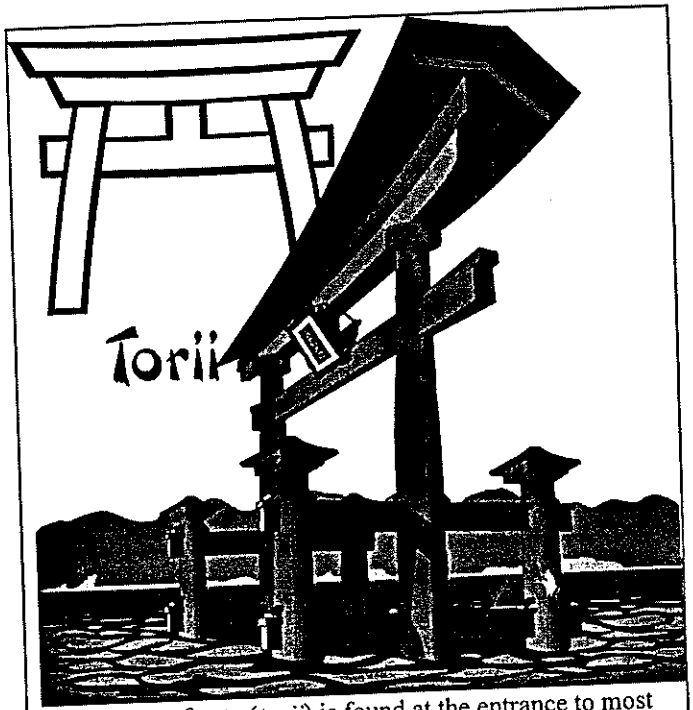
> By the solemn command of the Emperor,
> I humbly speak before you,
> Great Sovereign Deity, whose praises are fulfilled

In the bed-rock below
On the upper reaches of the Isuzu river
At Uji in Watarai:
I humbly speak this solemn command
To bring and present the great offerings
Habitually presented at the Grain-petitioning of the Second month.[3]

Notice the importance of agriculture as reflected in this ancient prayer. Notice also that the increasingly "national" scope of the religious rites of the imperial family to different parts of Japan went hand-in-hand with the spread of the **political power** of the imperial family. We see in a later section that some modern-day nationalists in Japan would have us believe otherwise.

JAPAN'S EARLIEST LITERATURE

An important part of the consolidation of imperial power in the Taika Reform process was the creation of an official, written account of Japan's past. This creation took place in the early and mid eighth century. The imperial court commissioned the writing of two official histories: ***Chronicles of Japan*** (***Nihongi*** 日本紀 or *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀), written in classical Chinese, and ***Record of Ancient Matters*** (***Kojiki*** 古事記), much of which was written in Japanese (using Chinese characters as a cumbersome alphabet). The two histories generally cover roughly the same ground, and their content is similar. Naturally, this official account of Japan's past (first sponsored by Emperor Tenmu) presented the divine ancestors of the imperial family in such a way as to justify their present rule as emperors.



This type of gate (*torii*) is found at the entrance to most Japanese shrines.

At this point, we should pause and read the account of the creation of Japan and its rulers as presented in *Chronicles of Japan*. The original text is quite convoluted, but fortunately Robert Borgan and Marian Ury have provided a streamlined, edited version appropriately called "Readable Japanese Mythology: Selections from *Nihon shoki*

[3]Adapted from Donald L. Philippi, trans., *Norito: A Translation of the Ancient Japanese Ritual Prayers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 57.

and *Kojiki*."[4] What follows is a portion of the Borgan and Ury edition. Read it with care and be particularly alert to the text's function in legitimizing the rule of the imperial family (as opposed to other *uji*). The account contains fantastic tales. Try to translate these fantastic tales into real-world political struggle. Pay particularly close attention to the deeds of **Izanami** and **Izanagi**, Amaterasu, **Susanowo,** and **Yamato-takeru**. We begin with Book 1 of *Chronicles of Japan*:

Nihongi, Book I

Of old, when Heaven and Earth were not yet separated, the Yin and Yang not yet divided, there was a mass, chaotic like the inside of an egg. Its spirit was faint, but it contained many embryos. The purer, clearer part was thinly drawn out, and formed Heaven; the heavier, grosser elements settled down and became Earth. The finer elements easily formed a united body, but the consolidation of the heavy, gross elements was difficult. Heaven therefore was formed first, and Earth, later. Thereafter divine beings were produced between them. Hence it is said that at the beginning of creation, earthly land floated about like a fish sporting on the surface of the water.

At this time a thing shaped like a reed-shoot was produced between Heaven and earth. It was transformed into a deity called Tokotachi, who was followed by Satsuchi and then Toyokumunu, in all three deities. These were pure males spontaneously developed by the operation of the principle of Heaven.

[Six alternate versions omitted]

The next deities produced were Uijini and Suijini. The next were Ōtonoji and Ōtomabe. The next deities were Omodaru and Kashikone. The next deities were Izanagi and Izanami.

[Two alternate versions omitted]

In all, these make eight deities. Being formed by the interaction of the Heavenly and Earthly principles, they were male and female. From Tokotachi to Izanagi and Izanami are called the Seven Generations of the Age of the Gods.

[Alternate version omitted]

Izanagi and Izanami, standing on the Floating Bridge of Heaven, conferred together, saying, "Is there no country beneath?" Then they thrust down the heavenly jeweled spear, and, groping about, found the vast ocean. The brine which dripped from the point of the spear coagulated and became an island, which was named Onogoro. The two deities then descended and dwelt on this island. Since they wished to become husband and wife and produce countries, they made Onogoro the Pillar of the Center of the Land.

They parted and went round the pillar

[4] *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese*, vol. 24, no. 1 (April, 1990), pp. 61-97. Borgan and Ury state, "No permission is needed to copy these selections for classroom use" (p. 63).

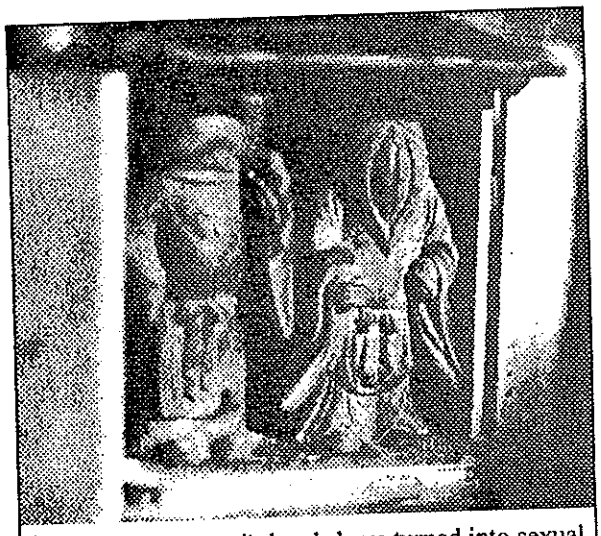
Izanagi & Izanami thrusting the heavenly jeweled spear dripping with brine.

of the land separately, the male deity turning left and the female right. When they met together on one side, the female deity spoke first and said, "How delightful! I have met a lovely youth." The male deity, displeased, responded, "I am a man and by right should have spoken first. Why did you, a woman, speak first, reversing the order? That was unlucky. Let us go round again." Then the two deities went back, and having met again, this time the male deity spoke first and said, "How delightful! I have met a lovely maiden." Then he asked her, "How is your body formed?" She answered, "My body has a place which is the source of femininity." The male deity said, "My body has a place which is the source of masculinity. I wish to unite this source-place of my body to the source-place of your body." Thereupon male and female first became united as husband and wife.

When the time of birth arrived, first the island of Awaji was reckoned as the placenta. Because they did not like it, it was named "Awaji" [i.e. "unsatisfactory"]. Next produced was Great Yamato, the islands of Rich Harvests . . . Next they produced the island of Iyo [the modern Shikoku] and next the island of Tsukushi [the modern Kyushu]. Next the islands of Oki and Sado were born as twins. The twin births which sometimes occur among people mimic this. Next was born the island of Ōshima, then the island of Kibi no Ko. Hence arose the name Land of the Eight Great Islands. Then the islands of Tsushima and Iki, along with the scattered small islands, were produced by the coagulation of the foam of the salt water, or, some say, by the coagulation of the fresh water.

[Ten alternate versions omitted].

They next produced the sea, then the rivers, and the mountains. Next they produced Kukunochi, the ancestor of the trees, and next Kayano, the ancestor of grasses. After this Izanagi and Izanami said to each other, "We have now produced the land of the Eight Great Islands, along with the mountains, rivers, grasses, and trees. Why should we not produce someone who shall be lord of all under heaven? Then, together they produced the Sun Goddess, who was called . . . Amaterasu [Heaven Shining Deity].



Izanagi and Izanami's heads have turned into sexual organs in this small household shrine.

This child's brilliant color illuminated all directions. Therefore the two deities rejoiced, saying, "We have had many children, but none equals this wondrous infant. She should not be kept long in this land. Instead, we ought to send her at once to Heaven and entrust its affairs to her." At this time, Heaven and Earth were not yet far apart, and

Japan's ancient chronicles and the mythical tales they contain have been a source of inspiration for modern artists. Above is part of a prize-winning watercolor by Aoki Shigeru (1903) depicting Izanagi fleeing from the world of the dead, which he had entered to visit Izanami after she died.

therefore they sent her up to Heaven by the heavenly ladder.

They then produced the Moon God, whose radiance was next to that of the sun in splendor. This deity was to be the consort of the Sun Goddess and to share in her government. They therefore sent him also to Heaven. Next they produced the leech child, who, even at the age of three years, could not stand upright, and so they placed him in the rock-camphor-wood boat of Heaven and abandoned him to the winds.

Their next child was Susanowo. This deity had a fierce temper and was given to cruel acts. Moreover he made a practice of continually weeping and wailing. He brought an untimely end to many people of the land and caused green mountains to wither. Therefore the two deities, his parents, said to him, "Because you are exceedingly wicked, it is not proper for you to reign over the world. You must depart to the distant Underworld." Finally they expelled him.

[Eleven alternate versions omitted]

Susanowo then requested, "Before I obey your instructions and proceed to the Underworld, I first wish to visit the Plain of High heaven and meet my elder sister. After that I will go away forever." Permission was granted and so he ascended to Heaven. Then Izanagi, his divine task accomplished and his spirit deteriorating, built himself a hidden palace on the island of Awaji, where he dwelt forever in silence and concealment. Or, some would say, his task completed and his power great, Izanagi then ascended to Heaven, reported his mission, and remained in the Smaller Palace of the Sun.

At first when Susanowo went up to Heaven, because of the fierceness of his divine nature, the sea roared and the hills and mountains groaned aloud. Amaterasu, knowing the violence and wickedness of this deity, was startled, and changed countenance when she heard his manner of coming. She said to herself, "How could my younger brother be coming with good intentions? I think his purpose must be to rob me of my kingdom. Our parents allotted each of us his own territory. Why does he reject the kingdom to which he should proceed and brazenly come spying here?

She bound up her hair in knots [i.e. in male fashion] and tied up her skirt into the form of trousers. Then she took a string of five hundred eight-foot-long jewels, which she entwined around

her hair and wrists. Moreover, on her back she slung a thousand arrow quiver and a five hundred arrow quiver. On her lower arm she fastened a mighty and high-sounding elbow-pad [to protect her arm against the recoil of the bow string and also to produce a terrifying sound when struck by the string]. Brandishing the end of her bow, she firmly grasped her sword-hilt. She stamped on the hard earth of the courtyard, sinking her thighs into it, and kicked it about as if it were rotten snow. Having thus displayed her fierce manly valor, she uttered a mighty cry of defiance and challenged him directly.

Susanowo responded, "Although my heart has never been black, in obedience to the strict command of our parents, I am about to proceed forever to the Underworld. How could I bear to depart without seeing you, my elder sister, face to face? This is why I have come here from afar, traversing on foot the clouds and mists. I did not expect that you, my sister, would greet me with such ferocity." Then Amaterasu asked him, "If this is so, how will you prove your sincerity?" He answered, "Let us swear an oath together. In making this oath, we shall surely produce children. If the children that I produce are females, then you will know that I have an impure heart. But if they are males, they will prove my heart is pure."

Upon this Amaterasu asked for Susanowo's ten-span sword, which she broke into three pieces and rinsed in the True Well of Heaven. Then she crunched them in her teeth and blew them away, and from the mist of her breath deities were born. The first was named Takori, the next Tagitsu, and the next Itsukishima, three daughters in all.

After this Susanowo begged from Susanowo the string of five hundred jewels that was entwined in her hair and round her wrists. He rinsed it in the True Well of Heaven. Then, he crunched the jewels in his teeth and blew them away, and from the mist of his breath deities were born. The first was called Oshihomimi, and the next Amanohohi (the ancestors of the Izumo and Haji clans). The next was Amatsuhikone (the ancestor of the Ōshikōchi and the Yamashiro clans). The next was Ikutsuhikone and the next Kusubi, in all five males.

Then Amaterasu said, Their seed originally was the necklace of five hundred jewels which was mine. Therefore these five male deities are all my children." So she took these children and raised them. Then she said, "The ten-span sword belonged to you. Therefore these three female deities are all your children." She granted them to Susanowo. These are the deities who are worshiped by the Munakata clan of Kyushu.

[Three alternate versions omitted]

After this, Susanowo's behavior was exceedingly rude. In what way? Amaterasu had taken as her own the narrow rice paddies and the long rice paddies of heaven. When the seed was sown in spring, Susanowo broke down the divisions between the plots of rice, and in autumn let loose a heavenly piebald colt, and made it lie down in the middle of the rice paddies. Again, when he saw that Amaterasu was about to celebrate the feast of the first fruits, he secretly voided excrement in the Ritual Palace. Moreover, when he saw that Amaterasu was weaving holy garments in her sacred weaving hall, he skinned a heavenly piebald colt, and, breaking a hole in the roof-tiles of the hall, flung it in. Amaterasu was startled and wounded herself with the shuttle. Indignant, she immediately entered the Rock Cave of Heaven, closed the rock door, and secluded herself there. Thus, constant darkness prevailed everywhere, and the alternation of night and day was unknown.

The eighty myriads of deities then met on the bank of the Tranquil River of Heaven and considered how they might placate her. Omoikane, after much deep thought, gathered long-singing

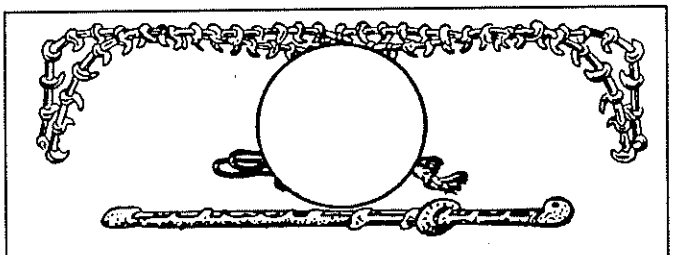
Uzume starting her dance

birds [i.e. roosters] of the Eternal Land and made them utter their prolonged cry to one another. Moreover, he made Tachikara stand beside the rock door. Then Koyane, ancestor of the Nakatomi [Fujiwara] clan, and Futotama, ancestor of the Imbe clan, dug up a five hundred-branched true *sakaki* tree of the heavenly Mount Kagu. On its upper branches they hung a string of five hundred eighty-foot-long jewels. On the middle branches they hung a mirror eight hands across. On its lower branches they hung offerings of blue and white cloth. Then they recited a liturgy together. Moreover, Uzume, ancestors of the Sarume clan, took in her hand a spear wreathed with eulalia grass and, standing before the door of the Rock Cave of heaven, danced skillfully. She also made a headdress of the true sakaki tree of the heavenly Mount Kagu and shoulder straps of club-moss. She kindled fires, turned a tub upside down, and gave forth a divinely inspired shout.

Amaterasu heard this and said, "Since I have shut myself up in the Rock Cave, surely the Central land of Reed Plains ought to be experiencing continual night. How then can Uzume enjoy herself so?" She opened the rock door a crack and peeped out. Then Tachikara instantly grabbed Amaterasu's hand and led her out. Koyane and Futotama at once made a boundary with rope and begged her not to return to the cave. After this, all the deities blamed Susanowo and punished him with a fine of one thousand tables of offerings. They also had his hair plucked out and made him therewith expiate his guilt. Or, some say, they made him expiate it by pulling out the nails of his hands and feet.

[Three alternate versions omitted]

Susanowo then descended from Heaven and proceeded to the headwaters of the River Hi in the province of Izumo. There he heard the sound of weeping and went in search of it. He found an old man and an old woman. Between them was a young girl whom they were caressing and lamenting over. Susanowo asked them, "Who are you, and why do you lament?" The man answered, "I am an earthly deity named Ashinazuchi. My wife's name is Tenazuchi. This girl is our daughter Kushinada. We weep because once we had eight daughters, but year after year an eight-forked serpent has been devouring them and now the time approaches for this last girl to be devoured. She has no means of escape, and thus we grieve." Susanowo said, "If this is so, will you give me your daughter?" He answered, "I will comply and present her to you."


The mirror, jewels, and the "Grass Mower" sword comprise the traditional three imperial regalia.

Susanowo then changed Kushinada into a multitudinous and close-toothed comb, which he stuck in the knot of his hair. Next he had Ashinazuchi and Tenazuchi brew some eight-fold refined

Aoki Shigeru, *Prince Ōanamuchi no Mikoto,* 1905. Ōanamuchi was Susanowo's son, and the scene here depicts a tale from later portions of the ancient chronicles. Modern Japanese artists often drew on ancient material as themes for their work.

liquor and make eight platforms, on each of which to set a tub filled with liquor. Thus he awaited the serpent's coming, and, as expected, it eventually appeared. It had eight heads and eight tails, its eyes were red like winter cherries, and on its back fir and cryptomeria trees grew. As it crawled it ex tended over a space of eight hills and eight valleys. When it came and found the liquor, each head drank up one tub, and it became drunk and fell asleep. Then Susanowo drew his ten-span sword and chopped the serpent into small pieces. When he came to the tail, the edge of his sword was slightly nicked, so he split open the tail and examined it. Inside was a sword. this is the sword that is called Kusanagi ["Grass Mower," one of the three imperial regalia]. Susanowo said, "This is a divine sword. How can I presume to keep it myself? So he gave it up to the heavenly deities.

After this he went in search of a place where he might celebrate his marriage, and at length came to Suga, in the province of Izumo. Then he said, "My heart is refreshed." (Accordingly that place is now called Suga [Refreshed].) There he built a palace.

(Another source states, "Now the fierce Susanowo composed a poem:

Eight clouds arise.
The eight-fold fence of Izumo
To dwell with my wife
I make an eight-fold fence;
Oh, that eight-fold fence.")

Thereupon they had intercourse together, and a child named Ōanamuchi was born. Susanowo then said, "The masters of my son's palace are Ashinazuchi and Tenazuchi. I therefore grant to these two deities the title of Inada Palace Master." Having done so, Susanowo at length proceeded to the Nether Land.

[Six alternate versions omitted].

♂♀ ♂♀ ♂♀

The *Nihongi* version that you have just read is somewhat less bawdy and crude than the *Kojiki* version. The former was written in classical Chinese, and to some extent reflects the influence of Chinese values and concepts. Identify some specific passages in which these Chinese values are evident.

Overall, however, early Japanese mythology differs considerably from the Chinese tales of the Sage Kings and culture heroes. Explain several of these differences. Is it possible to identify any fundamental Japanese values from the tales above, and if so

what are they?

Note that some deities are described as the founders of one or another clan (uji). Some of these deities[/clans] cause problems for Amaterasu[/Yamato royal clan], and others seem to be allied with her. Name several deities in each category.

Notice that after Susanowo was subdued and punished by the other deities, and his guilt expiated, he went to earth and became decent and helpful. Of what kind of events in the actual world of ancient Japan might this story be a reflection? In the same vein, what about Susanowo's giving the "Grass Mower" sword, a sword later identified as one of the three imperial regalia, up to the heavenly deities?

Kojiki, Book II

The Yamato Hero: The Story of Yamato-takeru, Son of Emperor Keikō

[Emperor Keikō (traditional dates 71-130 BC) dwelled in Hishiro Palace at Makimuku (in modern Nara Prefecture). By his various consorts and concubines he had eighty children; second and third among them were Prince Ō-usu ("Big Mortar") and his younger brother Prince O-usu ("Little Mortar").]

The Emperor said to O-usu, "Why does your elder brother not come to the morning and evening meals? Gently instruct him in his duty." Thus he commanded, but after five days Prince Ō-usu was still absent. Then the Emperor said to O-usu, "Why does your brother still stay away? Can you have failed to teach him his duty?" "I have already taught him," said O-usu. "Early in the morning, when he went to the privy, I lay in wait for him, caught him and crushed him; I tore his limbs off and wrapped them in matting and threw them away."

How Yamato-takeru Got His Name

The Emperor became alarmed at the ferocity of his son's disposition. He therefore said to him: "In the West [i.e. Kyushu] there are two heroes of the Kumaso, unsubmissive and disrespectful men. Go capture them!" At the time, O-usu's hair was still bound up at the brow [in the manner of a youth of 14 or 15]. His aunt Yamato-hime gave him her upper garment and her skirt, and with a saber hidden in his bosom he went forth.

When O-usu came to the dwelling of the Kumaso heroes, he saw that armed men were surrounding the houses three deep. A new building was being added to the encampment, and the people were talking about the feast they would have in celebration and preparing the food. He strolled about the neighborhood, awaiting the day of the feast. When the day came, he loosened his hair and ornamented it in the female fashion, and he put on his aunt's clothes. He looked just like a young girl. Mingling with the women, he went into the new building.

The two Kumaso heroes, who were brothers, took a fancy to the pretty maiden; they seated her between them, and all grew even merrier. When the feast drew near its height, O-usu took the saber from his bosom and, catching the older man by his collar, thrust the blade through his chest. The younger man ran out in terror. O-usu ran after him and caught him at the foot of the steps. Grabbing him by the skin of his back, the prince rammed the saber through his buttocks. The Kumaso said, "Do not move your sword; I have something to say to you." O-usu gave him a mo-

ment's respite, while continuing to hold him prostrate. "Who are you?" the man asked. "I am the son of him who rules the Land of the Eight Islands; my name is Prince Yamato-oguna. Hearing that you two Kumaso are unsubmissive and disrespectful, His majesty sent me to capture and slay you." "Truly spoken!" said the Kumaso hero. "In the West country there is one who has proved more heroic still. Therefore I shall offer you a name: from this time forward, be known as Prince Yamato-takeru [大和武], the Hero of Yamato." As soon as he had finished speaking, the prince split him up like a ripe melon. Henceforward, Prince O-usu was called Yamato-takeru no Miko ("Prince"). On his way back to the capital, he conquered and pacified mountain deities and river deities, and the deities of the straits as well.

The Prince Slays the Izumo Hero

Then he went to the land of Izumo. He wanted to kill the Izumo hero, so as soon as he arrived, he became friends with the man. he secretly made a false sword out of yew wood and girded it on. The two friends went together to the river Hi to bathe. Yamato-takeru came up from the river first and girded on the sword which the other had taken off. "Let us exchange swords," he said. When the Izumo man came up out of the river, he for his part girded on the false sword. "Come, let us joust," said Yamato-takeru. Each drew his sword, but Yamato-takeru cut him down. Thereupon, Yamato-takeru made this song:

"Alas that the sword of the Izumo hero,
Its sheath vine-wound,
Should have no true blade!"

Having thus subdued these unruly men, Yamato-takeru returned to the capital and made his report to the Emperor.

The story continues in like fashion with Yamato-takeru's conquering "savage deities and unsubmissive peoples" of the northern and eastern regions of Honshu, including the "Emishi," who were probably a group of Ainu. Recall that the Kumaso and the people of the Izumo region were major opponents of the Yamato confederation of clans. The emperor ended up sending Yamato-takeru on what amounted to a suicide mission. Yamato-takeru realized that the emperor wanted him to die but went ahead anyway. The eastern campaign became too much for him, and he did not survive it. It should not be too difficult to imagine real-life events that may be reflected in this tale of conquest by the prince of Yamato (and the prince's subsequent demise). Although it should be obvious by now, notice the extremely high level of conflict and violence in this early Japanese mythology. How does this "textual" violence and conflict compare with the late Yayoi, early tomb period archaeological record?

CONTROVERSIES ABOUT JAPAN'S ANCIENT PAST

Consider the following description of Japan and its past from a leading Japanese scholar of Japanese history. The section title of the book in which this description is found is titled, "Japan: A Very Strange Country:"

> Japan is a peculiar country . . . what is strange about Japan is not that this overpopulated, resource-poor Asian island country has managed to compete for a place as the world's second or third largest industrial power. The fair-tale aspect of this small island is to be found in its history. Despite its location hundreds of miles off the coast of China that boasts Asia's oldest and greatest culture, Japan has never been incorporated within that empire; it has consistently maintained its national independence, and it has by and large preserved its distinctive culture.

The author goes on to point out the many other great civilizations, Maya, Inca, Egyptian, and so forth, which, unlike Japanese civilization, are no longer around, concluding that "Japan seems a country of strange wonder, at once ancient and new. There is not another case like it in the history of the world."[5] Allegations of cultural uniqueness, a lack of forced foreign influence, and unbroken ancient cultural traditions still thriving in the present are examples of nationalist thinking. The term "nationalist" may conjure up images of aggressive, warlike right-wing patriots, but such an association is unfortunate. The author of this passage, for example, is a left-winger and staunch critic of Japan's modern emperor system. But he, like most thinking people in the modern world, is also a nationalist, who regards the nation as a obvious, "natural," common-sensical entity. He has furthermore bought into a common set of claims about Japan (especially cultural uniqueness) that many or most Japanese of various political persuasions would regard as obvious truths. Nationalism is not jingoism or extreme patriotism, although it can contribute to them. It is a way of imagining human communities that pervades the thinking of modern people.

Today, many in Japan and elsewhere, scholars and non-scholars alike, have strong feelings about what happened in the ancient past. Does this fact strike you as odd? After all, could events of the ancient past have a direct impact on today's world? It is **national thinking** that in large part accounts for the sometimes passionate interest in ancient history among many in Japan and elsewhere. In the United States, too, although there is no "ancient" past, interpretations of historical events often generate heated

REMEMBER

1. The main goal of our investigation here is to examine links between interpretations of history and political positions (as opposed to whether a particular view is correct or incorrect).

2. A related goal is to examine the rhetoric and vocabulary of nationalism as it pertains to interpretations of history.

3. (For those in HIST 104), the material here is closely related to Chapter Nine in *Topics in Chinese History*.

[5]Irokawa Daikichi, *The Culture of the Meiji Period,* Marius B. Jansen, trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 3, 3-4.

REMEMBER

1. "Nation" is not the same as "country" (or "state").

2. Nations are imagined communities, and exist because of feelings and beliefs, regardless of the actual situation.

3. A key element of national belief is the assertion that all members of the nation share a common ancestry.

4. Another key element is that all members share fundamental cultural similarities.

5. "Nationalism" means (1) loyalty to one's nation and/or (2) the idea that all nations should have a sovereign country of their own.

6. Nationalism resembles religious belief in certain respects.

7. In the modern world, the idea of "nation" and of "race" became closely associated.

controversy. Recall (reread relevant sections of *Topics in Chinese History* if necessary) that the cultural essence allegedly at the core of nations is commonly imagined to have always existed among "our people" as far back as anyone can investigate. In the case of Japan, many regard this alleged cultural essence as *genetically* built into "we Japanese."[6] Between 1868 and 1945, Japan's emperor served as the symbol of this alleged cultural essence, and even after 1945, the emperor has remained a potent symbol in the minds of some Japanese.

In modern Japan prior to 1946, according to official ideology, the emperor was a living embodiment of a so-called "national essence" (国体 or 国粋). This "national essence" consisted in the alleged ***unbroken line of imperial succession*** from the time of Jinmu 神武 to the present. Jinmu was the mythical first emperor whose alleged 660-585 B.C. reign would put him in the Jōmon period. As the story goes, Jinmu was a relative of the solar deity (see the abbreviated genealogy provided below). In modern thought, therefore, the "national essence" of Japan was transmitted from the two creator deities (Izanami and Izanagi) to the solar deity (Amaterasu) and then on to the first emperor. To a true believer, that "national essence" has been passed on from one generation of emperors to the next in an unbroken line of succession that continues today. The early mythology, such as the passages you read in the previous section, was taught in all schools as absolute truth until 1945 or 1946. Even today, there are a few bureaucrats and scholars who want to reinstate these myths into the curriculum as historical fact.[7] By this point in the course, you may have come to realize that the whole idea of an "historical fact" is complex and problematic.

If archaeologists were to perform careful excavations, weigh their evidence, and

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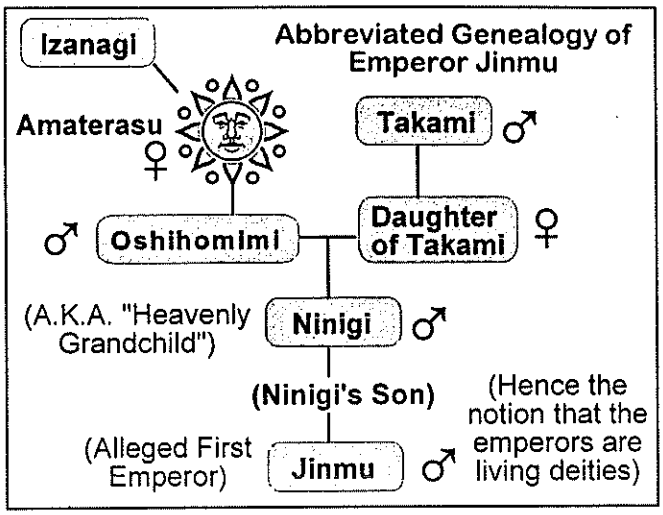
[6]It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that cultural characteristics *cannot* be transmitted genetically. All cultural characteristics are acquired after birth, and a given cultural characteristic may be acquired by anyone at all under the right circumstances.

[7]In the U.S., of course, there are those who demand that Christian prayer become a formal part of school activities and that U.S. history be taught in such a way as to glorify the past to enhance a sense of patriotism in students. Their counterparts in Japan would be those who want to put Amaterasu and Jinmu back into the curriculum. Compare these examples also with the prominent place of the legendary sage kings and cultural heroes in the teaching of Chinese history in Taiwan.



conclude that there were in fact breaks in the Imperial line—and there probably was at least one; perhaps two—this conclusion would not sit well with nationalists. Similarly, scholarship suggesting that the imperial family originally came from Korea—and a case can be made for this view—would be anathema to many in Japan, though Korean scholars would be more inclined to accept such a view.[8] Similarly, the question of where "the Japanese" people as a whole came from (probably many different places, but Korea leads the list) is also controversial. Another area of controversy in interpreting Japan's ancient past is violence. In the ideal nationalist portrayal, "the Japanese" were one big, harmonious family, all united in loyalty and respect for a father-like emperor. Warfare and political struggle, especially within the imperial family itself, are virtually non-existent in nationalist accounts of Japan's past.

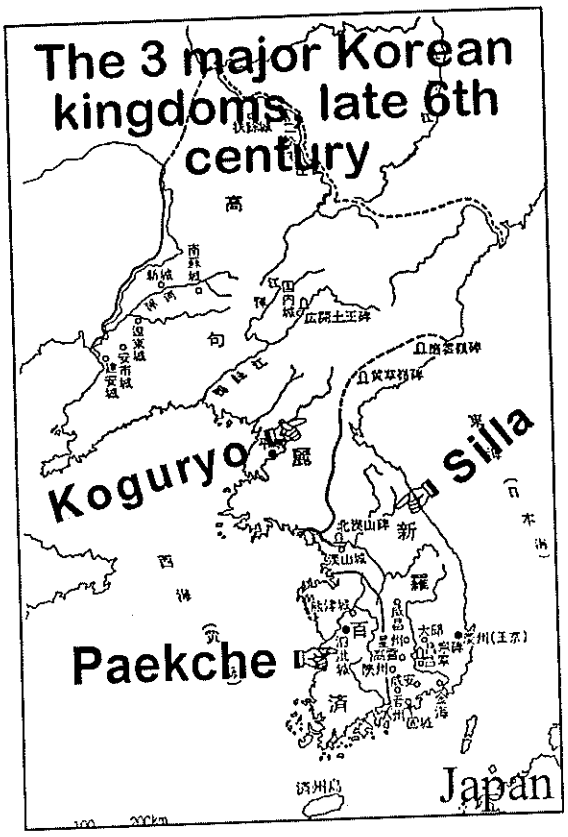
In the following section, we briefly survey some of the modern controversies connected with ancient Japanese (Yamato)-Korean (esp. Paekche) relations. We then examine some controversy connected with Japan's ancient religious practices as portrayed in an earlier edition of this book.

ANCIENT YAMATO AND THE KOREAN PENINSULA

There can be no doubt that the Yamato kingdom in the Japanese islands and the various kingdoms of the Korean peninsula had extensive contact from the late Yayoi period onward. Advanced continental culture came into the Japanese islands through Korea, and many thousands of human beings came across the seas and settled in the Japanese islands. The precise nature of the relationship between Yamato and one or more of the Korean kingdoms, however, has been a matter of controversy. Scholars from Korea tend to emphasize the superiority of Korean culture at the time and the extensive contributions of Korean culture and people to the development of ancient Japan. The Japanese imperial family itself, some would say, were originally Koreans.

Scholars from Japan often play down, but never deny, Korean cultural influence and stress that any outside cultural influences did not significantly alter Japan's fundamental national essence. Prior to 1945, it was common for Japanese books to claim that for long periods of time, the Korean peninsula was under Japanese political and military control. Such portrayals describe the Korean kingdoms as "tributary states" or "subordi-

[8]As you may know, (with formal U.S. agreement) Japan took over Korea in 1910, annexed it, and made it into a colony. Japanese-Korean relations are still strained today as a result of these past events, and discrimination against persons of Korean ancestry is strong in today's Japan.



nate states," all paying homage to the glorious Yamato court. In the modern world of nations, such claims have not been mere academic braggadocio. They helped justify, in Japanese eyes at least, Japan's 20th-century colonization of Korea and adjacent areas. Although the rhetoric of Japanese conquest of Korea in ancient times is toned down considerably in post-1945 textbooks and other materials, ancient Yamato military activity in the Korean peninsula can still be a contentious topic.

In a reversal of the typical pre-1945 Japanese position that the Korean kingdoms were subordinate to Japan (Yamato), Korean economist-turned-ancient-historian Wontack Hong argues that the Yamato kingdom was an offshoot of the Korean kingdom of Paekche. Paekche had conquered the Japanese islands and established a branch kingdom there, called Wa (倭). This branch kingdom did not become "Japan" (*Nippon* 日本) until the late 660s, owing to the destruction of the mother country of Paekche by Silla (another of the major Korean kingdoms) and Chinese forces. At this time, "Japan's" leaders created a history for themselves and claimed they had been rulers of the Japanese islands since the earliest times. This claim helped legitimate the rule of the imperial clan, which was actually a clan of Korean conquerors in Hong's view. Here is his summary:

> As Paekche was completely destroyed by the Silla-Tang allied forces in A.D. 663 and annexed by Silla shortly thereafter, the Yamato rulers had to redefine their identity. They officially changed the name of their country from *Wa* 倭 to *Nippon* 日本 in A.D. 670. They began rewriting their history around A.D. 682, eventually producing *Kojiki* in A.D. 712 and *Nihongi* in A.D. 720. The imperial clan began to insist on its sovereignty since ancient times.[9]

Furthermore:

> Historians of the Yamato Court manufactured a history for the imperial family dating back to B.C. 660, eradicated from all records its ancestral relationship to Paekche (which had been annexed by Silla), and claimed a divine ancestry for the ruling house. The migration of the imperial family from 'Paekche' was transformed into the mythological descent of this clan from the 'Heaven.'[10]

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[9]Wontack Hong, *Paekche of Korea and the Origin of Yamato Japan* (Seoul: Kudara International, 1994), p. 266. Underlining added.

[10]Ibid., p. 268. Underlining added.

Notice the phrase "ancestral relationship" underlined above. In nationalist-inspired writing, "ancestral relationships" are terribly important because of the stress on unbroken continuity of national essences transmitted through the generations of a nation's people. In the passages that follow below **words and terms that play a key role in nationalist rhetoric** appear underlined. Pay attention to them. Devoting some attention to the vocabulary and techniques of nationalist rhetoric will help you to recognize nationalist thinking in a variety of contexts. After reading a passage containing underlined terms, re-read only the underlined terms. Although the result is broken English, it will give you a good feel for the essential terms and concepts of nationalism.

Hong's book reflects the bias of Korean nationalism just as strongly as many Japanese histories reflect the bias of Japanese nationalism. He selects only those sources that support the point he wants to make, no matter how weak it may be. Hong himself is a modern economist by training, not a scholar of ancient history. His book, in short, is as much a variety of propaganda as anything else. *For this very reason,* it is ideal for our purposes. Although Hong's overall argument as expressed above is problematic, it is certainly reasonable to view the *Kojiki* (*Records of Ancient Matters*) and *Nihongi* (*Chronicles of Japan*) as books written to justify the rule of the Yamato imperial clan. The writing of history, as we have said before, is necessarily a political act.

Although Hong's extreme position contains problems, some historians in Japan, Korea, the U.S., and elsewhere have made convincing arguments that the "imperial" line was broken with the reign of "emperor" Ōjin 應神 (traditional reign dates 270-310, but these may be roughly a century too early). In some interpretations, Ōjin was the head of a conquering warrior group from the continent that has crossed to the Japanese islands. This position is unacceptable to many Japanese historians, even today, because it destroys the idea of a unique national essence embodied in the unbroken imperial line. Sakamoto Tarō, for example, wrote as follows in a 1984 book commissioned by the Japan's government-sponsored International Society for Educational Information:

> [T]he Japanese emperors and the Japanese populace both stem from the early Yamato peoples–the monarchy most probably does not descend, as many have theorized, from a different race that invaded the country and conquered the native population. . . . The fundamental characteristics of these people, formed over the ten-thousand years of the pre-pottery Jōmon periods, were not basically changed even by the later introduction of wet rice cultivation and metal implements. The unity of the emperor and his subjects stemmed from this basic ethnic homogeneity. . . . The Japanese emperors were not members of a separate, conquering people, and enjoyed as a result, a strong ethnic bond to their subjects.[11]

Now, re-read only the underlined terms in the passage to get a better sense of the vocabulary of nationalist rhetoric. The underlined terms suggest unchanged cultural essences, dating back thousands of years before history, which constitute a "race" or ethnic group–classic nationalist rhetoric in the modern world. Notice also that the last sentence

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[11]Sakamoto Tarō, *The Japanese Emperor Through History,* Mack Horton, translator (Tokyo: International Society for Educational Information, Inc.), pp. 13-15, Quoted in Hong, *Paekche of Korea,* p.20.

implies, but does not state overtly, that ancient Japanese "emperors" lived in a state of harmony with "their subjects."

Hajime Hoshi's 1937 *Japan: A Country Founded by "Mother:" An Outline History* is an extreme example of history-as-nationalist propaganda. The author, not a specialist in Japanese history, wrote the book in English essentially to persuade an increasingly hostile U.S. audience that Japan's "aggression" on the Asian continent was not really aggression at all. Instead, Japan's actions represented the nurturing hand of a "maternal" country with a superior culture. Other countries, he claimed are "paternal," that is, aggressive. As guide to Japan's past, *Japan: A Country Founded by "Mother"* is nearly worthless. It is an excellent example, however, of a point of view common among well-educated Japanese of the 1930s, a time when nationalism was perhaps at its peak.[12]

One point that Hoshi never tired of repeating is that built into the "national character" of "the Japanese" was a tendency for cooperation:

> The Japanese people are a nation that observes the principle of progress and co-operation taught by the Sun Goddess [Amaterasu], and the Japanese national polity [=national essence 国体] itself is the incarnation of cooperation. Therefore, domestic life, education, social life, politics, economic activities, and what not, in Japan are all based on co-operation.[13]

As with all the passages in this section, pay close attention to the underlined terms. Here, note especially the term"incarnation of cooperation." The claim that a cultural trait or social practice such as cooperation is an incarnation or embodiment of an underlying national essence is part of the classical rhetoric of nationalism. Whenever you read of cooperation as a "national trait" in ancient Japan, recall the evidence of violence, warfare and political struggle, both in the archaeological record and in the texts of the *Nihongi* and *Kojiki*. Was Yamato-takeru, for example, an "incarnation of co-operation?" What about Amaterasu and Susanowo?

This cooperation was not simply a matter of people within the nation getting along with each other: "Co-operation which was taught by the Sun Goddess is exactly what 'mother' of the world at large desires. By this co-operation is meant, not co-operation in such narrow a sense as within a nation only, but one of a wider sense, namely between nation and nation."[14] How does this statement strike you? Is it reasonable? By reading only the underlined terms we see that the Sun Goddess (Amaterasu) has moved from being the Japanese national deity to being the universal deity of the world at large. In the 1930s, this claim was not at all benign—it was a major justification for Japan's conquest and colonization of vast areas of Asia. Indeed, in 1938 the official name for Japan's Asiatic empire became "Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" 大東亞共榮圈. The Sun Goddess had spread her benevolent cooperation far and wide–at the point of a bayonet.

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[12]For an excellent study of the propaganda emanating from China and Japan during the 1930s, see Bruno Lasker and Agnes Roman, *Propaganda from China and Japan: A Case Study in Propaganda Analysis* (American Council, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1938).

[13]Hoshi, *Japan*, p. 12.

[14]Ibid., p. 13.

While it is easy to be critical of Japan in this context, we should keep things in perspective. Consider, for example, the rhetoric of U.S. military activity in this century. Did the U.S. (or any other country) ever go to war in the name of "war," or pursue aggression in the name of "aggression?" Of course not. It was "police actions" designed to "further world peace" or "keep the world safe for democracy" or to bring freedom to the people of Kuwait (*not to mention* liberating the Emir's golden toilet seats–and his OIL), and so forth. The point here is not whether the military action of Japan, the U.S., or any other country was necessary or justifiable in any given instance. This issue is important, of course, but beyond the scope of this course. What we want to do here is examine the rhetorical strategies connected with nationalism and national aggrandizement, including warfare.

Cooperation between nations? A Korean laborer works like a pack animal in the service of the Japanese army (early 20th century) while jeering officers look on. In your mind, replace the Korean and Japanese nationalities with other pairs. Can you imagine this scene replayed in other contexts?

But what do these modern conflicts have to do with ancient history and Yamato-Korean relations? They are closely connected. Bear in mind that in nationalist thinking, national "essences" have existed nearly forever and do not change. The "natural" order of things in the ancient past, therefore, would be the same as the "natural" order of things in the present. By presenting the ancient past in a certain way, therefore, the historian is able to lend powerful justification to similar actions in the present–at least if that historian's audience buys into the assumptions of nationalism.

With respect to Yamato-Korean relations in this context, consider the following passages in Hoshi's *Japan: A Country Founded by "Mother:"*

> In the reign of the fourteenth Emperor Chūai [early tomb period], the tribe of Kumaso in Kyūshū again rebelled against the Government. Thereupon, the Emperor started a punitive expedition and after having subjugated the rebels, died in camp.
>
> The revolt of the Kumaso was manipulated by Korea, and thus with Korea at its back the recalcitrant tribe frequently rose in revolt. The Emperor made up his mind to cut off the connection between the revolting tribe and Korea and had ships constructed to be used for an expedition across the sea. Following the will of the Emperor, his consort, the Empress Jingū-Kōgō, keeping secret the demise of the Emperor, led herself not long after an expedition against the Korean kingdom of Silla. In a short time she conquered Silla, while the two other Korean kingdoms of

> Paekche and Koguryo also submitted to the expeditionary force of the Empress. In this way the whole of Korea subordinated itself to Japan. The Empress then established Uchitsu-Miyake or Residency General in that country and ruled it. Now that Korea was subjugated, the Kumaso tribe was pacified too.[15]

At the time Hoshi wrote these words (approximately 1936), Korea was a colony of Japan, ruled by a Governor General 朝鮮總督 appointed from Tokyo. The situation was not new, at least according to Hoshi, since the "whole of Korea had once submitted itself" to Japan and had thereupon come under the rule of Japan's "Residency General." Lest one think "Japan" was a warlike country for invading Korea in ancient times, however, Hoshi points out: "The Empress Jingū undertook the expedition against Korea, it is true, but it was essentially intended to remove the activity of an alien foe standing in the way of achieving peaceful internal government. It therefore was not the invasion of a foreign country in an ordinary sense at all."[16] Note that in nationalist/patriotic rhetoric, when one's own country invades another doing so is always for such worthy purposes that the action cannot really be called an "invasion."

Hong, our representative of history from a Korean nationalist perspective, makes precisely this point in the following passage:

> Whenever one country invades another, it has been a time-honored tradition for the aggressor to fabricate an excuse that makes the invasion seem just. The excuses usually take the form of claiming a need to redress some non-existing injustices or restore some original status which also may have never existed. In the late 19th century, when Japan was trying fiercely to emulate Western colonialism, its first target of invasion was Korea. For the ritualistic formality of justifying such an invasion, the newly formed Japanese imperialists invented the story that the southern part of Korea had been a colony of Japan during the fourth and fifth centuries while the northern part of Korea had been occupied by Chinese empires from time immemorial. Korea could not claim an identity as an independent state, and Japan alleged a historical right to take back Korea. Ever since the late 19th century, and even up to the present, the Japanese people have been systematically brainwashed by this kind of story.[17]

Keeping in mind that the phenomenon described here is not unique to Japan, these observations are on the mark. Constructing a past through the writing of history can be an act of profound political significance, particularly in the age of nations.

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[15]Ibid., pp. 50-51, with minor modification of the spelling of place names. There is no evidence to support this interpretation of events, and the implication that Yamato conquered and controlled all of Korea, while unfounded, was common among Japanese historians of Hoshi's time. At most, Yamato controlled or dominated a small part of southern Korea at different times during the tomb and Asuka periods.

[16]Ibid., p. 52.

[17]Hong, *Paekche of Korea,* p. 10.

ANCIENT RELIGION AND CRITICISM OF THIS BOOK FROM JAPAN


Fujikage, 10-1-93

An excellent example of the influence of nationalism in the writing of history is connected with an earlier edition of this book, *Topics in East Asian History*. The book covered the same general ground now covered by *Topics in Chinese History* and *Topics in Japanese History*. Having some extra copies on hand, I sent one to Fujita Satoru, Lecturer at Sanyō Women's College and head of an organization dedicated to the study of the Japanese scholar Nakae Tōju 中江藤樹 (1608-48). We have corresponded from time to time after I published an article on Nakae Tōju in 1991.

After receiving the copy of *Topics in East Asian History,* he published a letter to me in the 10-1-1993 issue of the newsletter *Fujikage* 藤陰. The first half of the letter was full of praise for the first half of the book–the part on China. The second half of the letter was a critique of the material on early Japan, which had offended Prof. Fujita's sense of nationalism. Because the letter was not a private communication, but published for all to see in Japan, I present the relevant part of it here in translation. What follows is most of the second half. As with previous passages key phrases in the rhetoric of nationalism are underlined.

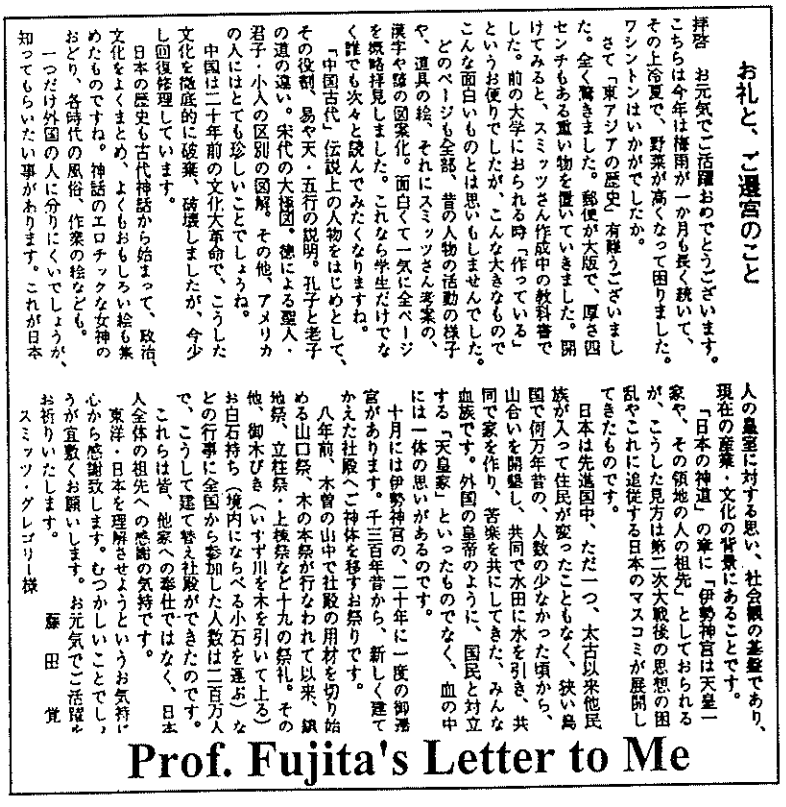
> There is just one thing–difficult though it may be for a foreigner to understand–of which I would like you to be aware. This is the attitude of the Japanese toward the imperial throne, the foundation of their view of society, which forms the background of Japan's contemporary industry and culture.
>
> The 'Shintō in Japan' chapter characterizes the Shrine at Ise as having been that of the Imperial household or the inhabitants of that area [as opposed to being the shrine of the entire Japanese people, i.e., the Japanese nation]. This view, however, is that which developed amidst the intellectual confusion following the Second World War, spread by Japan's mass media who adhered to it.
>
> Japan is alone among the world's advanced countries in not having had the composition of its people changed since remote antiquity by the coming of any outside ethnic group. A small island nation, from tens of thousands of years ago when its population was few, [its inhabitants] cleared the mountain forests for farming, cooperatively brought in water for the wet rice fields, cooperatively built houses, and experienced joy and grief together. They were all blood relatives. It is not like the case of foreign emperors in which there was a sense of the people versus the throne, since there was a unified attitude in the blood.
>
> In the tenth month, there is an event at the Ise Shrine that takes place once in twenty years called "Sengū." It is a ceremony held for the past thousand three-hundred years, in which the *kami* body is moved into the newly-constructed shrine building.

Eight years in advance, there was the Yamaguchi ceremony in which the lumber for constructing the shrine building was first cut from the mountains of Kiso. After the main ceremony for the wood was carried out, there were nineteen subsequent ceremonies, including the [pre-construction] consecration ceremony, pillar raising ceremony, and the ridgepole raising ceremony. Additionally, there were events like the *Go-kibiki* (bringing in logs via the Isuzu River) and the *O-shiraishi mochi* (hauling the small stones to be lined up inside the shrine compound) in which some 2,000,000 people participated from throughout the country. It was in this way that the re-construction of the shrine building could be accomplished.

This was not a case of all these people contributing labor service to an outside clan, but instead a feeling of gratitude to the ancestors of the entire Japanese people.

This letter contains so many points of importance to our study of nationalism and its influence on perceptions of pasts that we should review the underlined points paragraph by paragraph.

The letter starts off suggesting that it is beyond the capabilities of an outsider, someone not a part of the imagined community of "Japan," to understand what is a uniquely Japanese attitude toward the imperial throne. This alleged attitude is still alive and well today, we are told, and forms the background or foundation of Japan's modern culture. Articles by Prof. Fujita in the *Fujikage* newsletter frequently portray Japan's modern culture as being superior to and different from all others, and as deriving from an ancient national essence. Interestingly, in a personal communication explaining why he published this letter, Prof. Fujita said that he did so in part because so many people in Japan do not know the things he wrote about. One wonders, however, why they do not, at least if Prof. Fujita's assertion is correct that a reverent attitude toward the imperial throne is built right into the genetic makeup of "the Japanese."



お礼と、ご遷宮のこと

拝啓　お元気でご活躍おめでとうございます。こちらは今年は梅雨が一か月も長く続いて、その上冷夏で、野菜が高くなって困りました。ワシントンはいかがでしたか。

さて「東アジアの歴史」有難うございました。全く驚きました。郵便が大阪で、厚さ四センチもある重い物を置いていきました。開けてみると、スミッツさん作成中の教科書でした。前の大学におられる時「作っている」というお便りでしたが、こんな大きなもので、こんな面白いものとは思いもしませんでした。

どのページも全部、昔の人物の活動の様子や、道具の絵、それにスミッツさん考案の、漢字や語の図案化。面白くて一気に全ページを概略拝見しました。これなら学生だけでなく誰でも次々と読んでみたくなりますね。

「中国古代」伝説上の人物をはじめとして、その役割、易や天・五行の説明。孔子と老子の道の違い。宋代の大極図。徳による聖人・君子・小人の区別の図解。その他、アメリカの人にはとても珍しいことでしょうね。

中国は二十年前の文化大革命で、こうした文化を徹底的に破棄、破壊しましたが、今少し回復修理しています。

日本の歴史も古代神話から始まって、政治、文化をよくまとめ、よくおもしろい絵も集めたものですね。神話のエロチックな女神のおどり、各時代の風俗、作業の絵なども。

一つだけ外国の人に分りにくいでしょうが、知ってもらいたい事があります。これが日本人の皇室に対する思い、社会観の基盤であり、現在の産業・文化の背景にあることです。

「日本の神道」の章に「伊勢神宮は天皇一家や、その領地の人の祖先」としておられるが、こうした見方は第二次大戦後の思想の混乱やこれに追従する日本のマスコミが展開してきたものです。

日本は先進国中、ただ一つ、太古以来他民族が入って住民が変ったこともなく、狭い島国で何万年昔の、人数の少なかった頃から、山合いを開墾し、共同で水田に水を引き、共同で家を作り、苦楽を共にしてきた、みんな血族です。外国の皇帝のように、国民と対立する「天皇家」といったものでなく、血の中には一体の思いがあるのです。

十月には伊勢神宮の、二十年に一度の御遷宮があります。千三百年昔から、新しく建てかえた社殿へご神体を移すお祭りです。

八年前、木曽の山中で社殿の用材を切り始める山口祭、木の本祭が行なわれて以来、鎮地祭、立柱祭・上棟祭など十九の祭礼。その他、御木びき（いすず川を木を引いて上る）お白石持ち（境内にならべる小石を運ぶ）などの行事に全国から参加した人数は二百万人で、こうして建て替え社殿ができたのです。

これらは皆、他家への奉仕ではなく、日本人全体の祖先への感謝の気持です。

東洋・日本を理解させようというお気持に心から感謝致します。むつかしいことでしょうが宜敷くお願いします。お元気でご活躍をお祈りいたします。

スミッツ・グレゴリー様　　藤田覚

Prof. Fujita's Letter to Me

The second paragraph explains that the view of "Shintō" (here meaning ancient native religious traditions) presented in this book is the result of intellectual confusion that spread in the wake of the Second World War. This allegedly incorrect view politicizes the religious practices of the impe-

What might have been the attitude toward the imperial throne of this Ainu man?

rial court. It suggests that there was a dichotomy between those who ruled and those who were ruled. The Ise Shrine (Amaterasu) was not the shrine of a single ruling family, says Prof. Fujita, but the shrine of the entire "Japanese" people. One wonders if "Japanese" people included the Ainu, the Hayato, the Kumaso, Ryūkyūans, or the residents of the Izumo region? Did these "Japanese" people include the peasants and *be* members who toiled under the control of the powerful *uji*?

The third paragraph is classical racism of a type that developed in the 19th century, when "science" declared that physical differences among certain groups of humans were linked in a causal way with cultural differences. Today, most of the scientific community has rejected the "scientific racism" of the past century, and many contemporary biologists reject even the very proposition that there are human races (some other species have races, but not humans). But the legacy of 19th-century racism still informs the thinking of many in our present world. Is it really possible to have an "attitude in the blood?" Notice also the stress on cooperation, which we have already seen in the writings of Hoshi. "One has only to scrutinize Japanese history," says Hoshi, "to be convinced that all the historical facts and events in Japan have had their source in this notion of co-operation."[18] The views of Hoshi and Prof. Fujita have much in common. One last point: would anyone have been carrying water for wet rice fields in the Japanese islands "tens of thousands of years ago?" When did wet rice agriculture first appear in the Japanese islands?

Paragraphs four and five describe some of the details of the rebuilding of the Ise Shrine, which traditionally took place every twenty years. Notice the remarkably large number of people that supposedly participated. According to most archaeologists, during the tomb period, there might not have been 2,000,000 people in the entire Japanese islands. The final paragraph reiterates the points made in the first. We are asked to take the facts of the shrine rebuilding as proof of the alleged cooperation and attitude of gratitude. Are you able, though, to interpret these facts in any other ways? Think back on the violence, warfare and political struggle of the Yayoi, tomb and Asuka periods and the consolidation of "imperial" power. Do you find it plausible that "the Japanese people" were delighted to drop everything they were doing and pitch in their labor services to rebuild the Ise Shrine? What if the emperor or his/her officials had said to a certain group of peasants or others: "Contribute labor to the project or we'll kill you?" That certainly might instill an "attitude" of "cooperation." In other words, and this is a key point, the view expressed in the letter *ignores political and economic conflict* within the imagined national

[18]Hoshi, *Japan*, p. 12.

group. Notice also that this view contains no sense of historical change.

To put things into perspective, suppose 1,000 years from now a historian wrote about the United States in former times. He claimed that the regular, institutionalized practice of "income tax" indicates that "the Americans" all had a deep sense of gratitude toward their ruler, the President. Millions of Americans from all over the country gave significant portions of their incomes to this ruler and his government, showing that it was the benevolent government of all the people, not just a relatively small group of power holders. Would you not agree with such a reasonable interpretation?

Upon reading Prof. Fujita's letter, the reaction of many in Japan today would be something like "it must have been written by a very old man." Many Japanese educated after 1945 would find the tone, and to some extent the content, of the letter oddly out of date. Indeed, Prof. Fujita said that it was in part for this reason that he wrote the letter in the first place. If we were to read the letter to a class of high school seniors in Japan, and then ask how many agree with it, few would answer yes. If, however, we asked the class to analyze the letter, explaining its specific arguments and the weaknesses of those arguments, very few would be able to do so. Most would have no ability to analyze such matters critically. Nationalism remains quite strong in Japan, though it normally takes different and more subtle forms than the letter above. If you have studied this and the previous chapter with care, you are probably better equipped to analyze Japanese nationalist writings than most of the high school seniors in our hypothetical example. For those readers from somewhere other than Japan, what about your own society? Are you able and willing to look at nationalist writings and talk in the United States, Taiwan, or wherever with a critical eye? Should you want to pursue this matter further, consider taking HIST 312, The U.S. and East Asia.

FINALLY

At first glance, Japan's ancient past may seem remote and alien. The archaeological and documentary record is relative sparse, containing large gaps and conflicting findings. The events of this past took place such a long time ago that the reader from the contemporary United States might initially wonder why anyone would care—much less become emotionally charged—about such ancient matters. But as we have seen, nationalism, although a modern phenomenon, functions in part to make the ancient past highly relevant. (There are other reasons to study the ancient past, of course, for the past in any age is a rich source of data on the forms and possibilities of human societies and culture.) Nationalist readings and writings of history take the ancient past and shape it into the mold of the contemporary nation. For nationalists, the ancient past is a repository of the national essence, and its study provides an opportunity to see that essence more clearly. Again, this phenomenon is not unique to Japan.

To briefly revisit previous material in the course (HIST 104), we saw in our study of China's ancient sage kings and cultural heroes that the tales of those legendary figures do not tell us anything about events around the time of 3,500 B.C. or so. Instead they tell us much about cultural values and tensions among educated Chinese in Han times. Generations of Chinese scholars read the values and issues of their own day into the remote

ancient past. This phenomenon explains why someone like the Yellow Emperor can be both Daoist and Confucian, a fierce warrior and the founder of the healing arts, a brilliant creator and a man who took most of what he "knew" from the instruction of others–all at the same time. The Yellow Emperor and the other legendary rulers could be anything anyone wanted them to be.

In modern times, the Yellow Emperor became the embodiment of the Chinese "race" and "nation." Frank Dikötter explains the situation in the early part of this century:

> The Yellow Emperor (*Huangdi*) was a mythical figure thought to have reigned from 2697 to 2597 B.C. He was hailed as the first ancestor (*shizu*) of the Han ["Chinese"] race, and his portrait served as the frontispiece in many nationalist publications. From mid-1903, the radical magazines started using dates based on the supposed date of birth of the Yellow Emperor. Liu Shipei's (1884-1919) first published article advocated the introduction of a calendar in which the foundation year corresponded to the birth of the Yellow Emperor. . . . The Yellow Emperor remained a powerful figure for many decades. Despite the historian Gu Jiegang's severe criticism of the myth in the 1920s, [the Yellow Emperor] was still officially revered in 1941 as the founder of the nation and initiator of the race.[19]

Prince Yamato Takeru (1906)

In the early twentieth century, China's remote past became very much a part of the present owing to the political and social conditions of the time.

The same thing, of course, took place in Japan. Its alleged ancient founders, Izanagi, Izanami, Amaterasu and the like were superficially quite different from the legendary sage kings and cultural heroes of ancient China, but in the modern world they came to serve nearly identical purposes. Both groups of legendary founding heroes became symbols of the nation. They both became very present pasts.

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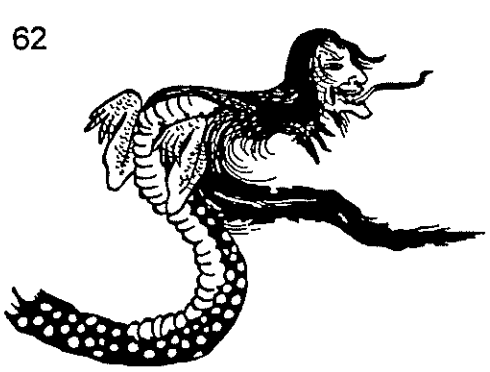
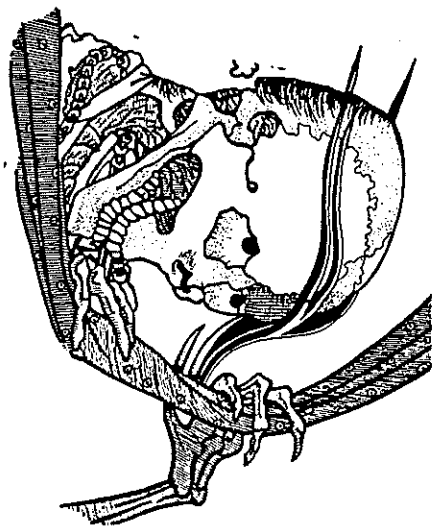
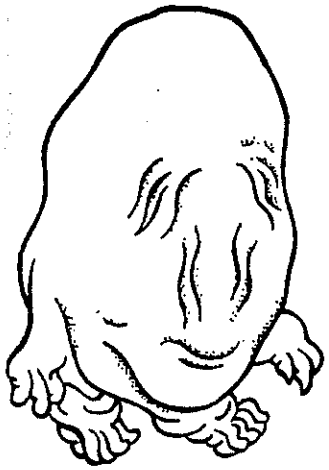
[19]Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 116.







妖怪 Japanese Specters (Various Time Periods)

CHAPTER FOUR

JAPAN'S CLASSICAL AGE: THE HEIAN AND EARLY KAMAKURA PERIODS

Japanese aristocratic society developed to its fullest extent during the long Heian period 平安時代. Aristocratic culture of the Heian period is particularly fascinating because many of its values, practices and customs differed sharply from those of today's world—in Japan or elsewhere. A study of Heian-period life can therefore help to "defamiliarize" cultural values that may seem obvious or "natural." Moreover, studying the Heian period is simply interesting. The Heian period is so rich and complex that we can only examine a few of its many aspects here. We begin with an overview of major political and economic developments, then focus on the fascinating world of the life and culture of the Heian nobility. Finally, we look at the rise of warrior power and the creation of a new form of government.

HEIAN PERIOD POLITICS

Warrior monk, rosary dangling from right wrist

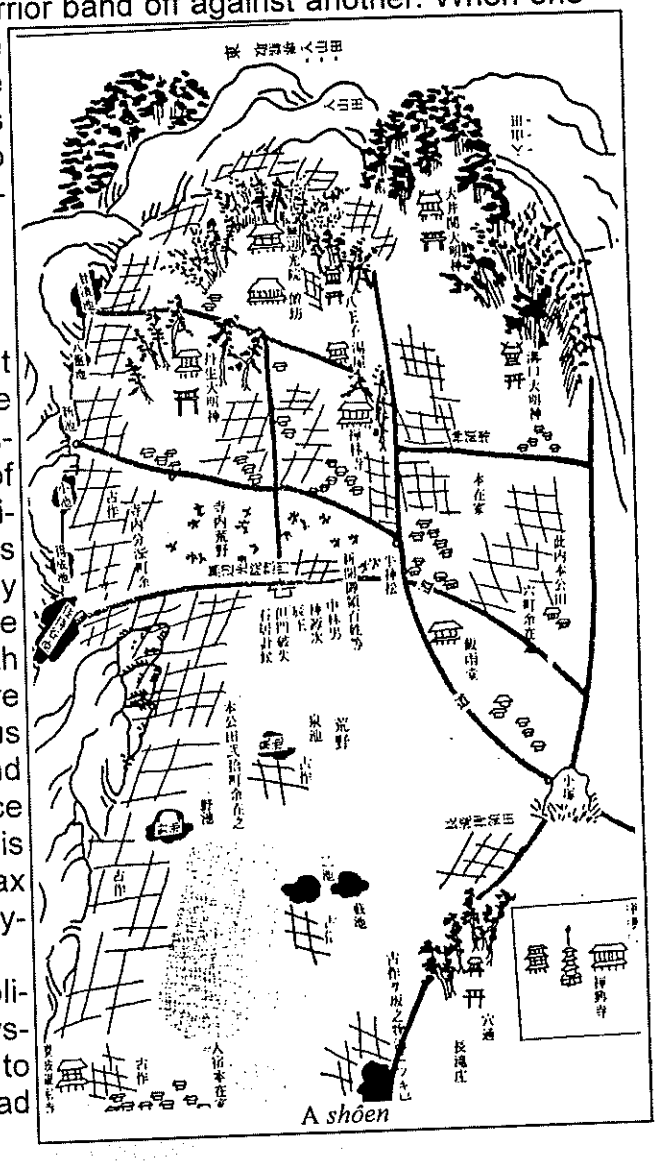
Overview

During the Heian period, political power resided mainly in four entities: 1) **The emperor/imperial family,** 2) **the aristocracy,** 3) **Buddhist temples and their armies of warrior monks,** and 4) **provincial warriors**. In general, entities one and two tended to be more powerful during the early and middle Heian period (from about 794-1094), while entities three and four became particularly strong during the last century of the Heian period and remained so into later ages. The Heian period was the golden age of the civil aristocrat; warriors dominated later eras.

The first few Heian emperors ruled in a powerful manner like their Nara-period predecessors. Gradually, the Fujiwara family managed to usurped the power of the emperors. The Fujiwara leaders controlled the imperial office from behind the scenes, using the authority and prestige of the throne to benefit Fujiwara interests.

The Fujiwara dominated not only the imperial family, but all the other aristocratic families as well. Toward the end of the Heian period, the imperial family was able to reassert itself vis-à-vis the Fujiwara family by institutionally outmaneuvering it.

No sooner had the imperial family reasserted itself within the capital, than it faced challenges from outside. Kanmu moved the capital from Nara to Kyôto (Heiankyô) to get away from the powerful Buddhist monasteries, but new forms of Buddhism and new monasteries established themselves in the mountains around the new capital. These monasteries often resembled fortified military centers as much as religious institutions. Many maintained armies of warrior monks (*sôhei* 僧兵), who were more like soldiers than monks. During the last decade of the Heian period in particular, these warrior-monks made repeated demands on the government. An even greater threat to imperial power came from the provincial warriors. For a long time the imperial court kept this group in line by playing one warrior band off against another. When one warrior clan rose to prominence over all the others, this strategy no longer worked. The imperial court, which had long since allowed its own military resources to dwindle, then had to relinquish a great deal of its power to the warriors.



A *shôen*

The Shôen (Private Estates)

The major economic[1] development during the Heian period was the rise of private estates, known as ***shôen*** 荘園. *Shôen* developed gradually throughout the early years of the Heian period. This complex process typically involved peasants giving over their lands to local entities with political clout, typically Buddhist temples or regional warlords. These local entities then used their connections with high-ranking aristocrats in the capital to secure special legal status for these lands. This status eventually included exemption from taxes and often exemption from government interference of any kind. Peasants cooperated with this process because it offered them better tax rates compared with what they had been paying directly to the state.

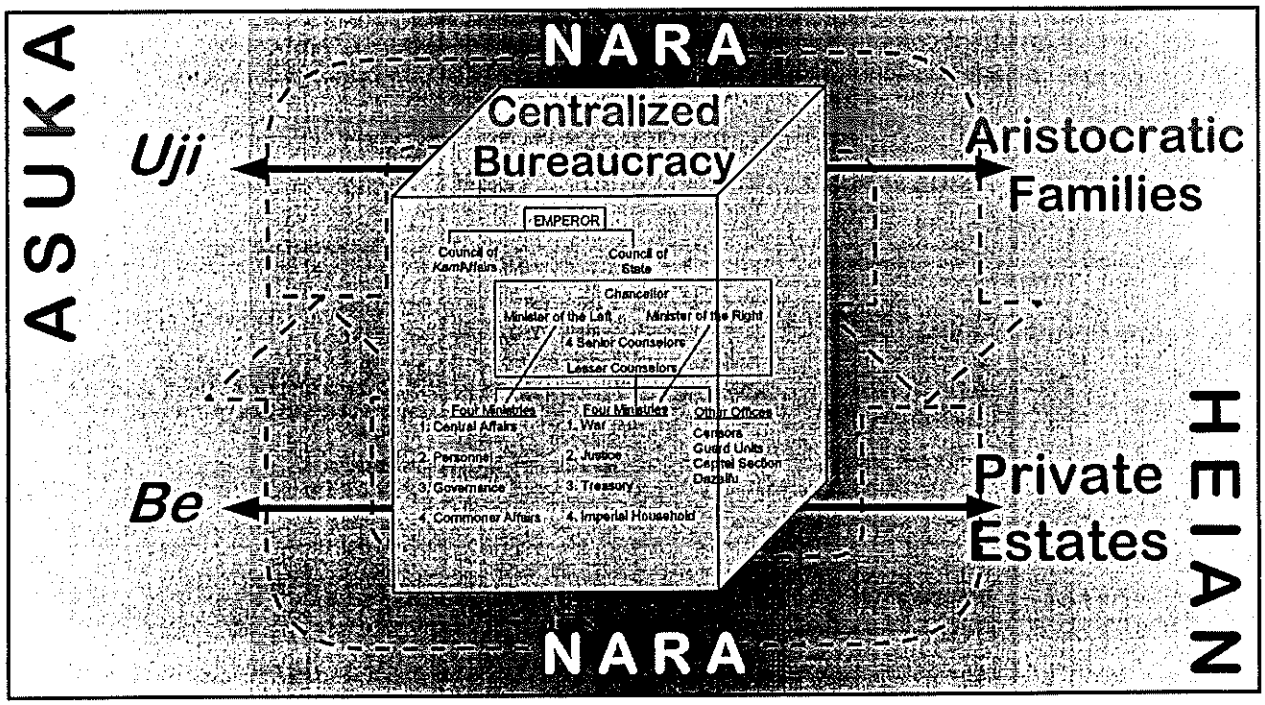
A complex network of duties and obligations developed. At the bottom of the system, peasants in the estates were entitled to keep a certain portion of the harvest and had

[1] *Shôen* were also a major social institution, but we cannot examine this aspect of *shôen* in this course. For a fascinating, postmodern study of the *shôen,* see Thomas Keirstead, *The Geography of Power in Medieval Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

other minimal rights in return for their labor. A significant percentage of the crop went to local manger(s) of the *shôen.* They, in turn, sent a portion of the produce to high-ranking aristocrats in the capital. In return, the high-ranking aristocrats used their political clout to ensure the continuation of special legal status for the estates with which they were connected. Additional middle layers of persons with interests in an estate were possible.

Written documents spelled out in detail an individual or group's duties and benefits (***shiki*** 職, roughly "rights") vis-à-vis a parcel of land and its proceeds. At the higher levels, these documents were bought and sold, much like shares of stock in corporations today.[2] The origins, structure and function of the *shôen* is an important topic in Japanese history, but it is too complex for detailed analysis in this course (take HIST 415, Traditional Japan, for more details). Here is the **bottom line** for our purposes: As more land became incorporated into *shôen,* tax revenues to the government fell, but private payments from the *shôen* to aristocrats increased. Therefore, as time went on, aristocrats received more of their income from shares (*shiki*) in private estates and less from government salaries. The big loser in this process was the emperor (or at least the *reigning* emperor—as we shall see). Why? Because the emperor theoretically possessed all the land in Japan. Therefore, it would have made no sense for him to acquire interests (*shiki*) in *shôen.* The economic power of the aristocracy thus expanded at the expense of the emperor.

The rise of the *shôen* was part of a broader trend in Japanese history. The Taika Reforms and the resulting Nara state were a move in the direction of a centralized bureaucratic state under the control of an emperor, roughly similar to the case of China. During the Heian period, the Nara system proved unworkable, and **there was a *de facto* return to the Asuka-period *uji* and *be* as the major units of social and politi-**



[2] *Shiki* should *not* be thought of as deeds of ownership. Modern concepts of land ownership would have made no sense to Japanese of the Heian period.

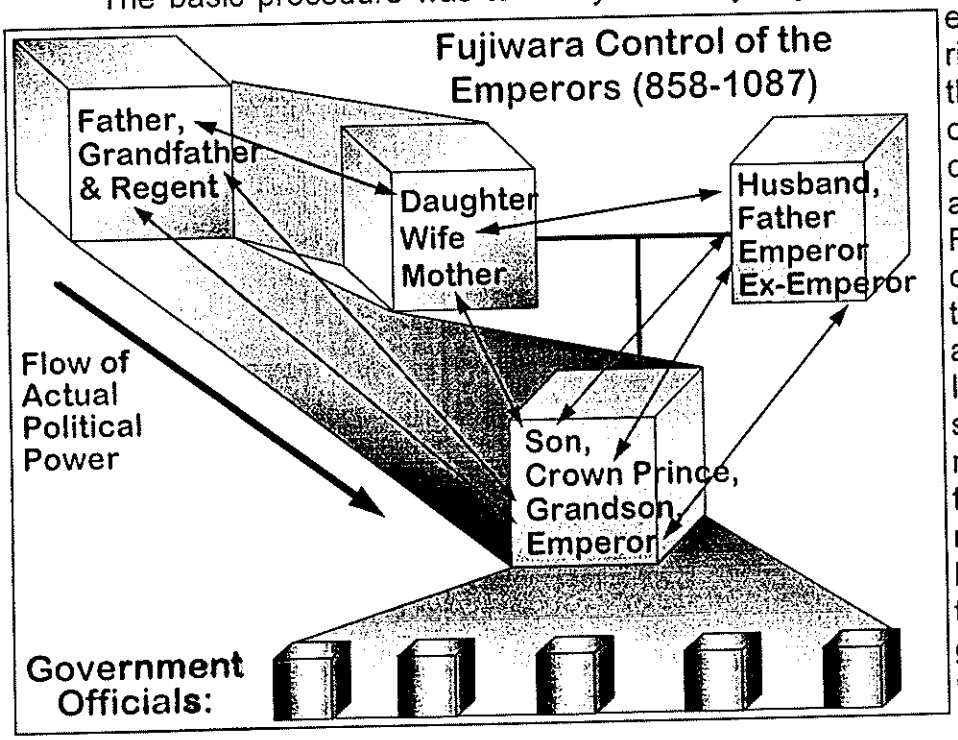
cal organization. This is *not* to say that the Heian government officially reinstated *uji* and *be*. The Nara institutions continued to exist as the outward, official form of political organization. Powerful aristocratic families like the Fujiwara, however, functioned in a manner almost identical with the old *uji*. Their court rank, once awarded for merit, had, by Heian times, become hereditary and fixed, just like the old *kabane* rank titles. The *shôen* functioned like the old local territories of the *uji,* and the workers and managers of the estates were functionally like the old *be*. Names and outward forms had changed, but the reality of Heian-period social and political organization resembled that of the late Asuka period more than that of the Nara period.

Marriage Politics & the Era of Fujiwara Ascendancy

The major political development of the early Heian period was **Fujiwara family control of the emperor and concentration of political power in its own hands.**[3] This era of Fujiwara control (摂関時代), began gradually, starting in 858. Over the course of the next century, the Fujiwara tightened its grip on power. The grip began to loosen in 1068, and by 1087 the imperial family began to reassert itself through the Cloistered Emperor (explained below).

We have seen that tension between the Fujiwara and the imperial family extended back to the beginning of the Nara period. Additionally, because the Fujiwara were the highest ranking of all the aristocrats, there was extensive intermarriage between their family and the imperial family, again, since the early Nara period. It was through the **politics of marriage** that the Fujiwara eventually came to control the throne.

The basic procedure was to marry as many Fujiwara daughters as possible to emperors and imperial princes. When the emperor and one of his Fujiwara wives or consorts produced a male child, the pro-Fujiwara factions at court pushed to have this child designated as the next emperor. If successful, the next step in the game of marriage politics was to assign the child, now crown prince, a **Fujiwara guardian**, typically the boy's grandfather on his mother's side. The



[3] Strictly speaking, it was the "northern" branch of the Fujiwara family that became powerful, not the several other branches of this large family.

child would grow up among Fujiwara, who would have a chance to influence his views.

Recall that it was common for emperors to resign the throne and go into retirement. Often emperors were eager to do so because the duties of their office included a heavy burden of ritual obligations, which took time and energy and limited the reigning emperor's freedom. In the case above, with a child as crown prince and a Fujiwara guardian, should the reigning emperor retire, the Fujiwara guardian would become the *de facto* emperor by exercising authority on the child emperor's behalf. Indeed, there was an official title for the guardian of a child emperor: *sesshô* 摂政. With a boy emperor on the throne and a Fujiwara guardian exercising real control, leading Fujiwara family members began to take over ever more of the top government posts such as Minister of the Right and Minister of the Left. Once in these posts, and backed by a Fujiwara-controlled throne, these officials were able to build up the economic power of the Fujiwara family by using their influence to acquire interests in choice *shôen.*

Growing Fujiwara power placed the family in an even better position to play the politics of marriage. After 858, the emperors' primary wives were normally the daughters of high-ranking Fujiwara family members. The sons of these daughters quickly became crown princes. In the meantime, a Fujiwara guardian continued to control the reigning emperor even after he became an adult. A "guardian" for an adult emperor is usually called a "**regent**" in English, which corresponds to the Japanese title *kanpaku* 関白. With Fujiwara regents controlling government administration, emperors became virtual puppets of the Fujiwara family. As a final step in the procedure, the Fujiwara regents usually pressured the emperors in their "care" to retire early, usually in the early thirties, to make way for a new boy emperor and his Fujiwara grandfather/guardian. This process continued one generation after the next until 1068.

Readers sometimes wonder why the Fujiwara did not simply eliminate the emperors and put themselves on the throne. Actually, a move like this would have made *no sense* in terms of maximizing Fujiwara power. First, the position of emperor was as much a religious office as it was a secular one. By Heian times, anyone other than a member of the imperial family would have been unacceptable in the religious and ceremonial roles the emperor had to perform. Furthermore, these religious and ceremonial duties consumed a great deal of time and energy but were of little benefit for acquiring political and economic power. By manipulating the throne and using its general authority from behind the scenes, the Fujiwara were free to concentrate on matters of practical importance, acquiring interests in *shôen,* for example, while retaining all the benefits imperial prestige authority might bring. Ivan Morris explains:

> [N]ever once did the Fujiwaras succumb to the temptation of trying to supplant the reigning dynasty and put a male member of their family on the throne. Nor did they ever get into the position of having to use force against a hostile emperor or crown prince. In this they profited from the mistake of their predecessors, the Soga family, who came to grief precisely because they aspired (or gave the impression that they aspired) to imperial honour. Astute politicians as they were, the Fujiwaras realized that they could accomplish far more by exploiting the prestige of the imperial family than by becoming emperors themselves.[4]

[4] Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 66.

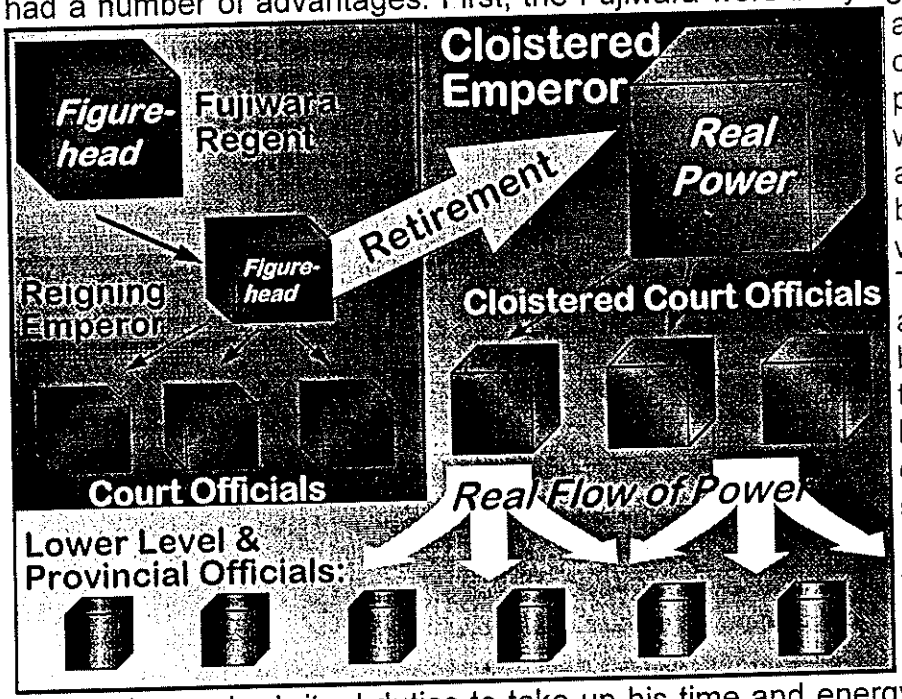
Here is an important generalization that applies even in today's Japan: **power is often employed most effectively from behind the scenes.**

Rule by Cloistered Emperors

In 1068, the first emperor in many generations *without* a Fujiwara grandfather took the throne. Having no Fujiwara regent gave this emperor more leeway than his predecessors, and he tried to reduce the power of the Fujiwara family by various means. For example, he subjected some of the Fujiwara *shôen* holdings to close scrutiny regarding their legality and documentation. These efforts, however, could not undo generations of Fujiwara control, and Fujiwara family members still held most of the important government offices. Though this emperor was unable directly to unseat the Fujiwara family from its position of dominance, he devised with this son, the crown prince, a plan that ultimately would succeed.

This son became **Emperor Shirakawa** 白河天皇. Shirakawa followed the same path as emperors before him, retiring while young and in the prime of his life. When emperors retired, they normally shaved their heads, took Buddhist holy orders, and went to live in Buddhist temples. Shirakawa did likewise. Instead of spending his days in quiet retirement, however, Shirakawa moved quickly to set up his own, alternative court, which he presided over in the capacity of **Cloistered Emperor** (*in* 院) from 1087 until his death in 1129. Since the Nara period, emperors sometimes retired and then attempted to exercise power behind the scenes. Shirakawa's move formalized the process, establishing an actual court of officials and advisors around the retired emperor in his temple.

The Fujiwara, of course, were not happy with this development, but Shirakawa had a number of advantages. First, the Fujiwara were busy fighting among themselves at the time. Second, because the Buddhist temples around the capital were safe from military attack, Shirakawa had a base of operations that was physically secure. Third, strong resentment against the Fujiwara had built up within the rest of the aristocracy, so Shirakawa found many aristocrats eager and willing to support his new court. Fourth, Shirakawa had the advantage of surprise on his side. Fifth, Shirakawa was in his prime and no longer had ritual duties to take up his time and energy. Therefore, he could focus all his attention on political matters. Finally, Shirakawa had great prestige by virtue of being the reigning emperor's father.

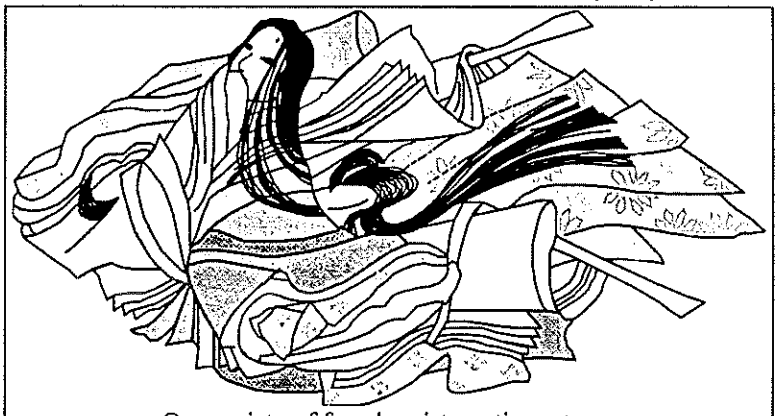


By establishing an alternative court, Shirakawa was able to outflank the Fujiwara. Fujiwara nobles still served as guardians and regents for reigning emperors, but the Cloistered Emperor and his court superseded the reigning emperor and his. Emperors could now look forward to assuming much greater power after retirement than while on the throne.

Because there was nothing wrong with the *cloistered* emperor acquiring interests in *shôen,* retired emperors were now free to build up the sagging economic base of the imperial house in the same way the Fujiwara had enriched themselves. Although the reigning emperor and the cloistered emperor did not always get along and sometimes competed with each other for power, the cloistered emperor was nearly always able to prevail. After roughly 1100, it was the cloistered emperors who were the most powerful figures in the capital. From then until 1221 was the age of **rule by cloistered emperors** 院政.

SOCIAL HISTORY: LIFE OF THE HEIAN ARISTOCRACY

By almost any estimate, the Heian-period aristocracy comprised less than one percent of the entire population of Japan, and it was under ten percent of the population even within Kyôto. There remains a large quantity of literature from the Heian period, nearly all of which is by the aristocracy, for the aristocracy, and about the aristocracy. We know next to nothing about the lifestyles, beliefs and customs of the majority of the people in Japan at the time. We therefore focus our attention only on aristocratic life. But we can be nearly certain that life among the peasants and other ordinary people at the time was much different. Most of the information for this section can be found in Ivan Morris' excellent study of Heian aristocratic life, *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan.*



One variety of female aristocratic costume

Suppose we were to ask a random sample of well-educated U.S. citizens about typical "Japanese characteristics," or "things Japanese." Many respondents would probably come up with items such as the following:

Culture in General: tea ceremony, *nô* and *kabuki* drama, *haiku* poems, polychrome *ukiyoe* prints, *shamisen* music, flower arrangement, miniature landscapes.

Society: samurai warriors with their two swords, *geisha.*

Realm of Ideas: Zen Buddhism, *bushidô* (idealized samurai ethic), conflicting demands of duty and human affection, permissive attitude toward suicide.

Domestic Architecture: *tatami* (woven straw mats) as ordinary floor covering, large communal baths, *tokonoma* alcoves in houses.

Food: raw fish, tempura, sukiyaki, soy sauce.[5]

Although this list is somewhat stereotypical, the items on it are indeed aspects of Japanese culture, although a few, like the samurai and the *ukiyoe* prints, are no longer living parts of Japanese culture. One hundred years ago, this list would still have been acceptable. Even three hundred years ago, we could find all the items on the list as part of Japanese culture. But what about during the Heian period? Interestingly, *none* of the items on the list were important parts of Japanese culture during the Heian period, and the vast majority did not even exist at that time (so much for the stereotype of an unchanging Japan).

Social Organization and Occupations

Heian aristocratic society was obsessed, among other things, with **rank and formal status**. The basic definition of an aristocrat was one who held court rank. There were ten basic court ranks. Each was subdivided into junior and senior grades. Ranks four through ten were further subdivided into upper and lower. There were, in other words, approximately thirty gradations in formal rank. One aristocrat might be "junior sixth rank, upper;" another might be "senior fourth rank, lower." The major division was at the fifth rank. The emperor himself appointed those of the fifth rank and above, while a government agency issued the appointments of those of the sixth through tenth ranks. Those of the top three ranks enjoyed particularly high status and benefits. These "appointments" had become mere formalities by the Heian period. What determined a person's rank was not his or her actual abilities or merit, but the rank of parents or other relatives had held. Rank, in other words, was hereditary. Furthermore, a person's rank determined the sort of government positions, in the case of males, to which he would be appointed. For males and females, rank was the major de-

[5] Ibid., p. 153.

terminant of wealth and social opportunities.

From where did the ranked aristocrats originate? Morris explains:

> Members of the High Court Nobility [top three ranks] were recruited from among junior branches of the imperial family and from the great families who had held clan titles (*kabane*) in the pre-[Taika] reform days. The Fourth and Fifth Ranks drew their original membership mainly from the lesser clans in the Yamato region and from certain distinguished foreign families that had immigrated to Japan during the previous two centuries; the remaining ranks included the heads of the minor clans, particularly those in the provinces.[6]

So the members of the highest three ranks were the descendants of the ruling Yamato confederation of clans in the Asuka period.

The holders of any of the aristocratic ranks enjoyed special legal and economic privileges. The level of privileges increased sharply for those of the fifth rank and above, and still more so for those of the third rank and above. The diagram shown here summarizes some of the benefits of aristocratic rank.

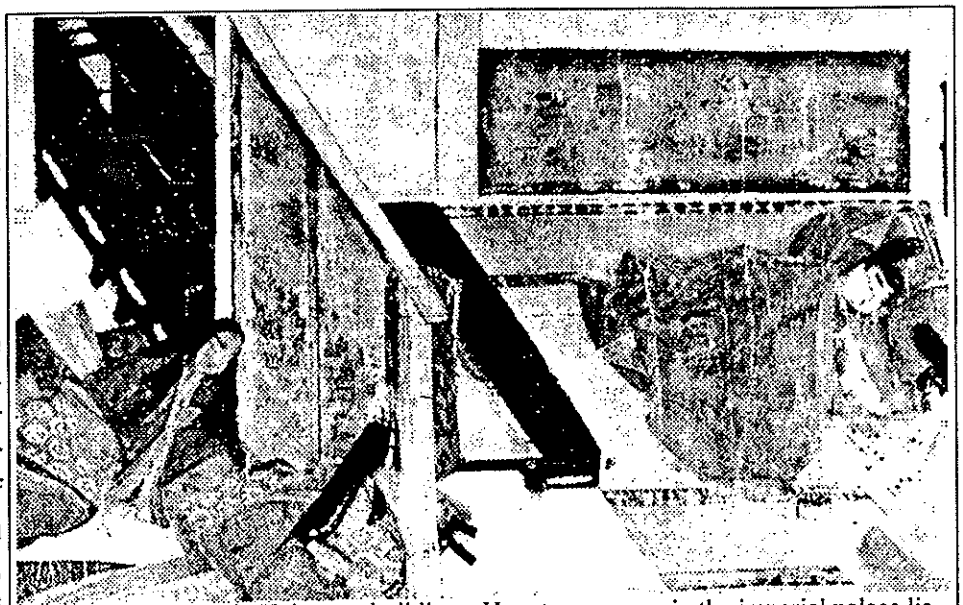
There was a link between one's rank and nearly every detail of daily life. The type of clothing one would wear under various circumstances, the type of carriage one might use, the size and location of one's residence, and even the height of one's gatepost were all a function of rank. Would all aristocrats carry the same type of fan? Of course not! Those of the first three ranks carried fans with twenty-five folds. The fourth and fifth ranks carried fans of twenty-three folds. Those of the sixth rank and below were allowed a mere twelve folds in their fans. Rank also, of course, influenced the details of human interactions.

Owing to the accident of historical circumstances, the world of the Heian aristocrats was remarkably sheltered from many of the harsh realities of life. There was no threat of invasion from abroad. Internally, there was an occasional rebellion, but the court had little difficulty convincing rival warrior bands to do any fighting that might be required. The periodic battles that resulted took place away from the capital, with little or no direct impact on Kyôto's inhabitants until the last century of the Heian period. Local governors or their agents extracted taxes and kept law and order. There was a price for this law and order, since many of these governors took every opportunity, legal or otherwise, to enrich themselves. Because it was the source of their wealth, provincial officials tended to be loyal to the imperial system from which they derived their authority. For these and other reasons, the aristocrats in the capital rarely had grave

Typical male aristocratic attire, upper ranks

[6] Ibid., p. 79, with minor modification.

matters of state with which to concern themselves.



The walls had ears in Heian-era buildings. Here two women in the imperial palace listen in on two men.

The lack of urgent business did not mean the aristocrats were idle. Nearly all male aristocrats held political office, and there was often intense competition for top positions such as Minister of the Right or Minister of the Left. Rank, of course, was the main determinant of office, but for the top posts there were always more eligible candidates (based on rank) than there were openings. Factional affiliations and back room (often bedroom) deals and politicking was the usual route to higher office. Once the Fujiwara gained control, they reserved the top government posts for themselves, but there was intense competition for these posts within the large Fujiwara family.

Theoretically, politics was a male domain during the Heian period (in contrast with the Nara period), and men held all formal ministerial offices. Private residences and public buildings, however, featured large open rooms. Thin screens of fabric divided these open spaces, and women were frequently nearby in one capacity or another, particularly in the imperial place where all the emperor's wives and female relatives had groups of ladies-in-waiting as attendants. No spatial arrangement could have been more ideal for political intrigue, particularly because, as we shall see, aristocratic men and women normally had multiple sex partners. Conversations were easy to overhear, and word traveled fast in the small, gossip-loving world of the capital. Under these circumstances, women often involved themselves in politics behind the scenes, the marriage politics of the Fujiwara clan being but one example of many.

The world of formal offices and government administration was a forest of red tape and paper-shuffling. Government activity was a matter of external ceremony and form, with no regard for administrative efficiency. Morris provides an excellent description:

> The procedure for issuing Imperial Decrees provides an example of Heian bureaucracy rampant. When the Grand Council of State have decided on a proposal, they submit it to the emperor, whose secretaries rewrite it as a State document, drafted of course in Chinese. After the emperor has read it, he automatically approves and signified this by writing the day of the month in his own hand (the year and the month having already been filled in by the secretaries). The draft is then sent to the Ministry of Central Affairs. The minister makes a Report of Acknowledgment to the emperor. He then examines the document and (approval being

> automatic) inscribes the Chinese character for 'Proclaim' under his official title. The next stop is the office of the Senior Assistant Minister, who, after the usual delays, writes the character for 'Received'. The same procedure is followed by the Junior Assistant Minister, except that he writes the character 'Perform.' Now the draft goes to the Scribes' Office, where it is copied. The document is then sent back to the Grand Council of State, where the Major Counsellor makes a Report of Acknowledgment. Next the emperor sees the document; this time he writes the character 'Approved' and returns it to the Great Council. Here the document is thoroughly scrutinized and, if no stylistic mistakes are found, it is sent back to the Scribes' Office for multi-copying. Each copy is signed jointly by the Prime Minister and all other officials who are concerned with the matter in hand, and then sent to the palace for the ceremony of affixing the Great Imperial Seal (*Seiin no Gi*). Now finally the decree can be promulgated. Since, as often as not, it is concerned with some such question as the type of head-dress hat an official of the Third Rank may wear at court, we can judge the prodigious waste of time and effort involved in government procedure.[7]

When viewed out of context, this sort of activity may seem a waste of time by today's standards. In the contexts of the values of Heian aristocratic society, however, proper dress was a major issue, as we see below. Form was as important, or more so, than content—if we can even make such a distinction. Of course, the lack of urgent problems described above was also a major reason Heian government worked the way it did.

The Rule of Taste and the Cult of Beauty

The tendency for ceremony to dominate affairs of government was but one aspect of a broader feature of Heian aristocratic society. According to historian George Sansom:

> The most striking feature of the aristocratic society of the Heian capital was its aesthetic quality. It is true that it was a society composed of a small number of especially favoured people, but it is none the less remarkable that, even in its emptiest follies, it was moved by considerations of refinement and governed by a rule of taste.[8]

Sansom hit the nail on the head with the phrase "**rule of taste**," which we should contrast with the rule of law (civil or moral) that prevails in many societies. In Heian Japan, subtle rules of aesthetic refinement were the major regulators of aristocratic behavior. Negotiating these rules with skill was the primary challenge for an aristocrat desirous of the coveted goal of a good reputation.

What constituted good taste? That which was *beautiful* constituted good taste. Heian aristocrats made a **cult** out **of beauty**. Of course, what a Heian aristocrat might consider beautiful, someone in different cultural circumstances might consider ugly. In terms of personal appearance, for example, Heian aristocrats regarded white teeth as ugly, particularly for women. "They look just like peeled caterpillars" wrote one critic of a woman who refused to blacken her teeth. To blacken their teeth Heian women applied

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[7] Ibid., p. 85.
[8] George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1963, 1974), p. 178.

a sticky black dye to their teeth so that their mouths resembled a dark, toothless oval when open. This particular custom of blackening the teeth (*haguro* 歯黒) persisted until the 1870s among certain elite groups of Japanese women.

Professional entertainer (*geisha*) with blackened teeth, c. 1880

There were many other **aspects of a beautiful personal appearance**. Both men and women prized a rounded, plump figure. The face in particular would ideally have been round and puffy. Small eyes were ideal for both sexes, as was powdery white skin. Aristocrats with dark complexions, both men and women, frequently had to apply makeup to appear more pale. Even most capital military officers, many of whom were civilian aristocrats with no military training at all, would not have dared appear in public on formal occasions without makeup.

The majority of Japanese at the time must have appeared quite the opposite of the aristocrats. Peasants and laborers engaged in demanding physical work out of doors. Food was often scarce. These conditions tended to produce lean physiques and dark skin. It seems that in nearly all human societies, beauty and wealth go hand-in-hand. In the Heian period, the plump, pale courtier was obviously someone of privilege, wealth, and leisure. Such a person had the time and resources to attend to her or his appearance.

Ideal female appearance: a river deity depicted as a ravishing beauty of the Heian period.

In today's society, both in this country and Japan, conditions of life for the average person tend to produce exactly what was beautiful in the Heian period: a plump, pale appearance. Society, therefore, no longer regards such an appearance as beautiful or glamorous. A lean, dark appearance is now a signal of sufficient wealth and leisure time to join and use exercise facilities, spend time at the beach or in tanning booths, and so forth. Standards of personal beauty are largely arbitrary, in that there does not seem to be any single ideal set of criteria that has held stable across time, culture and historical circumstance. But this rule is widely applicable: it is and has been the case that societies regard as personally beautiful an appearance that requires wealth, effort, and therefore leisure time to attain.

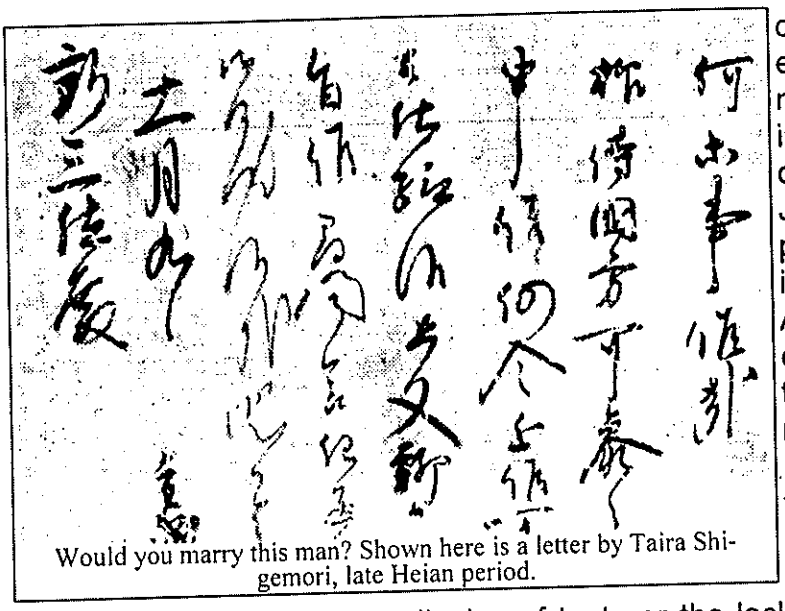
There were still other standards of personal beauty. For women, nature unfortunately put eyebrows in the wrong place. To correct this problem, women plucked out their eyebrows and painted them back on, usually quite thick, an inch or so above their original location, thereby beautifying the face. Also, extremely long hair—longer than one's own body—was *de rigueur* for an attractive Heian woman. Washing such hair was an all-day affair requiring the assistance of numerous attendants. Again, notice the connection with wealth and leisure.


Ideal male beauty: a river deity as a handsome Heian courtier.

Standards of male beauty were quite similar to those for females. Although men did not shave their eyebrows, idealized depictions of handsome men show the eyebrows high on the forehead. Men would ideally have a thin mustache and/or a thin tuft of beard at the chin. Large quantities of facial hair, however, detracted substantially from one's attractiveness. Looking at art of the Heian period, or even art of later periods depicting scenes of Heian courtly life, it is sometimes difficult to tell males from females from the face alone. The merging of male and female features is particularly apparent in depictions of children and people in their teenage years.


Rubens, *Three Graces*. Round and plump was once the ideal for female beauty in Europe, in part, as in Heian Japan, because such an appearance was connected with wealth and bounty. There is also a major difference: Heian aristocrats regarded nudity as ugly. even grotesque. Celebrating the male or female nude form in art would have been inconceivable to them—not for moral reasons, but for aesthetic ones.

Heian aristocrats regarded the nude body as disgustingly ugly. People of taste always adorned themselves with multiple layers of clothing. This clothing was inseparable from the body itself. It provided all manner of possibilities both to enhance the taste and beauty of one's appearance and to detract from it. First, clothing had to conform to a person's rank. Other key considerations included social situations (inside one's house, visiting a temple, participating in a court ceremony, etc.), prevailing weather, and the current season. Women commonly wore five or six layers of robes, the most crucial part of which was the sleeves. Each sleeve would be of a slightly different length and color, resulting in multi-


Would you marry this man? Shown here is a letter by Taira Shigemori, late Heian period.

colored bands of fabric at the ends of the arms. The arrangement of these colors was terribly important for conveying a sense of refinement and good taste. Just one color being a little too pale or a little to bright could easily become a point of criticism. Appearing in colors that blatantly clashed or were inappropriate for the season could ruin a person's reputation.

There was much more to the rule of taste and the cult of beauty than one's physical appearance. All aspects of behavior were opportunities for the display of taste or the lack thereof. Walking, talking, eating, playing music—and of course, all aristocrats played music—and more were all opportunities for artistic display. Most important of all was a person's handwriting. Careers were made and lost over the quality of one's writing. Love affairs began and ended similarly. As Morris points out regarding the **importance of handwriting**, "A fine hand was probably the most important single mark of a 'good' person, and it came close to being regarded as a moral virtue."[9]

Let us examine two examples of the importance of handwriting from the literature of the time. The first is from Sei Shônagon's 清少納言 ***Pillow Book*** (*Makura no sôshi* 枕の草子) Sei Shônagon was a lady-in-waiting of a former empress (principal wife of an emperor now retired) and was herself of aristocratic rank. Her *Pillow Book*, thus named because she kept it under her pillow, is a diary-like account of thoughts and events in her life. The following excerpt refers to Fujiwara no Nobutsune, an official in the Ministry of Ceremony:

> One day when Nobutsune was serving as Intendant in the Office of Palace Works he sent a sketch to one of the craftsmen explaining how a certain piece of work should be done. 'Kindly execute it in this fashion,' he added in Chinese characters. I happened to notice the piece of paper and it was the most preposterous writing I had ever seen. Next to his message I wrote, 'If you do the work in this style, you will certainly produce something odd.' The document found its way to the Imperial apartments and everyone who saw it was greatly amused. Nobutsune was furious and after this held a grudge against me.[10]

In a scene from the lengthy novel, ***Tale of Genji*** (*Genji monogatari* 源氏物語) there is a scene in which Prince Genji, the protagonist, and Lady Murasaki, Genji's lover, are lying together in her room. Murasaki is worried because a thirteen-year-old princess, Nyosan, has recently become Genji's official wife. While Genji and Murasaki are together, a letter from the young princess arrives. Murasaki is particularly anxious to see

[9] Morris, *Shining Prince*, p. 195.
[10] Quoted in Ibid., p. 196.

the handwriting, for this will determine the fate of all concerned. When reading the letter, Genji allows Murasaki to catch a glimpse of it:

> Murasaki's first glance told her that it was indeed a childish production. She wondered how anyone could have reached such an age without developing a more polished style. But she pretended not to have noticed and made no comment. Genji also kept silent. If the letter had come from anyone else, he would certainly have whispered something about the writing, but he felt sorry for the girl and simply said [to Murasaki], 'Well now, you see that you have nothing to worry about.'[11]

Wife or not, the "Shining Prince," as Genji was known, would have nothing romantically to do with someone whose handwriting was not up to par. Among the Heian aristocracy, handwriting was a direct extension of a person's character, spirit and personality.

Heian aristocrats spent little time and energy writing scholarly essays and the like. The majority of what they wrote was **poetry**, and sometimes poems even substituted for memoranda in government offices. Nearly any event or occasion, public or private, called for rounds of poetry. A person deficient in poetic skills would have been at a serious disadvantage in Heian society. In their poems, the aristocrats delighted in obscure references and plays on words. Poetry was the ideal medium for communicating in a delicate, refined and indirect way. Taking a specific example, one night Murasaki Shikibu 紫式部, author of the *Tale of Genji,* was awakened by a man tapping on the shutter of her bedroom—a sure sign of someone wanting to gain admittance. Suspecting who it might be, and wanting to have nothing to do with him, she lay still and did not respond. The next morning, she received the following poem (brought by messenger, as was typical) from the powerful and lecherous Fujiwara Michinaga 藤原道長, the man who had been tapping on the shutter the night before:

How sad for him who stands the whole night long

Knocking on your cedar door

Tap-tap-tap like the cry of the kuina bird.

The reply to such a poem should ideally follow up on the image presented in the initial verse, the *kuina* (水鶏 or 秧鶏) bird (a small water-rail) in this case. Murasaki answered:

Sadder for her who had answered the kuina's tap,

For it was no innocent bird who stood there knocking on the door.[12]

One can imagine that such an exchange might be carried out in a much less refined fashion today.

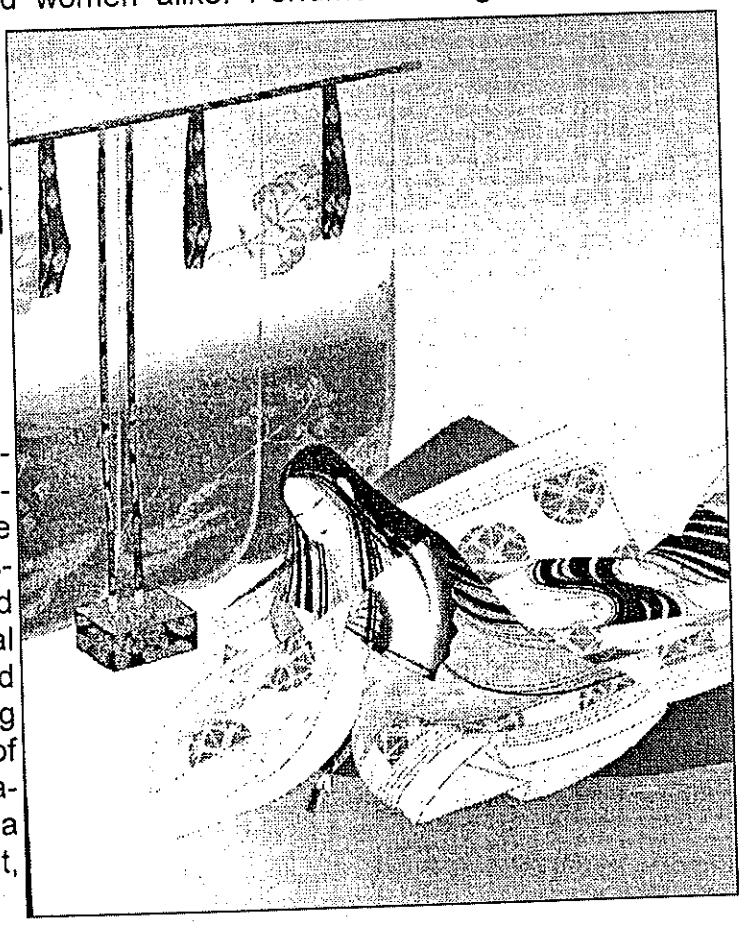
With such a stress on writing and poetry, one might think that scholarship was an important part of the life of Heian aristocrats, as it would have been for their Tang and Song Chinese counterparts. In fact, however, this was not the case. Unlike their Chinese counterparts, Japanese aristocrats generally had little interest in moral philosophy or the systematic study of any body of theoretical knowledge. There was a central university, where Chinese classics formed the main curriculum. But few aristocrats studied there, and its professors were regarded as laughably odd and out of place (in one pas-

[11] Quoted in Ibid., pp. 196-197.
[12] Quoted in Ibid., p. 77.


Heian-era parking lot

sage from the *Tale of Genji,* a number of young aristocrats cannot contain their laughter upon seeing a group of professors, clad in "ill-fitting robes," perform an induction ceremony at the university). Poetry, painting, music, calligraphy and the like comprised the educational training of most aristocrats, which private tutors usually directed. Men also had to learn classical Chinese composition, through which process they also gained a modest familiarity with the major works of Chinese literature such as the Confucian *Analects.* Some women also learned classical Chinese but were under no pressure to do so.

Aristocratic education included some subjects that today we might find hard to imagine. Although in later ages, frequent bathing became part of Japanese culture at all levels, Heian nobles took baths only rarely. In such a context, perfume became a valuable commodity, liberally applied to mask odor. Perfume mixing, therefore, was an important aristocratic skill for men and women alike. Perfume making contests were common, and, in the *Tale of Genji,* Prince Genji was a skilled perfume mixer. Some common ingredients in perfumes of the time included aloes, cinnamon, ground conch shell, Indian resin, musk, sweet pine, tropical tulip, cloves, and white gum.[13]



Relations Between Women and Men

We have already seen something of the nature of relations between women and men from the passages above. Heian period aristocrats spent a great deal of time and energy pursuing romantic and sexual adventures. Virginity was not prized among either sex. Indeed, remaining a virgin for long was a sure sign of possession by demons. Sexual relations in the Heian period were a mixture of promiscuity and restraint,

[13] See Ibid., p. 205, note 34.

the restraint deriving not from moral codes or legal sanctions, but from the demanding requirements of good taste. Outside of the romantic or sexual realm, men and women usually lived in different worlds and had relatively little direct contact (although we should remember that the romantic and sexual lives of Heian aristocrats were closely connected with other matters such as politics). Let us look more closely at the **lives of aristocratic women**.

Women of aristocratic status spent most of their time as adults sitting in their residences. As mentioned above, these residences generally had a few very large open rooms. Portable screens made of fabric and curtains were the major means of dividing these rooms. With servants and attendants to do all the work, including taking care of children, there were relatively few pressing matters requiring attention. **Boredom** was a problem for many aristocratic women as they sat behind screens with their attendants. Men, by contrast, could always busy themselves with the duties of their political offices.

This boredom was a major reason so many aristocratic women turned their attention to the literary arts, a topic we take up in the next section. Excursions to various places, especially to Buddhist temples, were another diversion. According to Morris:

> For Genji and his circle, the Buddhist church had many diverse functions. In the first place, the numerous temples surrounding the capital offered an opportunity for those excursions and pilgrimages that were one of the main distractions in their somewhat uneventful lives. For women in particular, these visits provided an occasional escape from the claustrophobic confines of their crepuscular houses and an opportunity to glimpse, if only through the heavy silk hangings of their ox-drawn carriages, the wide bright world outside. . . . Visits and retreats to outlying temples also served a very secular purpose in the gallant world of Heian, since they provided an ideal pretext for trysts or adventures of one kind or another; and it appears that the priests of the more fashionable temples were quite prepared to accommodate their aristocratic clients in this respect.[14]

In her *Pillow Book*, Sei Shônagon explained the social diversions of visiting Buddhist temples in some detail. For example:

> A preacher should be good-looking. For, if we are properly to understand the worthy sentiments of his sermon, we must keep our eyes fixed on him while he speaks; by looking away we may forget to listen. Accordingly an ugly preacher may be a source of sin . . .
>
> [. . .]
>
> [A] couple of gentlemen who have not met for some time run into each other in the temple, and great is their surprise. They sit down together and chat away, nodding their heads, exchanging funny stories and opening their fans wide so that they could hold them in front of their faces and laugh more freely. They toy with their elegantly decorated rosaries[15] and, glancing from side to side, criticize some defect they have noticed in one of the carriages and praise the elegance of another. . . . Meanwhile, of course, they pay not the slightest attention to the service that is going on.[16]

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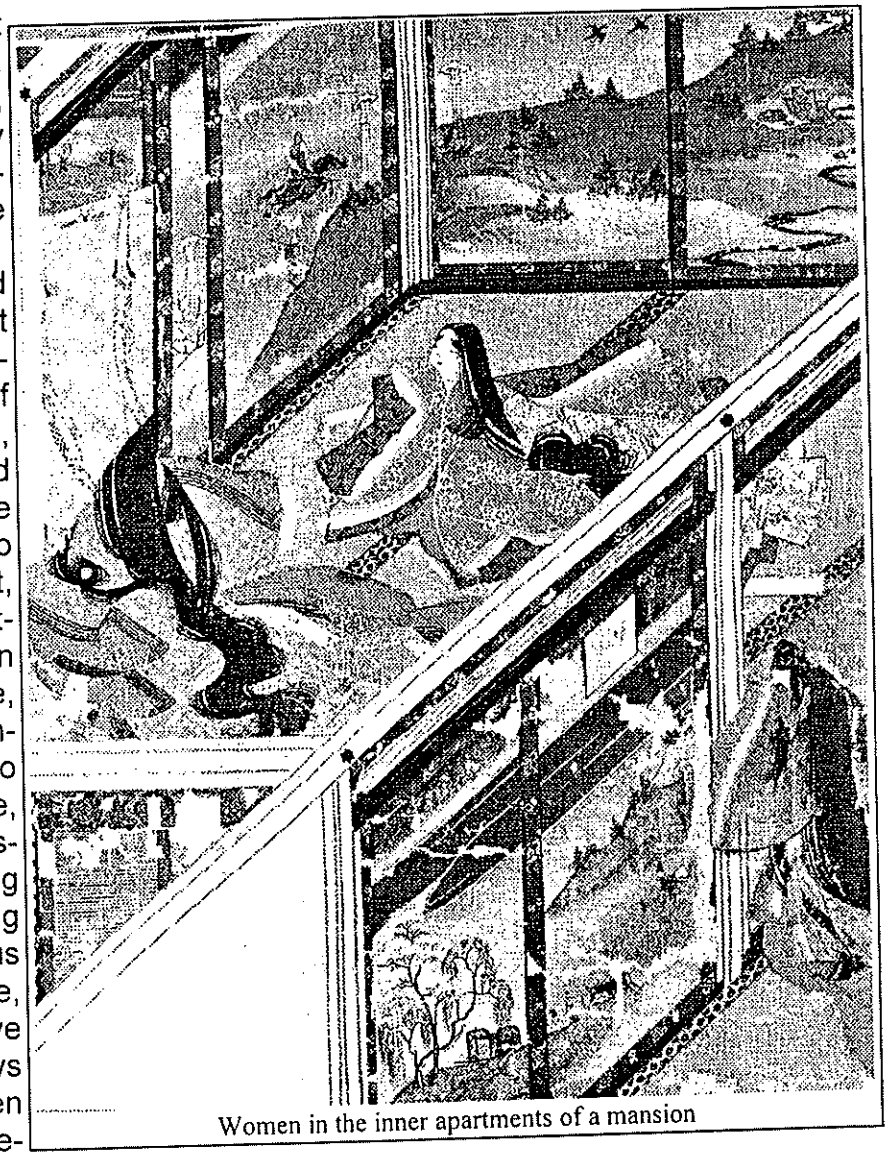
[14] Ibid., p. 119.
[15] These rosaries looked quite similar to those used in Catholicism, but with fewer beads.
[16] Quoted in Ibid., pp. 119-120.

Although women normally remained in their carriages during Buddhist services, with some care in the placement of the carriages there was ample opportunity for the men and women in attendance to have a look at each other. Such looks might later lead to the arrival of a poem by one of the men at attendance, which in turn might lead to a preliminary visit by him . . . and so forth.

Excursions had many drawbacks, however, the main one being the bumpy ride in an ox cart traveling at about two miles per hour. Most women stayed at home most of the time. There, visits from men were another possibility for dealing with boredom.

We should pause here to point out that marriage for Heian aristocrats did not normally mean men and women living together in close quarters as it typically does today. Married women often remained in the home of their parents, and these homes were usually large estates containing numerous rooms and apartments. Sometimes women did move to the residence of their husband but usually only in their later years. Even then, they might not live in close proximity to him. A newly-married woman, therefore, would usually await visits from her husband, or, perhaps, someone else.

Men were allowed multiple wives, though not without socially-imposed restrictions (consideration of the rank of the two people, for example). In theory and by law, married women were expected to remain faithful to a single husband. In fact, however, multiple sex partners for married women were also acceptable, though any such relationships had to conform to standards of good taste, which included being discreet, or at least going through the motions of being discreet. A quiet rendezvous at a remote Buddhist temple, for example, would have been ideal, if not always practical. In general, men were freer in their sexual re-



Women in the inner apartments of a mansion

A rare depiction of childbirth from the Heian period. The few depictions we have today are all of common people, since the physical details of childbirth would have been too crude for visual or verbal depiction among tasteful aristocrats. It seems that women gave birth in an upright, seated position.

lations than women, but aristocratic women in the Heian period were not nearly as restricted in this regard as were their Chinese counterparts or elite women in later ages in Japan.

Suppose a man happened to notice the outline of a woman as she rode in a carriage, found the carriage particularly tasteful (carriages were status symbols and tools for displaying one's tastes, like automobiles today can be), and thought he might like to meet her. He would find out where she lived and send a poem. Great care would go into this short three or so lines of verse. The handwriting must be perfect, of course. The content should convey the man's intentions in an elegant, indirect way. The type of paper must be selected with care and perfumed with just the right scent. It must be folded properly and put into a tasteful envelope, to which a sprig of some tree branch or flower would be attached—which type would depend on season and circumstances. When the woman received the poem, all of these considerations and more would be on her mind as she tried to size up the man's degree of refinement and good taste.

If she were unmarried, or married but lonesome and/or adventurous, and was duly impressed with the man's poem, she might compose her own, suggesting that he pay a formal visit. Now she would carefully attend to all the matters described above in an attempt to impress him with her refinement and good taste.

Attendants would announce the man's arrival and lead him onto an exterior room where the woman would sit behind a screen. Ideally, the screen would be sufficiently thin that he could vaguely see her outline while sitting on the other side. Here, they would chat and perhaps exchange poems. Usually, that would be all.

If both parties wanted to deepen the relationship, they would drop sufficient hints in the obligatory exchange of poems that would take place after the man's visit. She might, for example, suggest he visit on a certain night. Assuming no significant complications, they would spend the night together. If others heard or saw him enter her chambers, they would probably pretend nothing had happened, but would gossip later. For real secrecy, a remote place away from the residence would be better. In any event, the man would leave with the rising sun, as was customary. As soon as he returned to his mansion, he would ordinarily send a poem or letter, and she would reply. If he should fail to send one, or if his partner would not reply, this would be a definite sign the relationship was over, though being so blunt would suggest a lack of taste. Based on the poems and letters, the relationship would end or continue.

What did they actually do while together? Of course, they had sexual intercourse at some point, but we know next to nothing about the details of sexual acts in mid-Heian times. Despite all the vast writing on the subject of romance and sex, the *physical* aspect of the act itself seemed to have attracted little attention or interest. Owing to the

strong dislike of the nude body, we can probably guess that most couples had sex while still wearing at least some clothes. Beyond that, we can only imagine. It was the complex courtship rituals leading up to sex, the complex rituals following it, and the aesthetic experiences connected with it—but not the copulation itself—that Heian aristocrats found appealing.

Here is Sei Shônangon's idea of an undesirable partner for the night, from the chapter, "Hateful Things" in the *Pillow Book:*

> A lover who is leaving one at dawn announces that he has to find his fan and paper.
>
> 'I know I put them here somewhere last night,' he says. Since it is pitch dark, he gropes about the room bumping into the furniture and muttering, 'Strange! Where on earth can they be?'
>
> Finally he discovers the objects. He sticks the paper into the breast of his robe with a great rustling sound; then he snaps open his fan and starts flapping away with it. Only now is he ready to take his leave. What charmless behavior! 'Hateful' is really an understatement.[17]

On the other hand, Sei also described her idea of the perfect lover. What follows is only the first of many paragraphs describing the (imagined) man's actions in minute detail:

> Being of an adventurous nature, he has still not married, and now at dawn he returns to his bachelor quarters, having spent the night in some amorous adventure. Though he still looks sleepy, he immediately draws his inkstone to him and, after having carefully rubbed some ink on it, starts to write his next-morning letter. He does not let his brush run down the paper in a careless scrawl, but puts himself heart and soul into the calligraphy. What a charming figure he makes as he sits there by himself in an easy posture, with his robe falling slightly open! It is a plain unlined robe of pure white, and over it he wears a cloak of yellow rose or crimson. As he finishes his letter, he notices that the white robe is still damp from the dew, and for a while he gazes at it fondly.[18]

Notice there is no description of this handsome, charming man's physical body. The closest one gets is a description of his open robe. We find female authors describing handsome or ideal men frequently in Heian literature, and the descriptions are nearly all like that given here.

It is important to keep things in perspective. Yes, sexual relations between men and women were relatively free at this time in Japan's history, but the rules of taste did impose all manner of restrictions. Inappropriate sexual relations could lead to serious consequences such as a demotion in political office or even a period of exile outside the capital (a severe punishment for Heian aristocrats). Gossip about a woman's sex life could eventually cause her such grief that she would become a Buddhist nun—or even commit suicide in rare cases. Loneliness, jealousy, and insecurity were all part of the world of Heian-period sex, as they probably are and have been in any society. The Heian capital was not a sexual paradise.

It is interesting to examine differing interpretations of Heian period life by later historians, Japanese and non-Japanese. The modern, pre-Pacific War Japanese state

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[17] Quoted in Ibid., pp. 243-244.
[18] Quoted in Ibid., pp. 244-245.

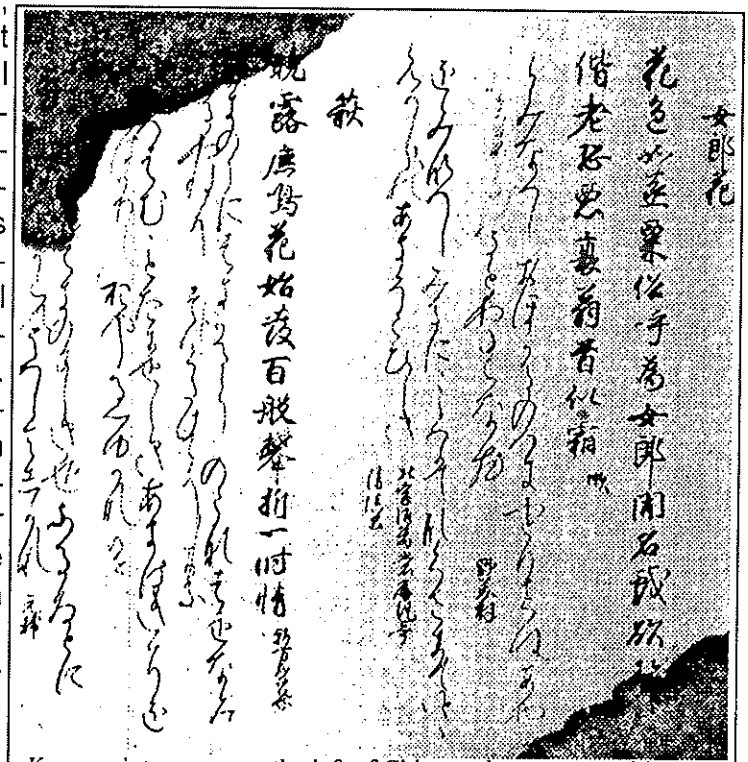
promoted a rigid code of morality, sexual and otherwise, in its school system. It took a dim view, therefore, of the Heian aristocrats' sex lives as well as much of the literature of the time (often called "pornographic"). Likewise, the dour, humorless Scottish minister James Murdoch wrote a multi-volume history of Japan in the 1930s and 40s. His interpretation of Japanese history sometimes reads like a sermon:

> Before a deftly turned Tanka [short poem], the tradition was that female coyness, if not chastity, was bound to yield as readily as the walls of Jericho fell flat before the blasts of the priestly trumpets and the shouts of the Israelitish people, while even the highest Ministers were apt to set infinitely more store by a reputation as an arbiter of taste in the world of *belles-lettres* and polite accomplishments than by renown as a great and successful administrator of the affairs of the nation.[19]

In this single, massive sentence, Rev. Murdoch links love of literary refinement with a lack of female coyness, or even (heaven forbid!) chastity, as well as lack of desire on the part of men to be great government officials. There is little to admire in the rule of taste, in his view at least. We shall return to the matter of interpreting the Heian period below.

Literature and Buddhism

The Heian period was a time of great accomplishments in the literary arts. Murasaki Shikibu produced the world's first novel, *The Tale of Genji.* Other aristocratic writers produced a wealth of prose and poetry, much of which has stood the test of time and remains great world literature, available in most major languages. It was women who produced nearly all of this great literature. Most of the literature men produced was of mediocre quality and has long been forgotten. There is a clear reason for this quality gap. Men generally wrote literature in a foreign language, classical Chinese, of which the average aristocrat had a less than perfect grasp. Women, on the other hand, wrote literature in their native language. Men pompously wrote poor classical Chinese prose; women sat behind their screens and wrote great Japanese prose. When it came to poetry, men wrote in both Chinese and Japanese.



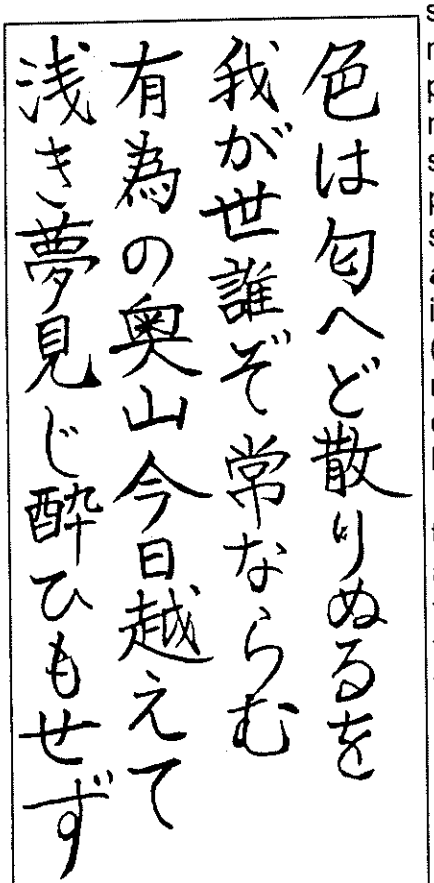
Kana script appears to the left of Chinese characters on this page from an 11th century anthology of verse in both Chinese and Japanese (『雲紙本和漢朗詠集』より)

One key development that encouraged literary production was the ***kana*** 仮名 **script**. *Kana* is a simple alphabet (technically, a syllabary) consisting of approximately fifty charac-

[19] Quoted in Ibid., p. 193, with minor modification.

ters. Two forms of *kana* developed, one straight and angular (similar to printed Roman script), the other a rounded, cursive style. *Kana* developed from Chinese characters. The cursive form of *kana* (平仮名 in Chinese characters, ひらがな in the cursive form of k*ana*) developed by writing the characters in a fast, abbreviated manner. Here are two examples. "*Ho*" ほ derived from a cursive form of the Chinese character 保; "*chi*" ち derived from a cursive form of the Chinese character 知. The angular, "printed" style of *kana* (片仮名 in Chinese characters, カタカナ in the angular style of *kana*) derived from a single part of a Chinese character. For example, "*ri*" リ came from the right side of the Chinese character 利; "*ho*" ホ came from the bottom right part of the Chinese character 保 (compare with the angular "*ho*" above). Ordinary Japanese writing today involves a complex mixture of Chinese characters and the two forms of *kana*. Writing in Japanese was simpler in Heian times. It was all in *kana,* with perhaps just an occasional Chinese character here or there.

Heian aristocratic literature was about the lifestyles and sensibilities of Heian aristocrats, particularly, of course, aristocratic women. This literature, whether poetry or prose, was concerned with aesthetics and taste, as we have already seen in a variety of contexts. But there was a darker side to Heian literature in the form of a deep-seated sense of anxiety. The cause of this anxiety was the impermanence of the world. A **sense of impermanence** 無常感 permeated much Heian-period literature. Closely connected with this sense of impermanence was a poignant sense of the pathos associated with the transformation and passing away of things—blossoms, human beauty, life itself. This poignant sense of pathos is called ***mono no aware*** 物の哀れ, which, coincidentally, might be rendered into a rough English translation as "an awareness of things" (*mono* = "thing[s]").[20] A sharp sensitivity to the impermanence of the world, and the anxiety that impermanence creates for humans, is a major characteristic of middle and late Heian-period literature.


色は匂へど散りぬるを
我が世誰ぞ常ならむ
有為の奥山今日越えて
浅き夢見じ酔ひもせず

The *Iroha* Poem

As you might have thought, this development was the result of Buddhism. Most Heian-period writers did *not* appear to have had a sophisticated understanding of the fine points of Buddhism (the literature, drama, and art of the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, however, *does* reflect a sophisticated understanding of Buddhism, and we explore the topics of Buddhism and the literary arts in detail in HIST 415, Traditional Japan). Heian literature tends to reflect a general understanding of the basic teachings of Buddhism (recall, for example, the Four Noble Truths). Perhaps the best example of Buddhism in Heian literature is the *Iroha* poem, a verse that uses each of the *kana* one

[20] One guide to classical Japanese literature provides the following basic definition: "The deep feelings inherent in, or felt from the world and experiences of it. . . . [it] later [late Heian] came to designate sadder, even tragic feelings." Earl Miner, Hiroko Odagiri, and Robert E. Morrell, *The Princeton Companion to Classical Japanese Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 290.

time. It was an aid for children in memorizing the *kana* but also contains a Buddhist message:

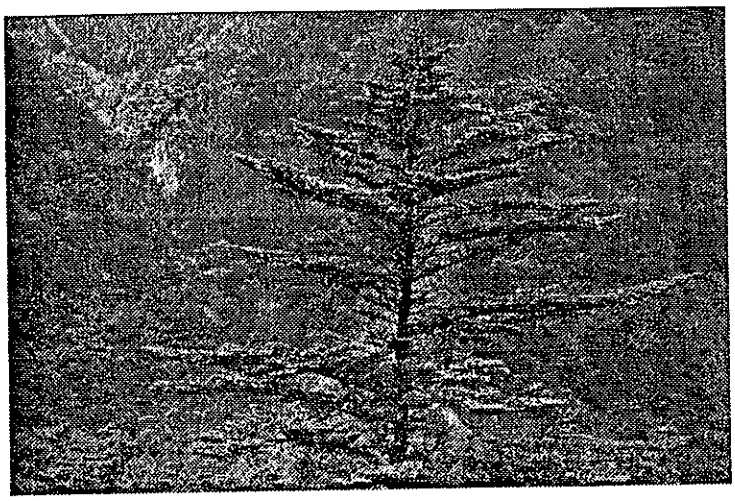
Iroha nioedo, chirinuruwo いろはにほへど、ちりぬるを
Though I smell the colorful blossoms, they are doomed to scatter
Wagayo tarezo tsunenaran わがよたれぞ、つねならむ
Who in this world exists forever?
Ui no okuyama kyô koete うゐのおくやまけふこえて
Today I cross over the deep mountains of existence
Asaki yume miji, emo sezu あさきゆめみじ、ゑひもせず。
I shall no longer dream shallow dreams, no longer be drunk.

The poem starts by establishing impermanence as the true state of the world and ends with the promise of enlightenment and transcendence of the cycle of willful existence (*ui* 有為, the only Buddhist technical term in the poem).

The colorful blossoms referred to in the poem are **cherry blossoms,** which became the most important metaphor in Heian-period literature. The cherry bursts forth in bloom during the spring, but the blossoms are fragile. Their peak of beauty lasts but two or three short days. At any time they are susceptible to being scattered by the wind, just as human life can end at any moment owing to disease or accident. Even under the best of circumstances, the flowers are all gone shortly after they begin to bloom. In the large picture, these frail blossoms last but for a brief moment. Cherry blossoms, and the feelings they invoked, became the ideal expression of *mono no aware* in literature.

In *Myriad Leaves,* which is relatively (but not totally) free of Buddhist influence, the cherry was of no importance as a literal or metaphoric image. Instead, the pine and the plum reigned supreme. The pine is sturdy and green year-round. The white blossoms of the plum, which appear in the cold of February, are sturdy and long-lasting. The pine and plum stood for strength and longevity. Here are two examples from *Myriad Leaves* of the pine and plum appearing as symbols of longevity and strength:

O Pine that stands
at the cavern's entrance
looking at you



is like coming face to face
with the men of ancient times.

They say the plum flowers
blossom only to fall.
But not from the branch
I tie my marker to.[21]

The sentiments expressed in these poems are nearly the opposite of Buddhist teachings.

In Heian times, although the plum and the pine continued to appear in poems, the Buddhistic cherry blossom took center stage. Here is a typical example from a collection of poetry called *Kokin wakashû* 古今和歌集:

Utsusemi no yo nimo nitaru ka うつせみの世にも似たるか
Indeed how they resemble this fleeting world of ours!
Hanasakura 花桜
The cherry blossoms.
Sakuto mishimani katsu chirinikeri さくと見しまにかつちりにけり
No sooner do we gaze at them in bloom then they have scattered.[22]

The first word, *utsusemi* means both the human world and the empty shell of a cicada, thereby reinforcing the idea that this world is a transient place without permanence or substance—just like the cherry blossoms.

Underneath the colorful, elaborate dress, the elegant cultural pursuits, the sex and romance, and other apparently pleasant aspects of life was an anxiety over the fact that none of it would last. The amorous, handsome Prince Genji, for example, eventually came to regret a life dissipated in the pursuit of empty pleasures. In a society so concerned with superficial appearances, growing old and losing one's physical beauty became a particularly horrifying prospect. Throughout most of the Heian period, this sense of dread and anxiety was subtle. During the last century of the Heian period, and throughout the following Kamakura period, it became stronger and more overt.

Interpreting the Heian Aristocrats and Their World

Interpreting Heian-period social history has been difficult for modern historians, Japanese and non-Japanese alike. Even professional historians often assume one's own current social values are "natural" and obvious. With the rise of science in recent centuries, there has been a tendency to assume the existence of *universal* human values that can be discovered by "objective" research. Questions about the ontological and epistemological status of universality and objectivity remain valid philosophical and

[21] Quoted in Levy, *Myriad Leaves*, pp. 175, 206, with minor modification.
[22] My translation of Saeki Umetomo 佐伯梅友, ed., *Kokin wakashû* (Iwanami bunko, 1981), p. 38.

practical issues. We cannot possibly deal with them, much less settle them, in these pages. There is no question, though, that many historians and students of history have been guilty of simple-minded application of present-day values to other times and places, with the assumption that these values are "natural," obvious, "objective," and universal.

Reverend Murdoch is an extreme example of such an approach, but not atypical among Europeans of his day. Here is his summary of the Heian aristocracy:

> An ever-pullulating brood of greedy, needy, frivolous dilettanti—as often as not foully licentious, utterly effeminate, incapable of any worthy achievement, but withal the polished exponents of high breeding and correct 'form'. . . . Now and then a better man did emerge; but one just man is impotent to avert the doom of an intellectual Sodom. . . . A pretty showing, indeed, these pampered minions and bepowdered poetasters might be expected to make.[23]

Murdoch *knew* what was right and wrong, natural and unnatural, and clearly Heian aristocratic society came up badly wanting when examined against such standards. Sexual life was "foully licentious." Men were "effeminate," "bepowdered poetasters." Even the "better" of them were "impotent." Had they acted like *real* men, fighting wars, perhaps, instead of mixing perfume, they might have accomplished some sort of "worthy achievement" instead of languishing in an "intellectual Sodom." If only they had had the benefit of Reverend Murdoch in their midst to set them straight!

It is precisely because its values and lifestyles were so different from those of many modern societies that we should study Heian society. Heian aristocratic culture offers an alternative view of sexuality, an alternative view of social control (the rules of taste as opposed to rule of civil or moral law), alternative views of gender roles (perfume-mixing men, a world of literature dominated by women), alternative views of standards of beauty, and so forth. Heian society had its share of problems, and none of these alternatives solved all of these problems, nor would they if applied today. While Heian period aristocratic life is not a comprehensive model of solutions for today's problems or the problems of any age, its study can help us see things differently.

We can dismiss the Heian period as an odd, alien place—or even condemn it, as did Murdoch, for failing to meet some modern-day standard. Taking Heian society and its values seriously (i.e., on their own terms),[24] however, enables us to see more of the wide range of human social possibilities. Examining the Heian period helps us realize that our current social arrangements are in large part arbitrary. They are *not* "natural" or obvious in a universal sense. The study of Heian society can help defamiliarize the present social arrangement, which is (or *should be*, I would argue) one of the major values of the study of history.

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[23] Quoted in Morris, *Shining Prince,* p. 21.

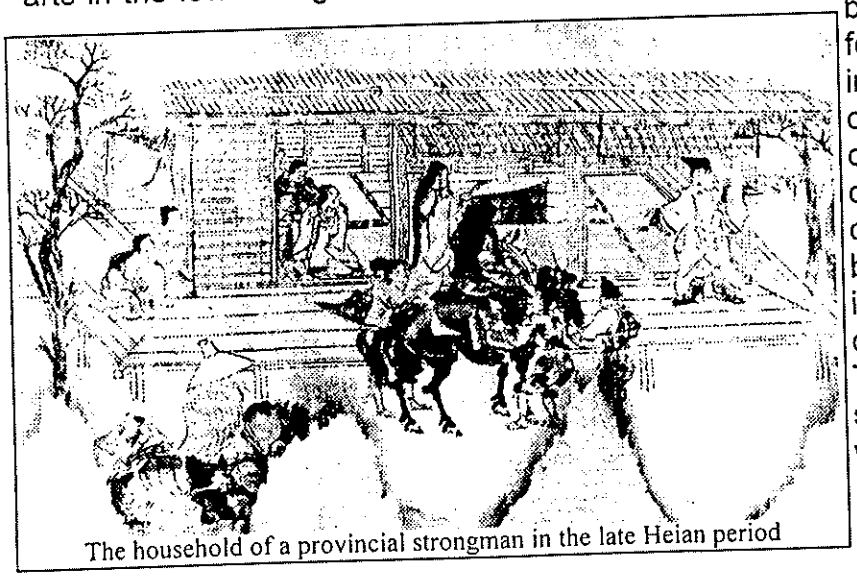
[24] I am, of course, aware that today it is impossible totally to recreate the Heian aristocratic mindset and that we inevitably filter the past through our present values, even if not as blatantly as in the example of Murdoch quoted above. Nevertheless, being self-conscious of our "presentism" and some of the reasons for it may enable us *in part* to comprehend the past on its own terms.

THE END OF THE HEIAN PERIOD

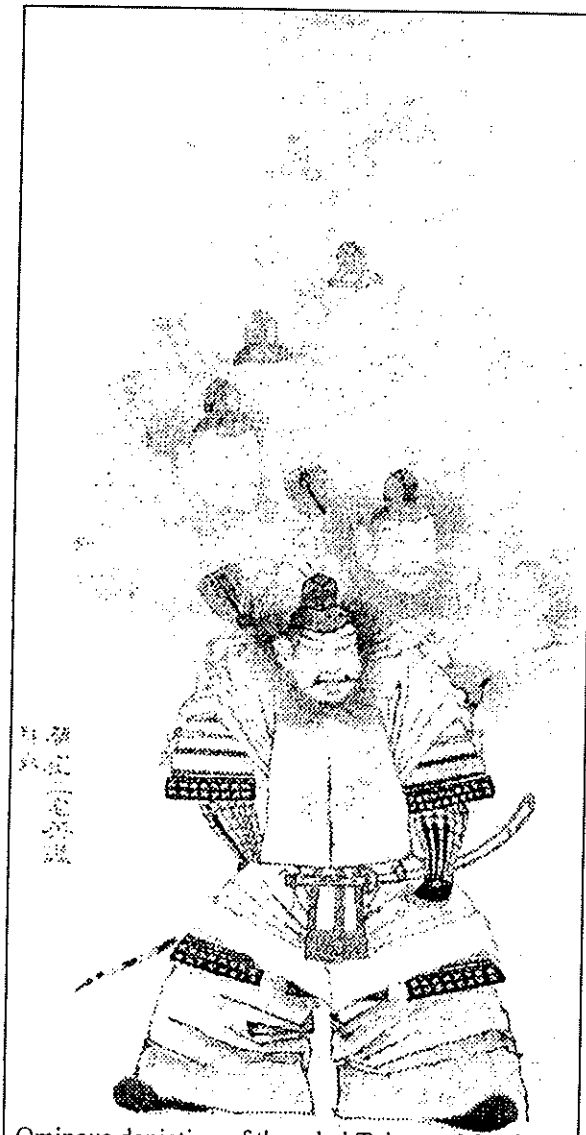
By roughly the middle of the Heian period, the world of the aristocrats in the capital had become remarkably insular and removed from life in the rest of Japan. It was almost a fairy tale world—a brilliant blossom destined to fade and scatter in the face of the winds of inevitable change, to say it in Heian Buddhist terms. Turning our attention back to the realm of politics and institutions, the cloistered emperor's court had managed to return the preponderance of political power in the capital to the imperial family; though, as always, it still had to rely on the cooperation of leading aristocratic families. The power of the capital over outlying areas, however, had been gradually fading. Filling the power gap were **local strongmen** with **bands of warriors** under their command. Many of these local strongmen had distant hereditary connections with the aristocrats in the capital, often with the imperial family.

The reason for these connections is that the imperial family continually grew too large, its members having ample time, energy and opportunities to produce many children, each of whom in turn tend to produce many children, and so forth. The numbers of imperial second cousins and other distant relatives grew too large for the government to provide for their support. Periodically, therefore, there would be a weaning out of persons a certain number of generations removed from the current emperor. Those affected lost all or most of their government support and usually had to leave the capital to seek their fortunes in the provinces. An imperial relative, a cousin, for example, would have been unimportant in the capital because such people were so numerous. Out in the provinces, however, even the most distant imperial relatives enjoyed prestige. This prestige combined with connections back in the capital enabled many of these provincial aristocrats to acquire managerial interests in *shôen*. Economic power went hand-in-hand with military power, resulting in the formation throughout Japan of bands of provincial warriors led by local aristocrats. As the generations passed, these local strongmen completely abandoned the refined manners and culture of the capital.

Back in the capital, the aristocrats regarded such provincial strongmen as uncultured boors, hardly worthy of respect. Aristocratic capital society held skill in the military arts in the lowest regard. Indeed, to suggest that another aristocrat was "skilled with a bow" or something to that effect was a common form of insult. When one or another of these bands of local warriors got out of hand, becoming outlaws or rebels, the imperial court summoned other warrior bands to attack the rebels. As incentive, the court usually offered grants of minor rank. That the court's strategy was successful, at least for a while, suggests it retained much cultural prestige in the provinces, even if it lacked its



The household of a provincial strongman in the late Heian period


Ominous depiction of the rebel Taira-no-Masakado

own military might.

One of the earliest of the rebel warriors was Taira-no-Masakado 平将門, a fifth-generation descendant of Emperor Kanmu. Masakado took over several provinces and set up a rival court in 939. The imperial court appointed a member of the Fujiwara family as general, giving him orders to attack the rebels; however, before he was able to do anything significant, several other provincial warrior groups, including other branches of the Taira family, joined forces and defeated Masakado. The major point for our purposes is that, even as early as the 900s, rivalry among the different warrior groups, not the military power of the imperial court itself, kept potentially serious challenges to the imperial system in check. This situation, of course, was not conducive to long-term stability.

By the late Heian period, two large military clans had emerged, each with branches in many provinces. One was the **Minamoto** 源 family, the other the **Taira** 平 family. Both were distant descendants of former emperors. This situation was potentially dangerous for the imperial court because, if one of these two clans were to defeat the other, there would be nothing but tradition to stop the victor from taking over all government authority. This was exactly what happened, though tradition turned out to be a powerful force, and the imperial court retained a substantial measure of importance and authority throughout the Kamakura period.

At first, the Taira family gained the upper hand, and, by the middle of the twelfth century, their leaders had taken up residence in Kyôto. They demanded high court rank and offices and got it. The Taira ruled as virtual dictators, much like the Fujiwara had done at the height of their power. Like the Fujiwara, the Taira did not eliminate the emperor or any key institution. Instead they ruled from different places within the system, their military power always an ominous force in the background. Things looked bleak for the traditional aristocrats. They regarded the Taira as barbaric warriors and were horrified at the extent of Taira power, yet they were helpless to check it.

The Minamoto clan had not, however, been totally defeated. Led by politically astute **Minamoto Yoritomo** (1149-1199) 源頼朝 and his brother Yoshitsune (1159-89) 義経, a brilliant general who met a tragic end, the Minamoto began to make a comeback. Meanwhile, at the Heian court, life went on among the aristocrats, but change was definitely in the air. One specific problem was that revenues from *shôen* were becoming less reliable as imperial power weakened. *Shôen* managers in the field began

using a variety of excuses (bad weather/crop failure, for example) as a thin cover for not delivering full quantities, or even any, of the produce normally owed to the *shiki* holders in the capital.

Taira leader Shigemori 重盛 was the most powerful person in Japan until his death in 1179.

Pressured by the Taira and by reduced revenues, the high courtly ideals of the middle Heian period began to decline, albeit gradually, in a variety of ways. In literature, for example, we see less concern with elegance and taste and increasingly detailed depictions of the more sinister sides of life. In a major novel from the twelfth century, *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語, for example, we find relatively graphic depictions of sexual acts, often with a sinister twist. In one part, a former lover turned demon has been having sexual relations with one of the emperor's wives. The emperor called in Buddhist monks to perform an exorcism, but the demon merely bided his time, waiting a few months to make everyone think the exorcism had been successful. Then one day the demon reappeared in the palace and:

> . . . the lady reappeared following the demon. They made love right in front of the Emperor and everyone else present. It was so ugly an act that it cannot possibly be described. She performed it without any restraint at all. When the demon arose, she also stood up and went back into her room. The Emperor felt that there was nothing that could be done and collapsed in tears.[1]

Lady Murasaki and Sei Shônagon would have been shocked at such coarse, unpleasant matters depicted in literature. In the late Heian period, however, the "demons" (military families?) were gaining the upper hand over the "Emperor" (imperial court and aristocrats). The once-glorious aristocratic order (the imperial wife?) was clearly starting to decline by the twelfth century.

Law and order also began to decline within the capital during the twelfth century. The great Buddhist temples surrounding Kyôto took advantage of the imperial court's weakness by sending armed bands of warrior monks into the capital. These monks would sometimes march right up to the grounds of the imperial court and present lists of demands for political favors and concessions. To avoid attack from the imperial guards, the monks often brought various Buddhist icons, relics, and other holy objects with them. Terrified of divine wrath, the guards would not dare attack or even confront the monks (in most cases, there were some exceptions). The warrior monks' terrorizing of the capital and intimidation of the imperial court was another indication of the decline of late Heian period aristocratic society.

Warfare broke out anew in the late 1170s between the regrouped Minamoto forces and the Taira armies (源平合戦 or 治承の内乱). Under the able generalship of Yoritomo's brother Yoshitsune, the Minamoto forces gradually gained the upper hand. In 1185, the Taira and Minamoto fought a final, decisive battle in which the Minamoto

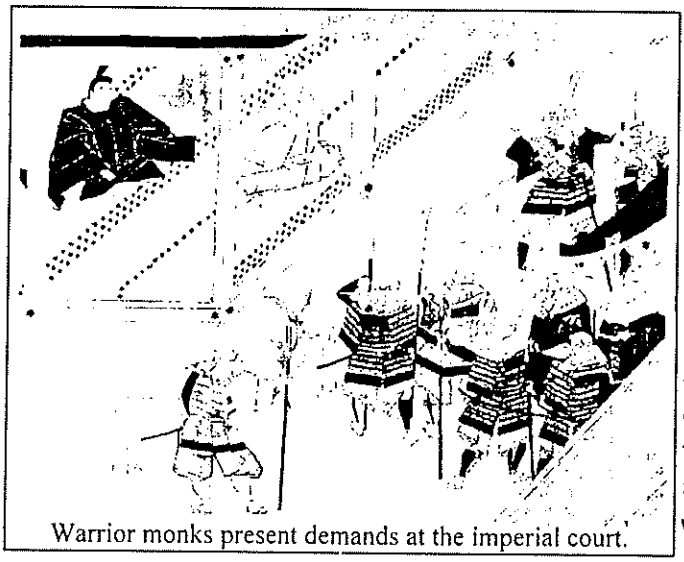
[1] Quoted in Shuichi Kato, *A History of Japanese Literature 1: The First Thousand Years* (New York: Kodansha International, 1979), p. 205.

were completely victorious. With the Taira destroyed, Minamoto Yoritomo and his warriors emerged as the single most powerful military or political force in Japan. Incidentally, to secure his own personal power, Yoritomo accused his brother Yoshitsune of treason and forced him to commit suicide. It was Yoshitsune who had done nearly all of the work of defeating the Taira, but he paid a heavy price for political naïveté. The tragic circumstances of his death after a heroic career resulted in Yoshitsune becoming a literary hero, celebrated even today.

Famous event in the career of the tragic hero Yoshitsune: the battle with the warrior-monk Benkei 弁慶(?-1189).

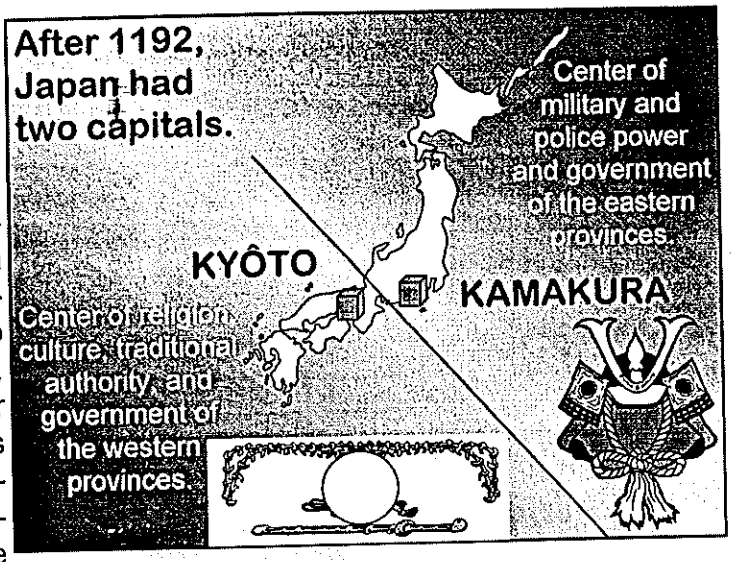
After victory over the Taira, Minamoto Yoritomo set up his headquarters in **Kamakura** 鎌倉, a city in the general vicinity of present-day Tôkyô. Yoritomo claimed to be in complete support of the imperial court, and all evidence indicates that he did respect imperial traditions. Nevertheless, because of Yoritomo's military power, talks with the imperial court were actually negotiations regarding the division of power.

In 1192, the emperor bestowed on Yoritomo the title *sei'i taishôgun* 征夷大将軍, which means "barbarian-conquering great general." Thereupon, Yoritomo established a **military government** at his base in Kamakura. His title is usually abbreviated to **shôgun**, and his military government is commonly known by its Japanese term **bakufu** 幕府, which is so common that we will use it here. The title Shôgun may sound impressive, but, being a military post, it was not high on the list of court offices. It seems that Yoritomo was willing to go without a high office or title from the imperial court, which must have pleased the aristocrats, and set up his headquarters far from Kyôto. In return, however, the court delegated substantial real authority to him.



Warrior monks present demands at the imperial court.

Initially, Yoritomo received permission from the court to appoint his own officers as *shôen* supervisors 地頭 and as provincial military governors 守護 in all of Japan's eastern provinces. This development in effect created **two different governments** in Japan, each with its own capital. Yoritomo's Bakufu ruled the east from the city of Kamakura; Go-Shirakawa 後白河, the cloistered emperor, ruled the western provinces from Kyôto. The impe-

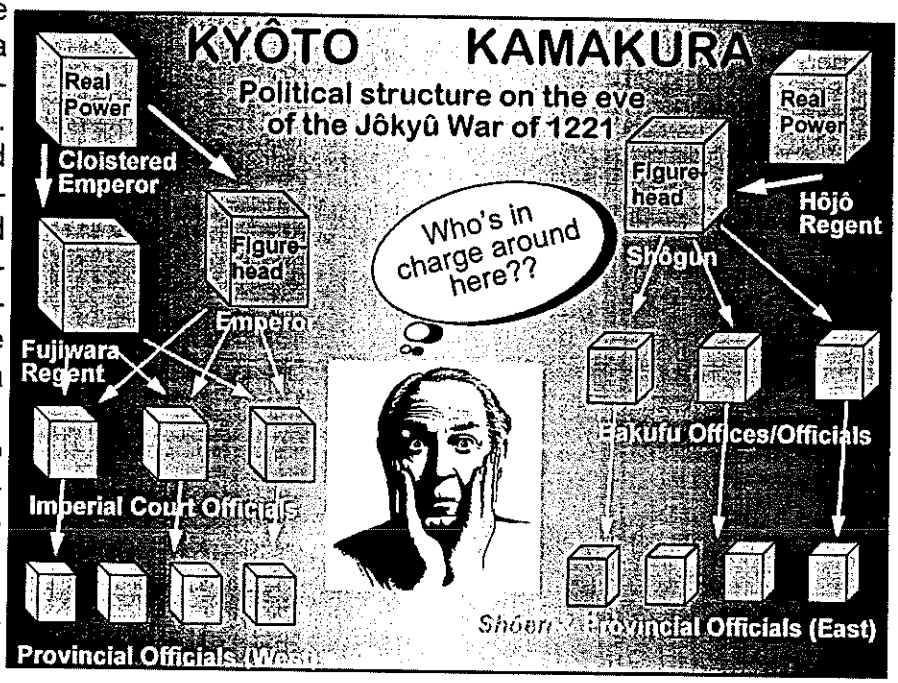


rial capital retained its prestige as the center of high culture. However much the imperial court may have disliked its forced alliance with Yoritomo, the merger actually strengthened imperial authority in the western provinces because now the imperial court had a powerful backer. Yoritomo's appointees also restored *shôen* revenues to the Kyôto aristocratic holders of *shiki,* though there was a discount to pay for the bakufu-appointed overseer. (As time went on, however, these overseers became a major problem for *shiki*-holding aristocrats, as we will see later.) The alliance between the civilian and military governments also gave legitimacy to Yoritomo's Bakufu.

Yoritomo died relatively young in an accident in 1199. At the time of his death he had two small sons and had not made arrangements for who would succeed him to leadership of the Minamoto family and the other families allied with it. Yoritomo's principal wife, Hôjô Masako 北条政子 (1157-1225), took advantage of the situation. Along with her father, Hôjô Tokimasa 北条時政 (1138-1215), she used her power over Yoritomo's sons to place members of **the Hôjô family** into key leadership positions within Kamakura's Bakufu. Gradually, the Hôjô family gained *de facto* control of the Bakufu. Yoritomo's descendants continued to become Shôgun, but they were actually puppets of a **Hôjô regent**, who ruled the Bakufu from behind the scenes. Does this arrangement sound familiar?

Around the year 1220, Japan had two governments, each ostensibly headed by someone who was in fact powerless—the emperor in Kyôto and the Shôgun in Kamakura. The real power in each case lay behind the scenes—the cloistered emperor in Kyôto and the Hôjô regent in Kamakura. This type of arrangement is still common in Japan today, whether in the realm of government or in business. It is common to find someone with a lofty title but very little real power serving as a ceremonial figurehead for one or more persons behind the scenes, often with humble titles, who actually wield power and make decisions. Government and business leaders from the United States trying to do business in Japan have often suffered for their ignorance of this phenomenon. What are some advantages to this arrangement of power? What are some disadvantages?

Until 1221, the power balance between the imperial court and the Bakufu was about even. The Bakufu, however, had greater potential power since government is ultimately based on coercive force. In the early Kamakura period, two important power struggles took place, one in each capital. In Kamakura, the brother and sister team of Hôjô Yoshitoki 北条義時 (1163-1224) and Hôjô Masako seized power from their father Tokimasa and (really) retired him. In Kyôto, Emperor **Go-Toba** 後鳥羽 "retired" at age 18 and then set to work eliminating the influence of rival court factions. By 1202, he was in complete control of his own cloistered government and was on the fast track to be-



coming master of the whole capital. Go-Toba began to compete with Kamakura in certain ways. For example, he recruited prominent Bakufu retainers for his personal guard units, thus providing an alternative source of patronage for warriors. Both the Hôjô siblings and Go-Toba were ambitious.

Go-Toba and Hôjô Masako entered into negotiations for a marriage link between the imperial court and the Bakufu. Masako's plan was for one of Go-Toba's sons to be adopted into the Minamoto family and become shôgun. Go-Toba balked at the plan after he learned of the assassination of the third shôgun, Minamoto Sanetomo 源実朝 (1192-1219), for not cooperating with the Hôjô. The bakufu responded by implied threats and other forms of pressure, and, finally, Go-Toba was forced to allow an imperial princess to marry the Hôjô-controlled shôgun. Go-Toba decided at this point to go to war and destroy the Bakufu. He quietly raised an army from imperial *shôen* and Buddhist temples and attacked suddenly in 1221. The attack initially caught the Hôjô family off guard, but they soon rallied and defeated Go-Toba's forces in what is known as the **Jôkyû War** 承久の乱. The fighting lasted approximately a month.

When word spread of the defeat of the imperial forces, lawlessness broke out in several western provinces as local warrior groups took advantage of the situation. This and similar incidents made the bakufu leaders realize that however much they might want to exact revenge on the imperial court, they still needed its authority to maintain order in the west. Therefore, the bakufu did not make radical changes in the imperial court. The changes it did make, however, were significant. After exiling Go-Toba to a remote location, the bakufu abolished the court of the cloistered emperor. Retired emperors now really retired. Second, the bakufu posted an overseer in Kyôto and reserved the right to intervene in high-level personnel decisions in the imperial court. Finally, the bakufu forced the court to allow it to post *shôen* managers 地頭 and provincial military governors 守護 in the western provinces, just as it had earlier done in the east.

From this point on, the balance of power shifted in favor of the warriors. The imperial court continued to exist, but it gradually lost power and prestige until the nineteenth century. At that point, the imperial court gradually regained its prestige, as well as some of its power. During the Kamakura, Muromachi periods, It was warrior government and institutions that most shaped the direction of Japanese society.

Zen Master Xiang Yan Attaining Enlightenment [upon hearing the sound of a pebble while sweeping], c. 1509

CHAPTER FIVE

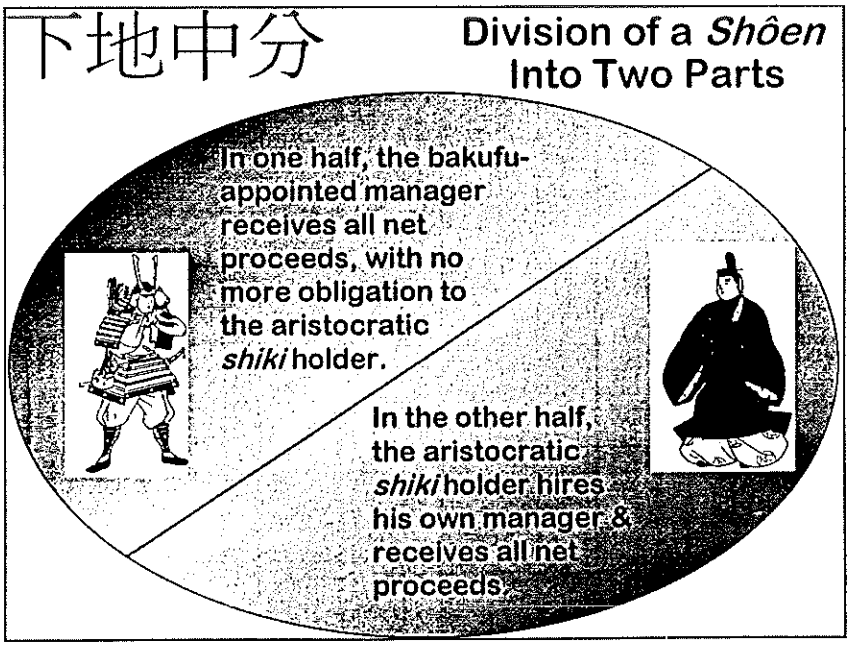
JAPAN'S MIDDLE AGES: 1200-1600

As political power shifted from civilians to warriors, institutional importance shifted from the imperial court to the bakufu. Japan had three bakufus, two of which we deal with in this chapter in some detail. We begin with major political events and then turn to a highly selective (i.e., partial) examination of religious and cultural developments. We conclude with the events that led to Japan's third bakufu.

THE KAMAKURA PERIOD 鎌倉時代

A period of approximately fifty years of relative peace and prosperity followed the Jôkyû War. The Hôjô regents provided excellent leadership for the bakufu, and the bakufu oversaw the operations of the imperial court. We need not examine the structure of the Kamakura bakufu here in detail, but we should be aware of its basic functions. First, it supervised Japan's warrior households, which was no simple task. Second, it supervised local officials and *shôen* managers. Third, it adjudicated disputes involving warriors or warriors versus civilian aristocrats (the imperial court continued to adjudicate disputes involving civilian aristocrats and ordinary people residing in Kyôto). The bakufu, in other words, had become Japan's largest legal organization, and its courts were constantly backlogged with disputes.

It was common for Kyôto aristocrats to bring suit before the bakufu against local *shôen* managers (bakufu appointees), claiming the managers were not delivering all the goods and produce owed the capital *shiki* holders. The bakufu tried to be fair in such cases and often sided against the *shôen* manager. The penalties it meted out to wayward managers, however, were usually too light to serve as an incentive for them to stop their wrongdoing. Dealing with the bakufu-appoin-




Hôjô Tokimune as a Buddhist monk

ted *shôen* managers became so frustrating for civilian aristocrats that many opted for a rearrangement of the contractual obligations. A common rearrangement was to split the *shôen* physically in half (下地中分). One part went to the bakufu's *shôen* manager, the other to the aristocrat and his own appointed manager. Such an arrangement often resulted in a cut in revenue for the aristocrat on paper but a greater, if not perfect, assurance that he would at least receive a predictable income. These arrangements were a sign that the bakufu was unable fully to control local warriors, even at the peak of its power.

The post-Jôkyû era was a difficult time for many court aristocrats. Kato describes aristocratic reactions to the reality of warrior power as follows:

> The aristocracy reacted in two basic ways to the military power of Kamakura. The first, as we have already seen, was to seize every opportunity to set in motion plots aimed at resurrecting the old system. The unsuccessful Jôkyû uprising of 1221, led by the Retired Emperor Go-Toba (1180-1239), was a typical example of this reaction. The second reaction is well illustrated by the policy of Fujiwara Kanezane (1149-1207) and his close relationship with Yoritomo; Kanezane's policy being to preserve the autonomy of Kyôto by compromise with Kamakura and to maintain for the aristocracy as many as possible of the special privileges, especially '*shôen*', they had enjoyed under the old system. Many individual aristocrats adopted this second attitude as a means of self-preservation.[1]

Despite the prevalence of disputes over *shôen* revenues and general aristocratic anxiety, there were no major problems until the late 1260s. At that time, the Mongols were completing their conquest of China and had also intimidated the Korean kingdom into becoming their allies. Mongol leader Kubilai Khan first sent envoys to Japan in 1266 to demand that Japan become a tributary state of the Mongol empire. The aristocrats at the imperial court were terrified of antagonizing the powerful Mongol leader and probably would have agreed to the demand. When Kubilai's envoys reached the bakufu, however, Regent Hôjô Tokimune 北条時宗(1251-1284) rejected their demands with scorn. Subsequent Mongol envoys received similar treatment.

In 1274, Kubilai Khan finally resorted to force, sending from Korea an armada, which landed an invasion force of about 30,000 soldiers. In the initial battles, the Japanese forces did poorly. One reason was a lack of preparation for the superior weaponry of the Mongols. More important was that the Japanese defenders, while numerous, consisted of a collection of unorganized local warrior bands. Each warrior band sought to maximize its own glory in the hope of receiving rewards from the bakufu. Many, therefore, avoided areas of the battle where the Mongols were strongest and Japanese defenders most urgently needed. Instead, they tended to hold back while seeking places where they could score a relatively easy victory. Fortunately for the Japanese side, serious storms arose, and the Korean sailors manning the fleet persuaded the Mongols to leave or risk disaster.

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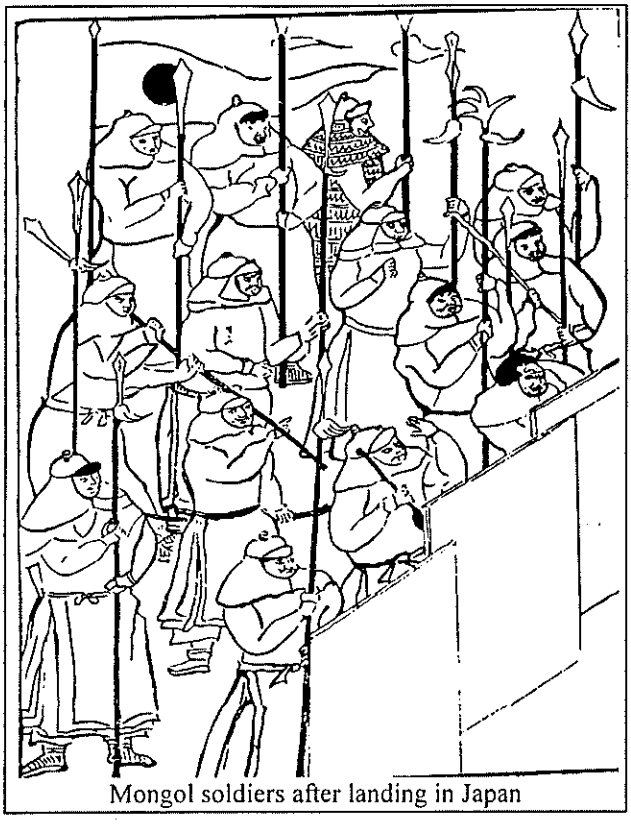
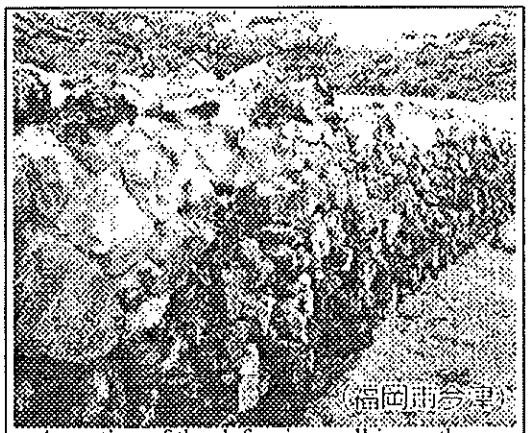
[1] Kato, *Japanese Literature*, p. 239.


Mongol soldiers after landing in Japan

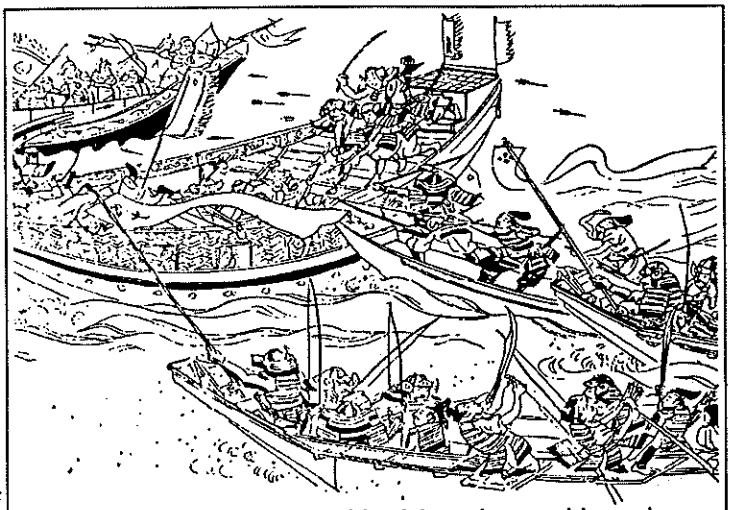
The Mongol force withdrew, but Kubilai had certainly not given up. He sent several more envoys and threatened a much larger invasion force if Japan did not capitulate to Mongol demands. The bakufu response was as firm as ever, and Hôjô Tokimune ordered fortifications built in northern Kyûshû, the area most likely to be attacked in the second invasion. The bakufu also ordered warriors from all over Japan to mobilize and serve guard duty in Kyûshû on a rotational basis. It was not until 1281 that the second invasion force set sail for Japan. This force was much larger, about 140,000, but Japanese defenses and coordination were also much better.

Since the first invasion, Japanese laborers had erected a massive stone defensive wall along the coast of Hakata 博多 Bay (part of present day Fukuoka City 福岡市, which is straight up from Nagasaki on the northwestern coast of Kyûshû). This wall proved quite effective in containing the Mongol forces that did manage to come ashore. Japanese strategy, however, called for preventing as many from landing as possible by keeping the relatively large Mongol ships under constant attack by small, maneuverable vessels that could strike swiftly from any angle. This strategy also worked well, and only a relatively small number of the invaders ever landed. The fighting went on for about two months, with Japanese defenses holding but no major battle having been fought. Then, quite suddenly, a typhoon came through the area and destroyed most of the Mongol fleet. The typhoon ended the invasion, and the battered, greatly reduced remnants of the Mongol force sailed back to Korea.

While the bakufu was busy with military preparations, the imperial court had mobilized all of Japan's shrines and temples to offer prayers and perform religious rituals to ward off the invaders. The court claimed the typhoon was the result of these prayers and proof that Japan was a land specially favored by the gods. The typhoon that destroyed the second Mongol invasion force is the origin of the word "*kamikaze*" (神風, also pronounced *shinpû* in premodern times). *Kamikaze* literally means "divine wind."


A portion of the defensive wall in northern Kyûshû, still standing

The **Mongol Invasions** of 1274 and 1281 were a major turning point in the history of the Kamakura period. On the surface, it appeared the bakufu had won a great victory against the vast



Smaller Japanese vessels attacking Mongol troop ships trying to land soldiers ashore

Mongol empire. It was certainly the case that the bakufu provided excellent leadership in the crisis, but, in hindsight, we can see that the Mongol Invasions proved to be the beginning of the end for the Kamakura bakufu.

Until the time of the invasions, all warfare had taken place within the Japanese islands. This meant that there were always spoils, typically land, taken from the losing side. The victorious general would reward his officers and key allies with grants of this land and other wealth taken in battle. The idea that sacrifice in military service should be rewarded had, by the thirteenth century, become deeply ingrained in Japanese warrior culture. In the case of the Mongol invasions, of course, there were no spoils to divide up as rewards. Sacrifices, on the other hand, had been high. Not only were the expenses for the first two invasions high, the bakufu regarded a third invasion as a distinct possibility. Costly patrols and defense preparations, therefore, continued for several years after 1281. The bakufu did all it could to equalize the burden and used what limited land it could spare to reward those individuals or groups who had made the greatest sacrifices in the defense effort; however, these measures were inadequate to prevent serious grumbling among many of the warriors.

There was a sharp rise in **lawlessness and banditry** after the second invasion. At first, most of these bandits were poorly armed civilians, called *akutô* (悪党, "gangs of thugs"). Despite repeated orders from the bakufu, local warriors were unable, or unwilling, to suppress these bandits. Toward the end of the thirteenth century, these bandits had become more numerous. Furthermore, it seems that impoverished warriors now made up the bulk of the bandits. The Kamakura bakufu was losing its grip on the warriors, particularly in outlying areas and in the western provinces.

Akutô

In addition to problems with bandits, the bakufu faced renewed problems with the imperial court. The complex details need not detain us here, but the bakufu had


Go-Daigo

gotten itself entangled in a bitter succession dispute between two branches of the imperial family. The bakufu decided that each branch should alternate emperors, which only prolonged the dispute from one reign to the next and also caused increasing resentment toward the bakufu in the court. **Go-Daigo** 後醍醐天皇, a strong-willed emperor, came to the throne in 1318, determined to restore imperial authority. In 1331, he began a rebellion against the bakufu. It quickly ended in failure, and the bakufu exiled Go-Daigo to a remote island. Go-Daigo escaped, however, and became a magnet around which all the many dissatisfied groups in Japan rallied. Go-Daigo's supporters were united by their dislike of the bakufu, not, for the most part, by any nostalgia for the old days of imperial rule.

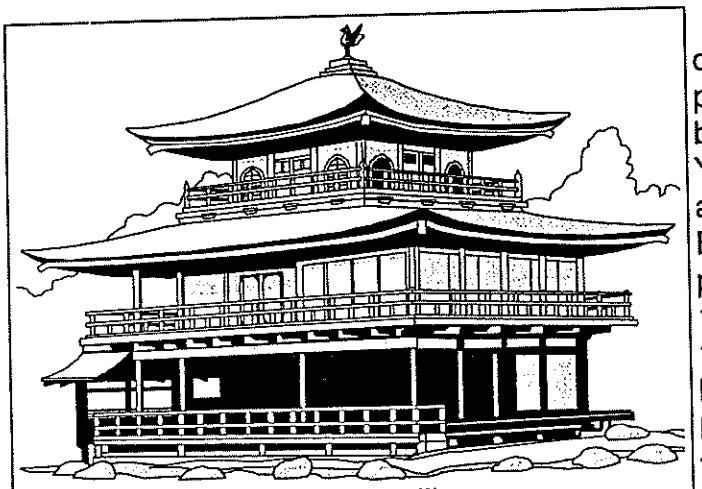
After Hôjô Tokimune died in 1284, the bakufu suffered intermittent rounds of internal disputes, some of which resulted in bloodshed. By the time of Go-Daigo's rebellion, it lacked sufficient internal unity to deal with the crisis effectively. As the opposition forces grew stronger, bakufu leaders assembled a vast army under the command of **Ashikaga Takauji** 足利尊氏 (1305-1358). In 1333, this army set out to attack Go-Daigo's forces in Kyôto. Takauji had apparently made a deal with Go-Daigo, however, for midway to Kyôto he turned his army around and attacked Kamakura instead. The attack destroyed the bakufu. Go-Daigo had finally realized his dream of restoring the political power of the emperors. His "victory" was, however, really the victory of Ashikaga Takauji, a general of questionable loyalty.


Ashikaga Takauji

The alliance between Go-Daigo and Takauji was indeed short-lived. Go-Daigo tried to turn the clock back to a time when civilians reigned supreme, and warriors were the lowly servitors of the civil bureaucracy. As a result, Go-Daigo alienated many of his military supporters, including Takauji, who turned his armies against Go-Daigo in 1335. Takauji drove Go-Daigo out of the capital and installed a different member of the imperial family as

emperor. Previously, Takauji had taken the title shôgun and established a new bakufu in the Muromachi district of Kyôto. It is for this reason that the period from 1334 to 1573 is known as either the **Muromachi period** or the Ashikaga period.

THE MUROMACHI PERIOD 室町時代



The Golden Pavilion

Go-Daigo did not give up his claim to the throne. He and his supporters fled south and set up a military base in the rugged mountains of Yoshino 吉野. There they waged war against the Ashikaga bakufu until 1392. Because there were two competing imperial courts, the period from roughly 1335 until reunification of the courts in 1392 is known as the period of the Northern and Southern Courts 南北朝時代. During this half century plus, the tide of battle ebbed and flowed with victories for each side, until gradually, the fortunes of Go-Daigo's southern court declined, and its supporters dwindled. The Ashikaga bakufu prevailed.

Both Takauji and Go-Daigo died before the matter of the two courts had been settled. The man who brought about that settlement was the third shôgun, **Ashikaga Yoshimitsu** 足利義満 (1386-1428). Under Yoshimitsu's reign, the bakufu attained the peak of its power, though even then its ability to control the remote areas of Japan was marginal. Yoshimitsu negotiated with the southern court to return to Kyôto, promising the southern emperor that his branch of the imperial family could alternate with the rival branch currently on the throne in the capital. Yoshimitsu broke this promise. Indeed, he treated the emperors quite poorly, not even allowing them their former ceremonial dignity. There is even evidence that Yoshimitsu planned to supplant the imperial family with his own, although it never happened. The power and prestige of the emperors reached its nadir in the fifteenth century.

Ashikaga Yoshimitsu

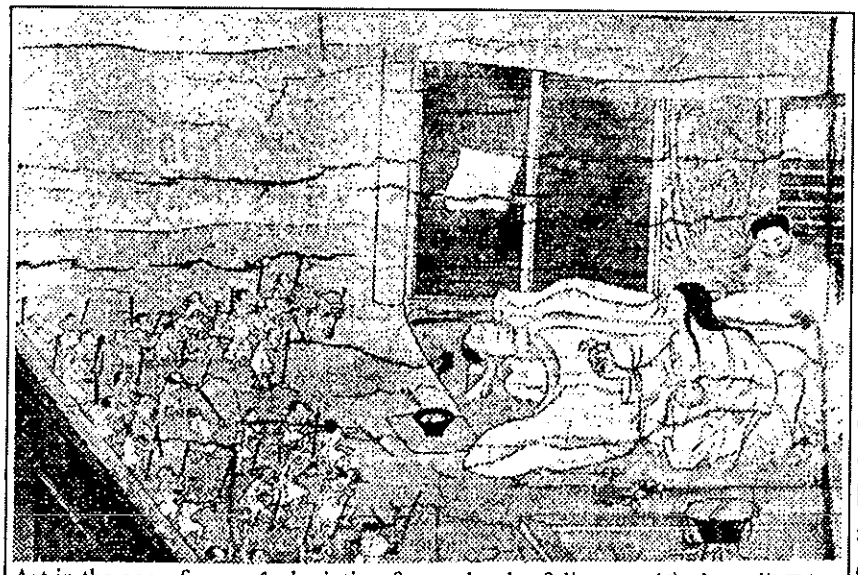
Yoshimitsu as a Buddhist monk. Late in life he "retired" to "monastic" life in his magnificent Golden Pavilion but retained a grip on political power until his death.

Yoshimitsu is noted for a number of accomplishments. In the realm of foreign relations, he initiated formal diplomatic ties between Japan and Ming China in 1401. Doing so required that the bakufu agree to participate in China's tributary system, which it did so reluctantly. Yoshimitsu even accepted the title "King of Japan" 日本国王 from the Ming emperor—an act that later Japanese historians often severely criticized as a disgrace to the "national" dignity. In the cultural realm,

Yoshimitsu created a number of magnificent buildings, the most famous of which is the Golden Pavilion 金閣, which he built as a retirement residence. The building's name derives from the walls of its second and third stories, which were plated with gold leaf. It is one of Kyôto's major tourist attractions today, although the current structure is not the original one. These construction projects established a precedent for shôgunal patronage of high culture. It was in patronage of high culture that the later Ashikaga shôguns excelled. The bakufu steadily lost political power after Yoshimitsu's day. In 1467, open warfare between two rival warrior families (応仁の乱) broke out in the streets of Kyôto itself, laying waste to large areas of the city. The bakufu was powerless to prevent or suppress the fighting, which eventually touched off civil wars throughout Japan. These civil wars continued for over a century, a period known as the **Age of Warfare** 戦国時代. Japan had entered an era of turmoil, and the Ashikaga bakufu, which continued to exist until 1573, lost nearly all its political power. The post-1467 Ashikaga shôguns spent their remaining political and financial resources on cultural matters, and the bakufu now replaced the imperial court as the center of cultural activity. Meanwhile, the imperial court had sunk into poverty and obscurity, and no emperor like Go-Daigo ever appeared on the scene to revive its fortunes. It was not until the 1580s that a succession of three generals managed to reunify all of Japan

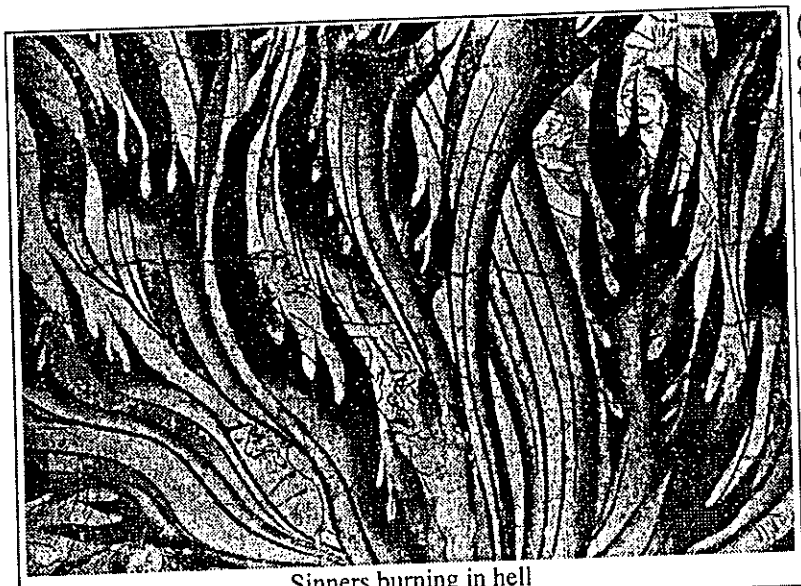
DEVELOPMENTS IN BUDDHISM: LATE HEIAN THROUGH MUROMACHI PERIODS

By the last century of the Heian period, significant numbers of Japanese Buddhists, and well-educated people in general, had become conversant in the fine points of Buddhist theology. No longer was Buddhism only a powerful form of magic. It was also a sophisticated body of religious and philosophical doctrine, to be discussed, debated and interpreted. In simplified form, Buddhism also became a popular religion, particularly during the Kamakura period and thereafter. We begin by examining some of the general issues that emerged in Buddhism and then examine two specific varieties: Pure Land and Zen.



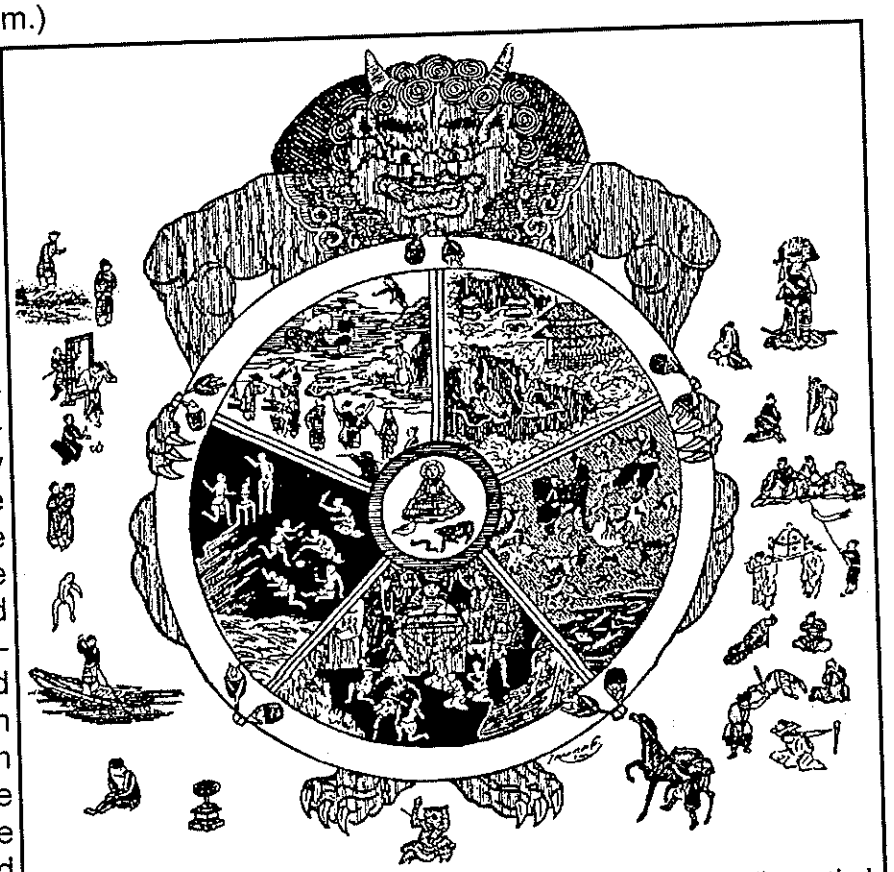
Art in the age of *mappô:* depiction from a book of diseases (やまい草子)

The major debate in Buddhist and literary circles in late Heian times centered on the theory of ***mappô*** 末法, or "**Final Age of the Buddhist Law**" (often appearing as "*sue no yo*" 末の世 in Japanese writings of the time). The basic theory held that world history passed through three stages dated from the time of death of the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni 釈迦. In each stage, Buddhist teachings deteriorated. The first stage


Sinners burning in hell

(the True Age 正法時) lasted either 500 or 1000 years from the time of the Buddha's death, the different figures reflecting two different theories. The second stage (the Imitation Age 像法時), a time in which Buddhism began to decline, would also last either 500 or 1000 years, depending on whose theory one believed. *Mappô*, according to the theory, was a time of misery and chaos. During this final age, people would cease practicing the true teachings of Buddhism. *Mappô* would, all theories agreed, last a full 10,000 years. At the end of this vast time, a new Buddha would emerge and the cycle would start again. (Review the relevant section of *Buddhism* regarding the idea of cycles in Mayahana Buddhism.)

Most debates in Japan were about the timing of the first two stages. Many Japanese Buddhist theorists placed the date at 1052. The decline of the Heian aristocratic world, the rise of the warriors, and the frequent warfare of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries convinced many Japanese Buddhists that they were indeed living in an age of rapid decline. Some even predicted a collapse of all civil law and order and the destruction of Japan itself. Themes of gloom and doom became prominent in literature from the twelfth century on as we have seen. Some Japanese scholars, however, argued that *mappô* would not take place until 1552. Others argued that the theory itself was incorrect and that there


Shown here is a depiction of the "Six" Courses, simplified to five. The vertical position is a rough indication of desirability. At top left is the realm of humans; top right is the realm of deities. At the bottom is King Yama's court in hell. Above it to the right is the realm of beasts; to the left is the realm of starving ghosts. Scenes from the human experience adorn the outside. Attaining *nirvana* would put one *outside* the whole cycle of different realms.

would be no Final Age of the Buddhist Law. Many were ambiguous in their writings as they struggled with the issue. Regardless of where one stood on the theory of *mappô,* nearly all Japanese Buddhists and writers were cognizant of the issue. Many struggled to find some basis for hope that, despite the degenerate age in which they lived, humans could still, somehow, achieve salvation.


Amida: hope in the age of *mappô*

Despair and hope were important themes in the literature of the Kamakura period. The despair came from the general theory of *mappô* descrobed above, combined with concrete conceptions of the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. This cycle is called ***Rokudô*** 六道 in Japanese, literally, "Six Courses" (alternatives: "Six Paths," "Six Realms"). Upon death, as the theory goes, all living creatures are reborn into one of these courses for their next life. Deeds in that life help influence the particular course of rebirth in the next life, and so on without stop until attainment of *nirvana.* At that point, one would be out of the cycle. The Six Courses generally included the realm of Buddhas, the realm of deities, the realm of humans, the realm of beasts, the realm of starving ghosts, and the realm of hells. Sometimes the Buddhas were left out, to indicate that Buddhas were outside the cycle, reducing the number of realms to five. Sometimes the realms of humans or beasts were divided each into two subcategories. Regardless of these minor variations in details, the basic point remained the same in any conception of the Six Courses.

Moving up in the six courses (i.e., from human to deity) was fine, of course, but in the alleged age of *mappô,* many feared that moving up would be impossible. Most people, the thinking went, were destined for rebirth in a lower realm. The possibility of descending into one of the many hells, each described in vivid detail in art and literature of the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, infused Buddhist practices with a sense of urgency.


Hônen

The hopeful dimension of Buddhism during this time derived from the several conceptions of escape from the Six Courses, many of which seemed, at least on the surface, relatively simple. One of these conceptions of escape involved reliance on the saving power of some outside, benevolent entity. The most popular savior figure in Japanese Buddhism from early Kamakura times onward was **Amida** 阿弥陀, a Buddha of compassion and mercy. In one Buddhist scripture, Amida vowed to save anyone who would invoke his name with sincerity. A new form of Buddhism was born from this scriptural passage.

This new form of religion was **Pure Land**

Buddhism 浄土宗. The founder of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan was the monk Hônen 法然 (1133-1212). Hônen began his career through the usual course of training at one of Japan's leading temples. At age forty-three, he read an essay by a Chinese Buddhist, which claimed that continual recitation of the name of Amida was the best way to salvation. Hônen realized the truth in this essay, left the temple, went into the streets of Kyôto, and began preaching the good word to people of all walks of life: one need only recite Amida's name with sincerity to attain release from the Six Courses.

Amida descends to earth to pick up a soul bound for the Western Paradise.

The **basic teaching** of Pure Land Buddhism is that because we live in Buddhism's degenerate age, it is no longer possible to rely on one's own power (自力) to achieve enlightenment and salvation. The Buddha himself, of course, achieved salvation through his own power, but the times in which he lived were different. In today's world of *mappô,* the only option is to relinquish all hope of effecting our own salvation. Instead, we must rely on the power of another (他力), namely Amida. When a person utters Amida's name with complete sincerity, true to his vow, Amida will save her or him. Upon death, instead of traveling through the Six Courses, the saved person will go directly to Amida's Western Paradise 極楽浄土. The standard formula for reciting Amida's name was, and is, "*Namu Amida butsu*" 南無阿弥陀仏 (Praise to the Buddha Amida!). Said once with sincerity, the speaker would be bound for the Western Paradise after death. Remember this phrase should you find yourself in a situation in which the end appears near at hand.

Given the description above, Pure Land Buddhism might appear merely silly. Why even have a religion if the point is simply to say three words? Indeed, Pure Land monks in Japan began taking up ordinary, secular lives in the generation after Hônen. There is more to Pure Land doctrine, however, than meets the eye. The key is in the word "sincerity." What does it mean to be "sincere" in this instance? "Sincerity" refers to a psychological state that is actually quite difficult to attain. Try to imagine the absence of any sense that one can control his or her own destiny. Imagine the state of relying 100% on something outside one's self. This state of mind is actually the same egoless state for which any other form of Buddhism would aim. In this sense, therefore, Pure Land Buddhism is anything but easy, which is one reason serious practitioners typically recite "*Namu Amida butsu*" repeatedly, day in and day out. The recitation becomes a form of meditation in which one displaces one's own sense of self onto an outside agency—a process, ironically, requiring considerable reliance on one's own powers. (For those in HIST 415: notice that for advanced practitioners, the distinction between

jiriki and *tariki* dissolves, just as other distinctions and dichotomies similarly dissolve in the process of attaining enlightenment.)

One of the best illustrations of *mappô* anxiety combined with reliance on Amida for salvation is Kamo-no-Chômei's 鴨長明 *Hôjôki* 方丈記, commonly translated into English as ***Life in a Ten Foot Square Hut*** or *Account of My Hut.* Kamo was a court aristocrat during the turbulent transition from the Heian period to the Kamakura period. He attempted to sever his attachment to worldly affairs by physically removing himself from the capital and living in a small hut. But he remained psychologically attached to the world. In the end, despairing over ever achieving salvation, he turned to chanting Amida's name as his only hope. What follows is my translation of approximately sixty percent of *Life in a Ten Foot Square Hut,* including the beginning and end. Read through it now, keeping in mind all the points about Buddhism made above.

Portions of *Life in a Ten Foot Square Hut*

The river flows on without ceasing, but the water that comprises the flow of the river changes its position each instant and is not the river's original water. The foam that floats on the surface of the water in those places where its flow has slowed, at one moment seems about to break up and at another it collects together—but there is no case in which a single piece of foam long remains in its original shape. The people who live in this world, along with their dwellings, are, if you think about it, just like the river. Not even for a moment do they remain stationary.

In the capital of Heiankyô (Kyôto), beautiful as a displayed jewel, the pagodas are arrayed, and the height of the roofs vie with each other—people of high status, people of low status, and the dwellings of a wide variety of people. At first it seems as if the scenery has been this way for numerous generations. But wondering if indeed this has been the case, and looking into the matter more closely, the houses that remain today from former times are exceedingly few. In one case, the house may have burnt down last year and the house one is now looking at was built just this year. In another case, what was once a large house is no longer and has now become a small house. And the process of change for those living in the houses is the same. In any place there are many people, but of those people I knew back in my youth, there are but one or two out of twenty or thirty. As for human beings, when thinking that on the one hand there are those who die in the morning, there are, on the other hand, those born in the evening. This configuration of human society perfectly resembles the situation of the foam floating on the water.

There is something I do not understand: From where do those who are born come, and to where do those who die go? And there is another thing I do not understand: In having a household in this impermanent world in which we temporarily reside, for whose sake do we worry and labor? What are we to do? Is it all merely something we do to amuse our eyes? The situation in which a household's residents and its physical buildings vie with each other to decline and go out of existence from this world is, to use an example, no different from the relationship between the morning glory in bloom and the dew within its flower. At times, the dew falls out and the flower remains. But although it remains, when the morning sun finally reaches it, it shrivels. At other times, the flower shrivels up first, the dewdrops not yet

evaporating. But though the dew has not yet evaporated, it will in time, and there is no case when it remains to await the evening.

In the forty years I have lived since becoming aware of and pondering society, human life and so forth, I have from time to time seen before my eyes inexplicable incidents that have arisen out of this world.

Such was surely the case on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month of 1177. On a night with a fierce wind blowing that did not once slacken, a fire broke out in the southeastern part of the capital around the hour of the dragon (8-9 p.m.). It spread to the northwest. After a while the fires had even spread to such places as the Suzaku Gate, the Great Palace, the University Dormitory, and the offices of the Board of Revenue. They were turned to ashes in the space of a single night.

It is said that the fire may have started in a small street in Higuchitomi. The flames came from a small inn which had put up some dancers for the night. By the time the winds had spread the flames this way and that way, they had formed a pattern just like that of an opened-up fan, and the flames spread outward in this shape. Houses located far away were choked in a thick layer of smoke, and those in nearby areas were rapidly engulfed in flames. As the night air blew the flames like those of a festival torch, it spread the light of the fire. In the midst of one area that appeared bright red, unable to resist the force of the wind, the blowing flames leapt as far as one hundred or even two hundred meters, spreading the fire.

Those in the midst of this must have been cooked alive. Some were overcome by the smoke and collapsed, and others were blinded by the flames and died soon. And some, although they were able to scramble and escape with their lives, could not possibly carry any of their belongings with them. In this way did the brilliant jewels amidst Kyôto suddenly turn to ashes.

As for the totality of the damage, how vast must it have been! Sixteen houses of the upper nobility were lost in that fire, and moreover, the other types of houses that were destroyed were too numerous possibly even to count. On the whole, I hear that one-third of the entire capital was affected. The men and women who died were many, and what became of the horses, oxen, and so forth is anyone's guess.

While *all* the activities of human beings are foolish, to spend a great deal of wealth and endure all manner of worry and stress in order to build a house in such a dangerous quarter of the city is surely the most stupid of them all.

Again, around the fourth month in 1180, a large tornado arose from the area of the Central Gate and cut a path all the way to the Rokujô area.

Of the houses within the three or four hundred meter area ravaged by the tornado, be they big or be they small, not even a single one escaped destruction. There were those that appeared to collapse like a house of cards, and the only things remaining were the beams and support posts. Gates were picked up and hurled distances as far as four or five hundred meters, and roofs were smashed together with those of neighboring houses. Because the situation was such as this, the items and tools within the houses were blown about in the wind. Things like roofing materials and thatched portions of the house blew about wildly in the wind like the leaves that are blown off trees in the winter. Because particles of dust were blown up so thick as to resemble smoke, opening the eyes was impossible, and because the roar of the tornado was so loud, it was completely impossible to hear what others were saying. I thought that the winds of hell must be about like this. Not only were houses and

shops destroyed, but I cannot even say how many were injured and crippled during the subsequent cleanup and repairs. This tornado turned to travel in a south-southwest direction, directly toward the center of town, causing a great many people to wail and lament.

The tornado blew constantly—and otherwise there was nothing particularly peculiar—but how could there be such a terrible event? It was certainly no normal event. I began to have doubts, thinking that it must have been a warning from the deities and Buddhas.

Then in 1180, the capital was suddenly moved [to Fukuhara, temporarily, in connection with the turmoil of the fighting between the Taira and Minamoto forces]. As for the origins of this city of Kyôto being the capital, I have heard that it was clearly designated as the site for the capital during the reign of Emperor Saga [r. 809-823], and it has remained so for over four hundred years since then. To simply pack up and move the capital for no particular reason is hardly something one would expect. Therefore, people worry about when the capital may be moved again, and for them to complain is certainly more than reasonable.

But in any event, starting with the emperor, the ministers and officials all made the move. In the case of those concerned with appointment to office, would even one of them stay behind in the old capital? Desiring promotions in office and rank, those who wait at the beck and call of the ruler scampered to move to the new capital in just one day. On the other hand, those with no chance of advancement on the fringes of court society, who saw no hope of rising in the future, grumbling about what a hardship it was, did not move. The [hastily abandoned] official residences, all adorned in splendor, became more run down with the passing of each day. They were eventually torn down, made into rafts, and floated down the Yodo river. The residential lots were suddenly transformed into agricultural fields. People's way of thinking completely changed, and they came to value only horses and saddles. There were none at all who made use of oxen and carts. They came to value territory in Kyûshû and Shikoku and ended up disliking *shôen* in the eastern and northern provinces.

During that time, I went to see the new capital in the province of Setsu while pursuing some matters. In looking at the lay of the land, the size [of the residential area] was narrow, and the downtown areas were not yet fully laid out. High mountains pressed in from the northern side, and from the south the ocean came in quite close. The sound of the waves was a year round nuisance, and the salty, tidal winds were particularly strong. [. . .]

I have been told the following: In past ages, during the reigns of sagely emperors, [these emperors] united the country under their rule, while taking pity on the common people. To cite some examples, although they would have the palace roof thatched with *kaya,* they did not adorn the palace with protruding eaves. Or when [an emperor] saw that the people's cooking fires were few [i.e., that they were low on food], he decided upon a relief plan and even exempted them from tax payments. This was because they took the welfare of the people and enrichment of society as their motto. Compared with that which prevailed during the reigns of the sagely emperors, the situation prevailing in today's society surely stands out in sharp contrast.

There was another matter—I think it was around the time of the Yôwa era [lasted only one year: 1181]—and because it happened so long ago, I am not sure if my memory of it is fully reliable. For a period of two years, there was famine everywhere, and the situation was clearly terrible. One year, there was a drought throughout the spring and summer. Another year, there were typhoons and floods throughout the fall and winter. The damage

accumulated, and the crops completely failed. Under such conditions, though at the expense of backbreaking labor the spring cultivation and summer transplanting of the rice shoots was accomplished, there was no fall cutting and winter harvesting.

As a result, peasants in each province either abandoned their land and crossed their provincial borders [in search of better land], or left their households as they were and went into the mountains to live. At the imperial court, various rounds of official prayers were initiated as were special *Shubô* rites [*Shubô* is an esoteric Buddhist ritual], but they had absolutely no effect. As for the economy of Kyôto, its basis, as always, depends upon the [produce] of the outlying regions. But because nothing at all was sent into the capital, it became impossible to live as though the times were normal. Worrying that the situation was deteriorating fast, people began selling off their valuables one after another and lived off of bamboo shoots . . . When at times there was food available for sale, the value of the money dropped sharply, as the price of grain soared. Beggars came to fill the streets of Kyôto, with complaints and lamentations to be heard everywhere.

[Discussion of additional matters, such as a great earthquake, and various events in the author's life]

Now, I live in seclusion deep in the mountains of Hino. From the eastern side of my ten foot square hut, there extends a small overhang, not even a meter long where I chop and burn firewood. To the south I spread out bamboo planks, and to the west of these I built an "offerings shelf" [a type of simple Buddhist alter]. On the northern side there are two single-sheet paper screens. In between them, I placed a picture of the Buddha Amida, next to which I hung a picture of the Bodhisattva Fugen, and in front of which I placed a copy of the *Lotus Sutra*. At the eastern extremity of the hut, I spread bracken [a type of large fern] ears to serve as a bed. In the southwest corner, I constructed a bamboo shelf, upon which are arrayed three black boxes. In these I place various writings: *waka* poems, books of music, a collection of writings on the essentials of rebirth in heaven, and so forth. Lined up next to these are a *koto* and a *biwa* [stringed musical instruments]. That which they call the *ori koto* and the *tsugi biwa* are what I have. This is the situation inside the hut that serves as my temporary abode.

[Skip to the final sections]

Now, when I think about it, my career in this world is fast approaching its end, and my remaining time is very little. Soon I may face descent into the Three Evil Realms [in Buddhism: hell, the realm of hungry ghosts, the realm of animals—refer to the diagram earlier in this section]. [So] why do I now try to explain all the things I have done in my life? The essential point of the teachings handed down by the Buddha is to not become attached to anything. Even my current feeling of fondness for this humble hut is a sin [i.e., a violation of this fundamental precept]. And my attachment to a quiet, peaceful life will also surely become an obstacle to rebirth in paradise. Why, then, do I state my useless pleasures and continue to waste the small amount of time I have remaining? No, no. That will not do.

In the dawn of a quiet night, I think much about such principles. Thereupon, I turn inward, and say to my own heart (*kokoro*): "Chômei! You abandoned the vulgar world of human society and entered the mountain forests in order to rectify your easily-confused mind

and to practice the Buddhist Way. But nevertheless you are only a pure monk in terms of your outward appearance—your inner heart is just as defiled as it ever was. The place you live in is nearly an exact replica of the small hut that [the great Indian Buddhist saint] Vimalakirti dwelt in, but nevertheless, everything you do is, no matter how one looks at it, not even on a par with the activities of Suddhipanthaka [an unusually dull disciple of the Buddha who was given the task of cleaning the other monks' shoes as his only means of working toward salvation]. Could it be that this current life of lowly poverty is the result of residual *karma* which is causing yourself so much worry? Or could it be that your mind is wildly disjointed, that your half-baked mental qualities are deteriorating, and that you have gone mad?" When I make such queries of myself, my mind provides no answer at all—because it cannot. There is but one method left. It is to put this defiled tongue of mine into motion, face the picture of Amida Buddha, and without any special ceremony repeatedly chant the *nenbutsu* [i.e. the invocation of Amida's name, "*Namu Amida butsu*" in Japanese]. I end with that.

It is now around the end of the third month of 1212, and I, the monk Renin, living in a hut in Hokayama in the mountains of Hino, write down these words.

Life in a Ten Foot Square Hut is full of Buddhist teachings and metaphors. Be sure that you are able to recognize and explain them.

This chapter continues on the next page.


Bodhidharma 菩提達磨, first patriarch of Zen.

Another form of Buddhism, ***Zen*** 禅 (*Chan* in Chinese), became prominent during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods. In contrast with Pure Land Buddhism, which took the approach of complete reliance on another, *Zen* took the approach of complete reliance on one's own power. In many respects, *Zen* was a back to basics movement within Buddhism. It rejected elaborate temples, rituals and scriptures. It took the historical Buddha, Sakyamuni, as a model for all people. The Buddha did not rely on any external agency. He attained enlightenment and salvation through his own hard work and meditation. He used no books, no temples, no religious rituals. According to Zen teaching, even in today's degenerate age—indeed, all the more so *because* the age is degenerate—a return to the simple, original path of Sakyamuni will lead individuals to enlightenment and salvation.

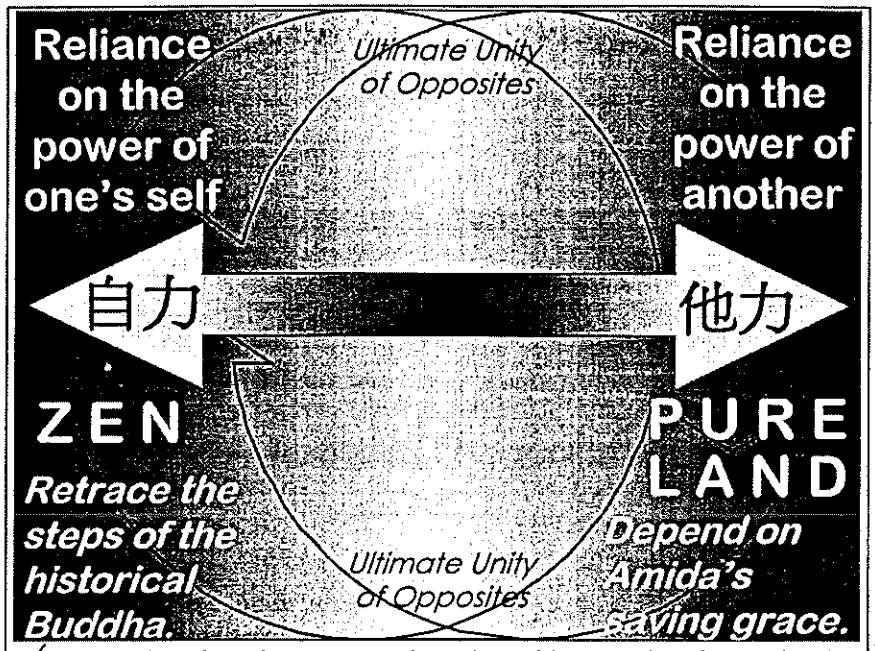
Zen is, or is supposed to be, no-nonsense hard work. Monks live in austere quarters and devote most of their day to hard physical labor cleaning and maintaining the temple. Sessions of meditation are the only lengthy breaks in the regimented labor of Zen temple life. *Meditation* is the single most important aspect of *Zen* practice. Monks spend hours daily seated in meditation attempting to eliminate their egos and see the world for what it really is.

Because of the rigors involved in *Zen* practice, it never became anywhere near as popular as did Pure Land Buddhism. Which would you rather do, sit for hours a day in meditation while living a Spartan life or chant "*Namu Amida butsu*" and live an otherwise ordinary life?

Zen Buddhism had a significant influence on the art and literature of the Kamakura and (especially) Muromachi periods. Because the state of enlightenment is something that cannot be described in words (much like the *dao* of the philosophical Daoists), Zen developed a wealth of drawings, parables, paradoxical riddles 公安, and other devices intended to challenge ordinary, commonsensical ways of thinking and to explain, albeit partially, the nature of true enlightenment.

Simplicity, austerity and suggestion are characteristics of


Buddhist nuns seated in *Zen* meditation, several hours of which each day would be the norm. The nun with the stick is on duty lest any of the meditators slacken in their posture or concentration.



(HIST 104 readers: do not worry about the "Ultimate Unity of Opposites")

Zen-inspired art and literature. *Zen* paintings, such as the portrait of Bodhidharma above, are typically monochrome ink drawings employing an economy of brush strokes. Ideally, a relatively small amount of ink should point to a deeper, more profound truth. *Zen* art in both Japan and China has much in common with Chinese Daoist art. Perhaps the best examples of *Zen* art in Japan are temple rock gardens, which are meditation aids. The more famous of these gardens, such as that of the Ryôan Temple 龍安寺 pictured below, are major tourist attractions. True appreciation of these simple, austere rock gardens is undoubtedly an acquired taste. During the Muromachi period, *Zen* was also a major influence on Japanese painting.

PAINTING DURING CENTURIES OF UNREST

The power the bakufu lost after the Ônin War became concentrated in the hands of local warlords, called ***daimyô*** (大名, literally "big names"). These *daimyô* constantly fought one another in an effort to enhance the size of their territories, commonly called "domains" 藩. The *daimyô* also struggled with problems within their domains. The domain of a typical *daimyô* was comprised of the smaller territories of local warrior families. These subordinate families frequently overthrew their *daimyô* in an attempt to seize his lands and power. *Daimyô* at this time, in other words, were never secure in their holdings. All of Japan,


Part of the Zen rock garden at the Ryôan Temple

it seemed, had entered a topsy-turvy age of "*gekokujô*" 下剋上, a term meaning "those below conquer those above." During the late Muromachi period, social and political hierarchies were unstable. More than ever, the world seemed transient, impermanent and unstable.

Although *Zen* was undoubtedly the single greatest influence on **Japanese painting during the Kamakura and Muromachi periods**, there were others. One was Chinese-style painting, which often reflected Daoist-inspired aesthetic values. Other Chinese influences included Song-era Confucian concepts and Geomancy (which we examine in HIST 310). Pure Land Buddhism also played a significant role in painting during Japan's middle ages, as did the literary **ideal of reclusion** (i.e., living a pure, simple life removed from human affairs), evident in works like *Life in a Ten Foot Square Hut.* In an age when many worried about *mappô,* problems with *shôen* revenues, and the instability of frequent warfare, some Japanese sought purity and idealism in art where none was to be found in human society. This section briefly examines some of these themes. The emphasis is on works from the Muromachi period.

One striking feature of Muromachi painting is that most of it was done in black ink. There is a studied simplicity in many works of this era. Most historians attribute this simplicity to *Zen* influence, and they are undoubtedly correct. The simplicity, however, may also have been a reac-

tion against the complexity and confusion of the day's social and political world. The many Daoist-like scenes of nature in Muromachi painting suggest a desire to abandon, perhaps only temporarily, human society and its wars in favor of a life of quiet simplicity.


Amida beyond the mountains (Kamakura)

In 1413, the shôgun commissioned Josetsu 如拙 to paint the Zen riddle 公案, "How should one go about catching a catfish with a gourd." The result was *Hyônenzu* 瓢鮎図, which means literally "Illustration of catching a catfish with a gourd." This interesting painting features, in the foreground, a ragged looking man trying to catch or hold down a catfish. The catfish has made it into relatively open water and is about to enter a wide area overgrown with weeds. Catching it would have been easier while it was still in the narrow stream.

Why bother catching a catfish? Because in Japanese folk thinking, the movement of catfish (along with thunder) cause earthquakes. The man trying to catch the catfish is, in other words, trying to stop the calamities and upheavals of the time. Is there, however, even a remote chance of him succeeding? The odds look nearly impossible. In his persistence, is the man an idealist, a fool, both, or what? A Daoist-like mist (notice also the bamboo) separates the foreground from the background. Behind the mist are mountains (see picture here for reference). The background mountain peaks create scenery similar to that featured in paintings of Amida coming down from his paradise to rescue true believers. Like the ending in *Life in a Ten Foot Square Hut,* might the message here ultimately be less one of Zen than one of Pure Land? In other words, just as it looks nearly impossible for the man to catch the catfish, so too is it nearly impossible in these corrupt times to achieve enlightenment or salvation through one's own effort. The only real hope may lie in the lofty mountains beyond the mist, that is, in Amida's Pure Land.


Sesshû, Winter Landscape

Landscapes are common in painting from the Muromachi period. Perhaps the most famous of these landscapes is Sesshû's 雪舟 (1420-1506) *Winter Landscape* 秋冬山水図. The most striking feature of this work is the thick, jagged "crack" or "tear" running down the middle of the upper portion of the painting. To the left of the crack is a temple, to the right, what appears to be a jagged rock face. Sesshû was heavily influenced by Chinese ideas and painting techniques. His work often features the primordial creative forces of nature (paintings in a style called *tenkai* 天開). In *Winter Landscape,* the fissure dwarfs the human structure

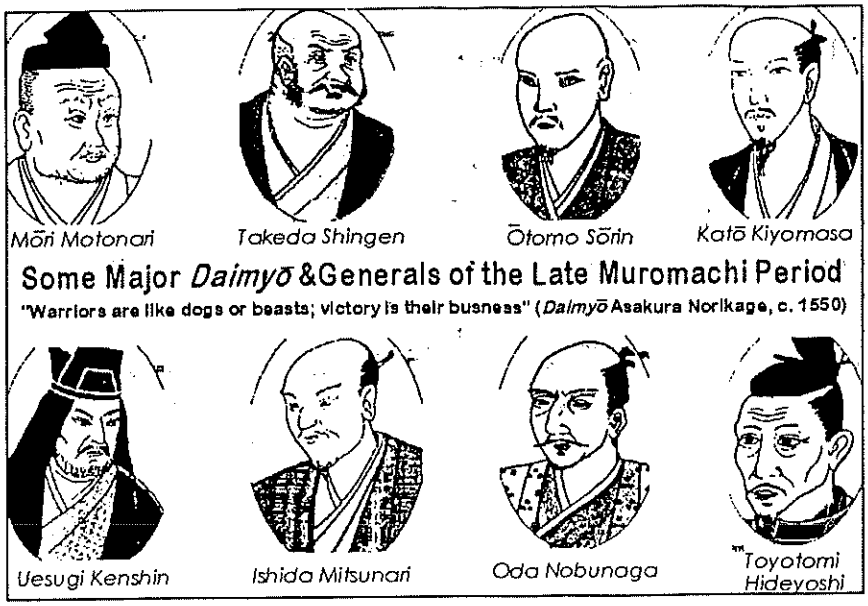
Eitoku: *Chao Fu and his Ox* (L); Xu You washing out his ears (R)

and suggests the tremendous power of nature. There are numerous interpretations of this ominous fissure in the landscape. Another holds that it is the turmoil of the outside world intruding into the painting. If so, then the fissure in Sesshû's landscape may represent the fissures and dislocations tearing apart the social and political fabric of Japan during the late Muromachi period.

Many works of late Muromachi art highlight the theme of reclusion, withdrawal from the world of human affairs. One example is the work of Eitoku 永徳 (1543-1590), famous for his paintings of ancient Chinese hermits and Daoist immortals. *Chao Fu and His Ox* illustrates part of a tale of two ancient (legendary) Chinese hermits. As the story goes, Sage King Yao offered to turn the empire over to the hermit Xu You. Horrified at the thought of becoming the ruler, the hermit washed out his ears, by which he had heard Yao's offer, in a nearby river. Thereupon, the river became so polluted that another hermit, Chao Fu, would not cross it. He turned away from the river and returned home with his ox. No doubt stories like this appealed to many world-weary Japanese at the time, including generals and *daimyô*.

Another theme of late Muromachi art is the celebration of that which is sturdy, strong, and long-lived. Needless to say, such characteristics were precisely opposite the conditions then prevailing in Japanese society. In the "real world," even the most powerful *daimyô* rarely lasted long before being defeated in battle by a rival or betrayed by a subordinate. In painting, as in poetry, the pine and plum served as symbols of stability and longevity. So too, did bamboo, which is extremely sturdy despite its hollow core. A good, relatively early example is Shûbun's 周文 *Studio of the Three Worthies* from the early fifteenth century. In the painting we see a small hermitage in winter surrounded by pines, plum, and bamboo, which dwarf the human-built structure. The painting conveys at least two themes at the same time: 1) a celebration of stability and longevity, which 2) tends to accentuate human fragility and short life by contrast. Such a painting could serve both to reflect the world around it (theme two) and present an alternative vision of that

Styled after Shûbun's *Studio of the Three Worthies*



world (theme one).

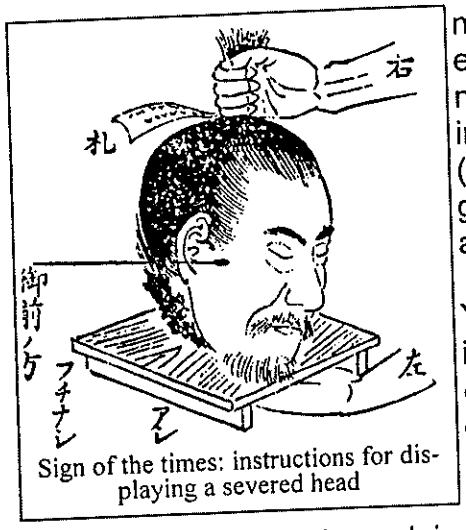
All of the paintings we have seen thus far reflect Chinese influence, both in terms of style and content. It was during the Muromachi period that Chinese influence on Japanese painting was strongest. There is much more to Muromachi art than we have seen here, and there is more that could be said about each of the works mentioned above. Here we simply suggest some tentative links between art and social, political and religious conditions. Also, keep these representative samples of late Muromachi art in mind when we examine the vastly different *ukiyoe* 浮世絵 prints of the Tokugawa period.

JAPAN REUNIFIED

In the middle of the sixteenth century, there were about two dozen major *daimyô* struggling for power. These struggles for power gave rise to new institutions and methods of government. The *shôen* system was gone by this time. In most parts of Japan it had faded away by the middle of the fifteenth century. Most *daimyô* tried to implement a system of direct taxation of the peasants in their domains. Many *daimyô* also experimented with ways of promoting commerce and industry. Despite all the warfare, or perhaps in part because of it, commerce flourished throughout most parts of Japan in late Muromachi times. Many *daimyô* cultivated relationships with major merchants in order to have ready access to needed supplies for military campaigns. The pressures of warfare ensured survival only of the fittest. Those *daimyô* that could collect taxes efficiently, promote commerce, and keep tight control over subordinates tended to prosper. Those that could not soon died. The middle fifteenth century was a "dog eat dog" world for warriors.

In 1560, a *daimyô* named **Oda Nobunaga** 織田信長 (1523-1582) scored a decisive victory over a powerful rival that outnumbered Oda's forces approximately ten to one. Oda was victorious because of superior weapons and innovative tactics. He was, for example, the first *daimyô* to take firearms seriously and employ large numbers of foot soldiers firing muskets in rotating groups. By 1568, he had conquered the area around the capital of Kyôto and had taken up residence there. At that point, he faced his greatest opponents: powerful Buddhist temples.

We saw that Buddhist temples were a major political and military presence as early as the late Heian period. Throughout the Muromachi period, some temples or sects of Buddhism became so powerful that they controlled entire provinces and com-



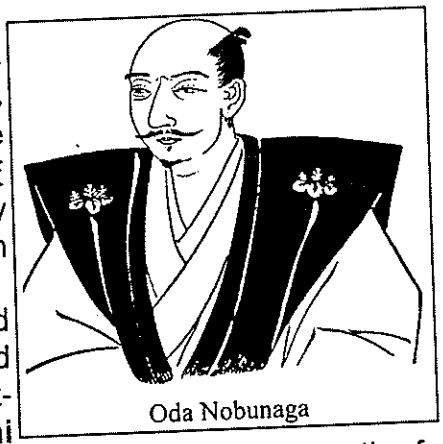
Sign of the times: instructions for displaying a severed head

manded hundreds of thousands of soldiers. After several costly campaigns, Oda managed to subdue the major Buddhist organizations in the Kyôto area. Realizing the potential power of those motivated by religion (as opposed to rational calculations of personal, worldly gain), Oda ordered the slaughter of everyone associated with the defeated temples, children included.

In the meantime, the last Ashikaga shôgun, Yoshiaki 足利義昭, became nervous over Oda's growing power. In 1573, he fled Kyôto to seek the aid of *daimyô* opposed to Oda. By this time, however, nobody of any significance took the Ashikaga shôguns seriously, and Yoshiaki lived out the rest of his days in obscurity. Throughout the 1570s, Oda employed skillful diplomacy to get various *daimyô* to fight each other. In such cases, even the victors would normally be in a weakened state vis-à-vis Oda's forces. By 1581, after defeating a major *daimyô* rival and another powerful Buddhist organization, Oda had emerged as the most powerful person in Japan. Large areas of Japan still remained outside his control, but the momentum was clearly in his favor.

Oda was a typical product of his day: ruthless and vindictive. One historian summed up his personality as follows:

> [Oda] Nobunaga was essentially a ruthless tyrant who was extremely self-willed. For example, he had a young serving maid executed because she had not cleaned the room thoroughly—she had left a stem of fruit on the floor. He was also a vindictive man. A man once took a shot at him and was captured many years later. Nobunaga had the man buried in the ground with only his head exposed and had it sawed off. He was particularly merciless in his treatment of Buddhist monks. In addition to the massacre of the monks of Mt. Hiei, he at one time had one hundred and fifty monks who were attached to the Taketa clan's family temple burned to death merely because they had performed funeral services for the departed chief of the clan.[1]


Oda Nobunaga

Oda once had the heads of several recently defeated opponents dipped in molten gold. He then sent them as "gifts" to potential rivals. His official motto, inscribed on the seal with which he stamped documents, was *tenka fubu* 天下布武, "overspreading all under heaven with military might." Oda's was an age when raw power and ambition were the keys to success.

In 1582, a fire all around his quarters awakened Oda in the middle of the night. A subordinate general had betrayed him. Seeing no way out of the flames, he committed suicide. Another of his generals, **Toyotomi Hideyoshi** 豊臣秀吉 (1536-1598), who at the time of Oda's death was busy fighting in the north of Japan, rushed back to Kyôto upon hearing the news. He quickly killed Oda's betrayer

[1] Mikiso Hane, *Premodern Japan: A Historical Survey* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 114-115.

and, able to take the "moral" high ground as avenger of his lord's death, took over command of Oda's organization.


Toyotomi Hideyoshi

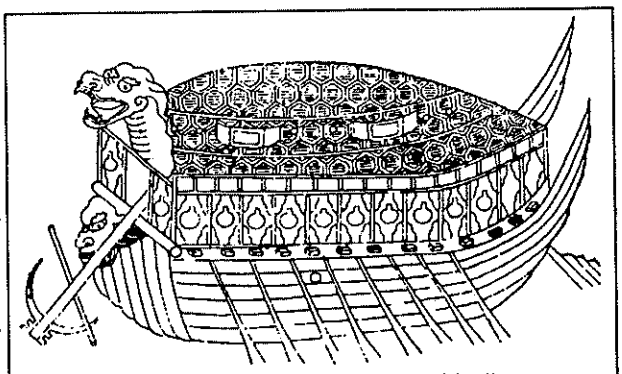
Hideyoshi[2] finished the work Oda had started. After several military campaigns, he had subdued all of Japan by 1585. The only possible exception was a *daimyô* named **Tokugawa Ieyasu** 徳川家康 (1542-1616), another of Oda's generals. Hideyoshi worked out a truce with Ieyasu under which Ieyasu supported Hideyoshi but also received a small empire consisting of eight provinces. While Hideyoshi was alive, there was no open conflict between he and Ieyasu, but Ieyasu remained a separate power outside of Hideyoshi's complete control.

Hideyoshi reunified Japan after over a century of civil war and political instability. As ruler he enacted **several important policies** that helped shape the structure of society and government for centuries after his death. Hideyoshi was himself of peasant origin, but he took steps to make sure that no peasant would again rise to fame and power as a general. He decreed a formal, rigid division between warriors (commonly known by the Japanese term ***samurai***) and everyone else ("commoners"). This decree was the origin of the ***samurai* class** as a clearly defined, legal entity. Those who were part-time warriors and part-time farmers or merchants had to choose between military or civilian life. After separating the warriors from the rest of society, Hideyoshi then collected all offensive weapons (e.g., long swords, certain types of firearms) from the commoners in what is called the "Sword Hunt" 刀狩り. Ostensibly, he had the weapons collected to be melted down and made into a huge Buddha image. Religious piety, however, was not the real reason. As you can imagine, it is much easier to collect taxes from a disarmed populace.

Another key element in efficient taxation is knowing how much everyone has. To this end, Hideyoshi ordered a massive cadastral survey 検地. Teams of officials went out with poles and other measuring devices in hand and measured every foot of farmland. They also assessed the quality of each plot of land and its expected productivity. The survey teams compiled all this information, which

Warriors of the late 15th century—members of the *samurai* class Hideyoshi created as a legal entity

[2]Oda Nobunaga is commonly called either "Oda" or "Nobunaga;" Toyotomi Hideyoshi is commonly known only as "Hideyoshi." The reasons for these naming conventions need not detain us here, but do not be bothered by what may seem to be inconsistencies in usage.


One of Admiral Yi's "turtle ships"

took years to gather completely, into detailed registers. These records remained the basis of taxation in many parts of Japan until the middle of the nineteenth century.

In addition to the policies mentioned above, Hideyoshi launched a massive **invasion of Korea** in 1592. His interest was less in Korea itself than in conquering Ming China. Historians sometimes debate Hideyoshi's motivation for the invasion. Some, for example, say the primary reason was to find an outlet for the energies of the many warriors in Japan, whose restlessness might have caused trouble at home. Others point out that Hideyoshi had even made plans for the conquest of India. Therefore, his own personal megalomania was the primary motivating force.

Whatever Hideyoshi's reasons may have been, a Japanese force of over 150,000 attacked Korea in 1592. Some members of the Korean court had warned the king and officials about the possibility of a Japanese invasion. But these warnings went unheeded, and the Korean side was unprepared. The seasoned warriors in Japan's army won victory after victory and soon overran the Korean capital. The Japanese forces continued northward toward China, but before they could enter China, a hastily-assembled Ming army engaged them in battle. From Ming China's point of view, it was better to fight Japan in Korea than in China. This Ming army stopped the Japanese advance but did not decisively defeat the Japanese army.

After the initial Japanese victories, the war settled into a stalemate. Japanese forces held the major Korean cities. They were unable, however, to advance into China and came under constant harassment in outlying areas from bands of Korean and Chinese soldiers. The war at sea went much worse for Japan. Korea was fortunate to have a brilliant admiral, Yi Sun-sin 李舜臣, whose forces kept constant pressure on Japanese supply lines. Admiral Yi created a radically new type of fighting ship: the world's first ironclad vessel. Called "turtle ships" 亀甲船 because of their appearance, these low-profile, iron-plated ships were almost immune from enemy gunfire. They wreaked havoc on the Japanese navy.

Hideyoshi eventually entered into negotiations with Ming China. The negotiations were a classic case of miscommunication. The Ming emperor, misled by his officials who were reluctant to admit the extent of Japanese victories, was convinced that Hideyoshi was ready to surrender and become a vassal of Ming China. Hideyoshi, on the other hand, expected the Chinese side to be forthcoming with major concessions. When Hideyoshi finally discovered the truth, he exploded with rage and ordered a second invasion in 1597. The second invasion force numbered about 140,000. They scored a number of important victories, but Hideyoshi died in 1598 before the final outcome could be settled decisively. At this point, the major *daimyô* met in a council. None were enthusiastic about continuing the war, and they ordered the withdrawal of the entire Japanese force. The war ended after years of bloodshed and devastation with nothing positive accomplished by any of the parties involved. The only possible exception was

EARS 耳

Hideyoshi wanted proof of Japanese fighting effectiveness, so it became common practice for Japanese soldiers to cut off the ears of fallen Koreans, pickle them, and send them back to Hideyoshi. At one point Hideyoshi gathered together a vast mound of these ears (about 40,000 pair) and held a "festival of blood." "Disgusting," you might think, and no doubt by this time, Hideyoshi had become a murderous tyrant both at home and abroad.

Moving to the 1940s, the U.S. wartime propaganda film, *Know Your Enemy—Japan,* cited Hideyoshi's "ear mound" as evidence of deep-rooted evil on the part of Japan's people. During the Pacific War, the removal of ears and sometimes other body parts as grisly souvenirs *was* rather common. *Ironically,* however, this practice was common among U.S. soldiers, not Japanese. For these and other less-publicized details of a miserable, brutal war, see John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986).

that Korean prisoners of war introduced a number of new cultural forms to Japan, particularly in the area of pottery.

There is good evidence that Hideyoshi had become mentally unstable toward the end of his life. He certainly became more murderous. Unable to produce a male child of his own, he eventually adopted a son and heir. Late in his life, one of Hideyoshi's wives unexpectedly gave birth to a healthy boy. Now with a biological son of his own, Hideyoshi ordered his adopted son to kill himself. At the time of Hideyoshi's death, however, his son was still a small child. Hideyoshi was rightly worried that this child would not fare well in the brutal political world of late sixteenth-century Japan. Hideyoshi appointed a council of leading *daimyô* to rule as a regency until his son came of age. As he lay dying, Hideyoshi required these *daimyô* to swear eternal loyal to Hideyoshi's son. Honesty and trustworthiness, however, were not qualities the leading *daimyô* of that time possessed.

In fact, as soon as Hideyoshi died, the leading *daimyô* began eyeing each other with suspicion and jockeying for strategic advantage. A decisive battle took place in 1600, in which the forces of Tokugawa Ieyasu won a decisive victory. This battle left Tokugawa Ieyasu the most powerful person in Japan. Ieyasu was more than an excellent general. He was also a shrewd politician and institution builder. In the course of capitalizing on his victory, Ieyasu established a strong and stable bakufu that ruled Japan until the 1860s. The period from 1603, the date Ieyasu formally took the title of shôgun, until the last shôgun's resignation in 1867, is known as the **Tokugawa period** or Edo period.

Hanshan (l) & Shide (r): Two Chinese Zen recluses popular in late Muromachi Japan & shown here in a Tokugawa-era depiction

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CHAPTER SIX

EARLY MODERN JAPAN I: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS, SOCIETY AND FOREIGN RELATIONS, 1600-1850

Compared with the two periods preceding it, the **Tokugawa period** (1603-1867) was a time of relative peace and prosperity. It was also a colorful age with an urban culture that tended to reject the gloom and longing for virtue of the Muromachi period. The Tokugawa period gets its name from the family of shôguns who presided over a strong bakufu. The strength of the Tokugawa bakufu helped create an age relatively free of civil strife. Political stability encouraged cultural and economic growth. Forms of high culture that were once the province of an elite few became widely available, in the major cities at least, via a variety of private schools and academies. Neither the court aristocracy nor the warriors played the major role in shaping urban culture of the Tokugawa period. More than any other group, it was the urban merchants that molded culture. The most vigorous cultural forms of the period reflected the busy, consumption-oriented world of commerce.

Move over Chao Fu! Tokugawa urban culture tended toward irreverence. Here, a courtesan has replaced Chao Fu (Cf. previous chapter). Pictures of Chao Fu and his ox were also common in brothels, again as a parody of holier-than-thou virtue.

THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS: ESTABLISHMENT OF STABLE POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Looking back now, we can see that the Tokugawa period was comparatively peaceful and stable. For someone in 1605, or even 1625, however, it was by no means clear what the future would bring. Furthermore, although in retrospect we can see that the establishment of the Tokugawa bakufu was actually the beginning of the end of the age of warrior predominance in society, at the dawn of the Tokugawa period the warrior seemed central to any social order. The founding premise of the Tokugawa bakufu was, therefore, that he who controls the warriors controls all of Japan. The bakufu's early institutional development reflected this premise.

In 1603, **Tokugawa Ieyasu** took the title shôgun. As the most powerful person in Japan, he could have taken any title he wanted. In contrast with Hideyoshi, Ieyasu had many

Major Steps in the Evolution of the Tokugawa Bakufu

1600: Tokugawa Ieyasu wins Battle of Sekigahara

1603: Ieyasu takes title of shôgun

1605: Ieyasu "retires," son Hidetada takes over as shôgun

1612: Christianity prohibited

1614-15: Ieyasu destroys Toyotomi Hideyori, Hideyoshi's son

1615: Bakufu issues Laws for Warrior Households

1616: Ieyasu dies

1623: Hidetada retires, son Iemitsu becomes shôgun

1629: Laws for warrior households revised & reissued

1635: Trade with China & European countries limited to Nagasaki Japanese forbidden freely to travel abroad

1635: System of "alternate attendance" made mandatory for all

1637-8: Shimabara uprising, more resources devoted to rooting out Christianity

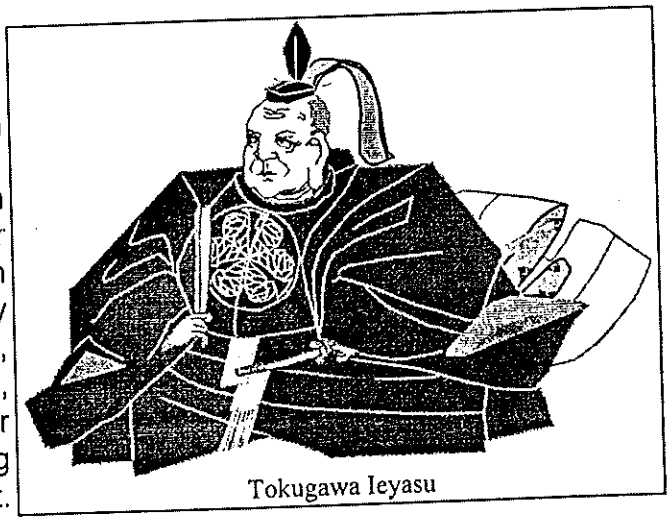
1638: Portuguese ships prohibited

1641: Dutch trading center moves to Nagasaki, British leave

1651: 3rd shôgun, Iemitsu, dies

children by his various wives and concubines. Ieyasu selected his son Hidetada 秀忠 to succeed to the position of shôgun and then "retired" to rule from behind the scenes—in what by now should be a very familiar style of exercising power in Japan. By retiring, Ieyasu was able to ensure a smooth transition and succession between himself and his son.

In 1612, Hidetada issued a decree prohibiting Christianity in Japan. In Hideyoshi's day, nearly one percent of Japan's population had become Christian, at least nominally. When Christianity, in the form of Roman Catholicism, first came to Japan, most Japanese regarded it as a form of Buddhism. Recall that for Mahayana Buddhists, nearly anything can be and is Buddhism. As time went on, however, Japan's leaders, starting with Hideyoshi, became uneasy about the potential political power of Christianity. Many regarded Christianity as similar to the militant sects of Buddhism that Oda Nobunaga had so recently destroyed. The Tokugawa shôguns saw that Catholicism and Spanish and Portuguese military expansion throughout the globe seemed to go hand-in-hand. The bakufu ban on Christianity, therefore, was based in part on fears of its potential for causing internal political unrest. It was also based on fear that Christianity might help pave the way for an external invasion by Spain or Portugal. The bakufu banned certain militant forms of Buddhism around this time for similar reasons.



Tokugawa Ieyasu

Perhaps the most important step in solidifying the power of his family was for Ieyasu to eliminate the only other person in Japan with a possible claim to legitimacy as ruler. This person was Hideyoshi's son, Hideyori 秀頼, now a young man. Hideyori, was, of course, the one Ieyasu and other leading *daimyô* had sworn to the dying Hideyoshi that they would forever protect.

Excerpts from Laws for Warrior Households

The arts of peace and war, including archery and horsemanship, shall be pursued single-mindedly.

Drinking parties and wanton revelry are to be avoided.

Offenders against the law shall not be harbored or hidden in any domain.

Whenever one intends to make repairs on a castle of one of the domains, bakufu authorities should be notified. All construction of new castles is to be stopped and never resumed.

Immediate report should be made of innovations which are being planned or factional conspiracies being formed in neighboring domains.

Do not enter into marriage privately [i.e., without notifying bakufu authorities].

Visits of the *daimyô* to the capital are to be in accordance with regulations [regarding the total number of escorting *samurai* and related matters].

The *samurai* of the various domains shall lead a frugal and simple life.[1]

Hideyori resided in Ôsaka castle and had with him a force of warriors hostile to Tokugawa Ieyasu. In 1614, Ieyasu launched an attack on Ôsaka castle, which lasted into 1615. In the end, all inside, including Hideyori, were slaughtered.

After this victory, the bakufu issued **Laws for Warrior Households** (*Buke shohatto* 武家諸法度). These laws applied to all members of the *samurai* class, whether in the direct service of the Tokugawa family or otherwise. The laws were a mixture of vague moral exhortations (e.g., to lead a frugal and simple life), unlikely to be enforceable, and specific restrictions or requirements. Many items, such as the restrictions on castle construction and marriages, were intended to weaken the power of the *daimyô* vis-à-vis the bakufu. These laws established the basic framework of the relationship between the *daimyô*—who continued to exist throughout the Tokugawa period—and the bakufu. In 1629, the bakufu issued a revised version of the Laws for Warrior Households, and they underwent several more revisions during the next century.

Ieyasu died in 1616. His death caused no particular problems, however, for Hidetada had become well-acquainted with the office of shôgun and continued his father's work of creating a strong bakufu under the Tokugawa family. Like his father, Hidetada also "retired" while in good health. In 1623, he handed the office of shôgun over to his son Iemitsu 家光, further establishing the Tokugawa family's hold over the highest office in the land. Tokugawa Ieyasu and his sons were not scholars, but they had a basic understanding of history. They learned from the examples of Hideyoshi and, much earlier, Minamoto Yoritomo. They worked to ensure that power would remain in Tokugawa hands well into the future. To this end, they created stable, viable institutions and also devoted attention to bolstering the religious-symbolic authority of the Tokugawa house.

The second shôgun, Hidetada

In the 1630s, the bakufu began imposing restrictions on foreign trade and travel. These restrictions were in part connected with the earlier ban on Christianity, which the Tokugawa

[1] Adapted from Ryusaku Tsunoda, Wm. Theodore de Bary, and Donald Keene, comps., *Sources of Japanese Tradition,* Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, 1964), pp. 327-329.

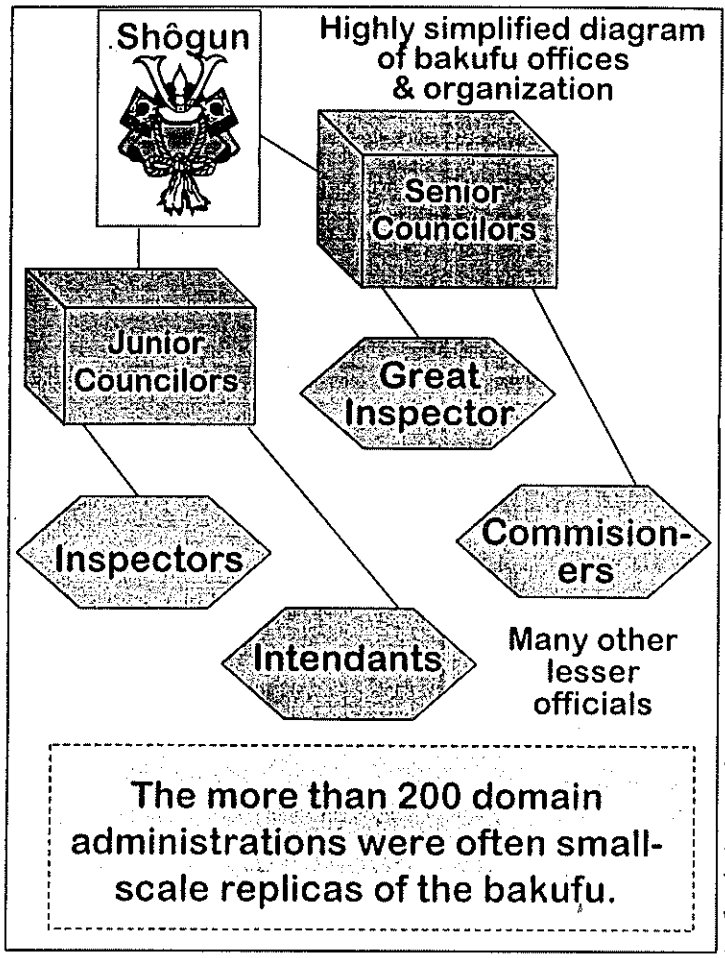

The third shôgun, Iemitsu. By the end of his reign, the basic structure of the bakufu was complete

shôguns took most seriously. They were also part of the overall process of the bakufu tightening its grip on power. The bakufu reserved for itself the right to direct trade and diplomatic relations with countries outside of Japan. In order better to supervise foreign relations, the bakufu issued orders that no Japanese may travel abroad without shôgunal permission and that foreign trade be restricted mainly to the bakufu-controlled port of Nagasaki. Dutch merchants, as a result, moved their trading post to Nagasaki in the 1640s. There had also been an English trading post, but it folded of its own accord owing to a lack of profitability. By 1640, there was no British presence in Japan. Spanish and Portuguese ships had, up until this time, engaged in trade with various Japanese domains. Owing to a fear of Spanish and Portuguese military power, and to a general unwillingness of merchants from these two countries to separate trade and religion, the bakufu prohibited Portuguese (and by extension Spanish) ships and persons from entering Japan.

Closely connected with this prohibition was a large-scale uprising by impoverished peasants in the Shimabara Peninsula 島原半島 and nearby islands in Kyûshû. This was an area of Japan in which Christians had been numerous, and the rebels adopted Christian symbols for their banners. With great difficulty, bakufu forces eventually put down the uprising, slaughtering all connected with it. The bakufu even ordered a Dutch warship to assist in the bombardment of the rebels' stronghold, which it did. As a result of this uprising, bakufu authorities became even more convinced that Christianity was a threat to their political power and put extensive resources into a generally successful campaign to root it out. The extremely small number of Christians that continued practicing had to do so in great secrecy until the 1870s.

One of the most important means of bakufu control over the *daimyô* was the **system of alternate attendance** (*sankin kôtai* 参勤[参覲] 交代). Under this system, *daimyô* spent half of their time in their local domains and half of their time "in attendance" on the shôgun, living in Edo near the shôgunal palace. The typical arrangement was one year in the domain and one year in Edo. The wives and family members of *daimyô* remained in Edo all the time. This system had a number of advantages for the bakufu. It kept the *daimyô* moving and helped drain some of their financial resources owing to the need to maintain suitably elaborate residences both in their domains and in Edo. Because the *daimyô* spent so much of their time in Edo, they were easier for the shôgun to keep under close watch. Finally, the families of the *daimyô* effectively served as hostages to help guarantee good behavior.

When Tokugawa Iemitsu died in 1651, the bakufu had become firmly established in power, and the Tokugawa family was firmly in control of the bakufu. It was no longer necessary for shôguns to retire in favor of their sons.

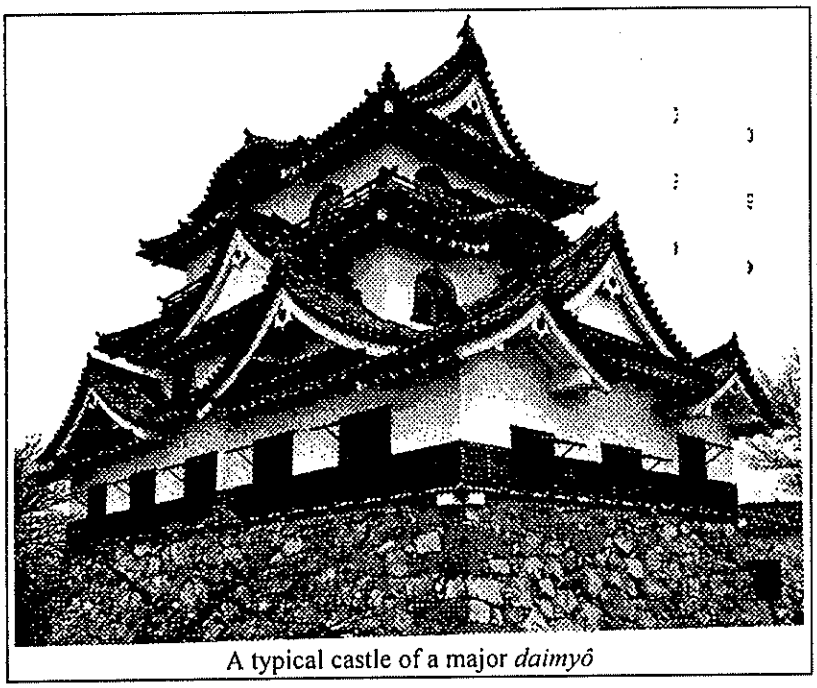


We now examine the **basic structure of the bakufu** and then look at the relationship between the bakufu and the various *daimyô* domains. The bakufu was a large bureaucracy. In theory, and sometimes in practice, the shôgun ruled as absolute dictator. In fact, some shôguns were weak-willed, incompetent, or simply lazy. The bakufu machinery functioned reasonably well with or without strong shôgunal leadership.

The two most important agencies within the bakufu were the **Senior Councilors** (*rôjû* 老中, literally "elders within") and the **Junior Councilors** (*wakadoshiyori* 若年寄り, literally, "younger elders"). The Senior Councilors usually consisted of four or five *daimyô* of a certain type (we examine types of *daimyô* below). Each individual councilor served as overall bakufu administrator on a monthly rotational basis. The whole group met in council to decide important matters of state, such as the selection of a new shôgun should the previous one die without naming a successor. The Senior Councilors also supervised several high-ranking officials such as the commissioners 奉行 that administered the major cities (e.g., Ôsaka and Nagasaki, both bakufu-administered), those that oversaw shrines and temples, those in charge of revenue and finance, and others. The Senior Councilors were a powerful group. Some shôguns gave them wide latitude; others tried to rein them in.

The Junior Councilors, all of whom were *daimyô,* were like the Senior Councilors but with slightly lower status. They supervised inspectors 目付け, who kept watch over bakufu retainers of sub-*daimyô* rank. The Junior Councilors also supervised the bakufu's corps of intendants (郡代 or 代官). These intendants administered parcels of the bakufu's extensive land holdings throughout Japan. Another important task of the Junior Councilors was supervision of the day-to-day operation of the shôgun's castle in Edo.

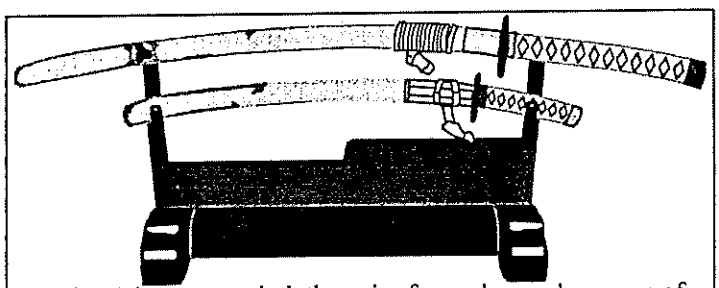
Bakufu relations with the *daimyô* were complex. In some respects, the shôgun was simply a very large and powerful *daimyô.* In other respects, such as when dealing with foreign countries, the shôgun was the singular leader of all of Japan. In the Tokugawa period, there were, throughout Japan, over two hundred *daimyô,* whose domains varied in size from tiny (10,000 units of rice productivity) to vast (over half a million units of rice productivity). There were three categories of *daimyô.* ***Fudai*** 譜代 were those *daimyô* personally allied with Tokugawa Ieyasu at the time of the Battle of Seki-


A typical castle of a major *daimyô*

ga hara in 1600. ***Tozama*** 外様 were those *daimyô* not allied with Tokugawa Ieyasu at the time of the battle, including those who fought against him and those who did not. ***Shinpan*** 親藩 *daimyô* were Tokugawa family relatives. In its early period, the bakufu designated three branches of the Tokugawa family (descending from Ieyasu) as *daimyô* lineages and potential heirs to the office of shôgun should the main line fail to produce a suitable male heir. Later, three more branches assumed *shinpan* status, making a total of six. Some but not all of these branches had the Tokugawa surname.

As we have seen, some *daimyô* not only administered their own domains but also worked as high-ranking bakufu officials. For bakufu offices requiring *daimyô* status, normally, only *fudai* were eligible for appointment. *Shinpan daimyô* occasionally served as bakufu officials, typically as regents for a boy shôgun. *Tozama* were ineligible to become bakufu officials. The *fudai* domains were small and often clustered around the larger *tozama* domains. The first three shôguns worked to create a geographic balance by surrounding *tozama* domains with the presumably more trustworthy *fudai,* with the *fudai* located in positions of strategic importance. Maintaining a balance of power, geographically and otherwise, between all potentially conflicting interests and groups was a conscious policy of the early shôguns.

After Ieyasu's victory, all the *daimyô* throughout Japan swore allegiance to the Tokugawa house. Such oaths would hardly have been worth the paper on which they were written had not the shôgun and his government (which, of course, included some *daimyô*—an incentive for these *daimyô* to preserve the bakufu) held the preponderance of military and economic power. The bakufu directly controlled one-fifth of Japan's agricultural land, making it the largest single land holder by far. It was taxes from this land that provided most of the bakufu's income. The bakufu also controlled all major cities and ports, even if they would otherwise be part of another *daimyô*'s domain. It owned all the gold and silver mines throughout Japan. In theory at least, the *daimyô* ruled at the pleasure of the shôgun, who formally reappointed the *daimyô* from time to time and had the


In the Tokugawa period, the pair of swords, one long, one of medium length, became the badge of *samurai* class members.

authority to confiscate or reduce any domain. The first three shôguns often did confiscate domains of *daimyô* they suspected of disloyalty or other problems. As time when on and the domains became well established, confiscations by the bakufu took place only under highly unusual circumstances.

The bakufu imposed numerous restrictions on *daimyô,* the most important of which are included in the excerpts from Laws for Warrior Households above. *Daimyô* were limited to a single castle and had to obtain bakufu permission to make any repairs on it. *Daimyô* were forbidden to act in concert with each other on any matters of policy. Their relationships, in other words, were to be with the shôgun and the people of their domains, not each other. Even marriages were subject to shôgunal approval. Should a *daimyô* appear to have accumulated a major surplus of wealth, the shôgun might require him to build a bridge or do some other sort of work for the public good outside his own domain—in part as a way of draining off some of that wealth. Alternate attendance also kept *daimyô* expenses up. Bakufu inspectors visited each domain from time to time.

During the Tokugawa period, warriors became more like civil officials, and it was the merchants who exerted the greatest influence on new cultural forms.

The bakufu clearly held more power than any *daimyô*. The *daimyô* nevertheless governed with a high degree of autonomy within their domains. *Daimyô,* for example, paid no regular taxes to the bakufu. As long as they fulfilled their duties to the shôgun, abided by the restrictions mentioned above, and caused no major problems, *daimyô* were free to govern as they saw fit. Some domains issued their own currency, good only within its borders, and laws sometimes varied from one domain to the next. In the early decades of the Tokugawa period, the *daimyô* were a culturally diverse group. By the second and third generations, however, all *daimyô* spent their formative years in Edo, which resulted in a high degree of cultural homogeneity among them.

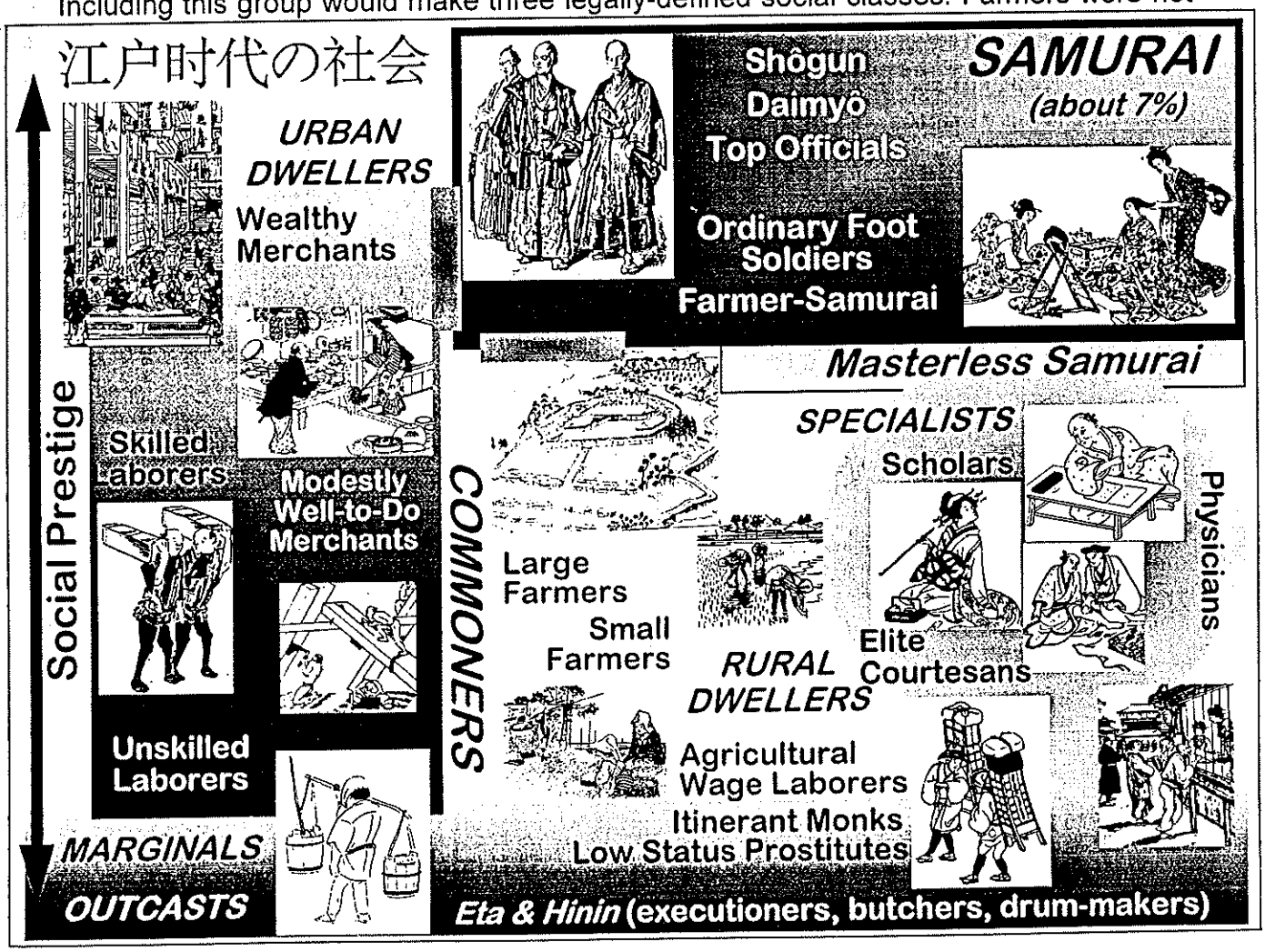
As the years went by, both the bakufu and the various *daimyô* domains encountered fiscal problems and accumulated ever larger debts to the leading business establishments in Ôsaka and Edo. Indeed, the *samurai* class as a whole—which depended on fixed incomes, the value of which steadily shrank owing to inflation—tended to sink into poverty throughout the eighteenth century. In the long run, it was the merchants who prospered during the Tokugawa period.

This chapter continues on the next page

JAPANESE SOCIETY IN THE TOKUGAWA PERIOD

In the traditional view of Tokugawa-period society given in many older textbooks, all was quite simple. As the story goes, society was divided into four social classes, each rigidly defined. One was either a *samurai* (士), a farmer (農), an artisan (工), or a merchant (商), in descending order of prestige. It would make our task quite easy if social organization had been like this, but could any advanced society really be so simple? Indeed, Tokugawa society was *not* that simple. The above four-class description, still commonly seen in many survey textbooks, is *positively incorrect.* Society was *not* divided into four social classes, nor were merchants on the bottom of the prestige ladder.

Although still an oversimplification, the diagram here attempts to convey a more complete view of Tokugawa society. First, there were **two legally-defined social classes** or, depending on one's point of view, perhaps three. The *samurai* class (侍 or 士階級) was a clearly-defined legal entity comprising roughly seven percent of the total population of Japan. Those not *samurai* were commoners (庶民 and other terms, including 百姓, which often specifically meant peasants [農民]). There were **outcasts** (穢多 and 非人), numbering less than one percent of the total population. Legally, these people were outside of ordinary commoner society, although functionally they were not. Including this group would make three legally-defined social classes. Farmers were not

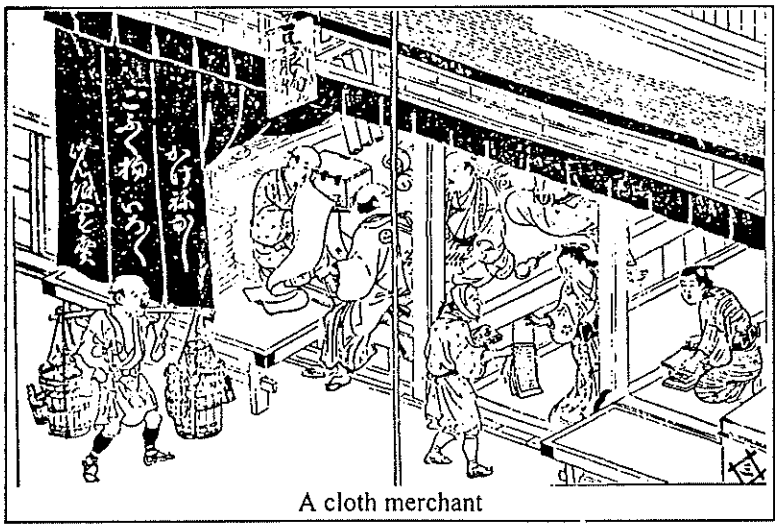



Samurai

a legally-defined social class, nor were artisans or merchants. These names indicated general categories of occupation. There were vast differences in wealth and status among individuals *within* these groups, however, so it is difficult to regard them as social classes in any reasonable sense of the term. Other significant groups included specialists of various kinds, some prestigious, some not. The emperor and the court aristocrats are not included in the diagram because, by the Tokugawa period, they had become far removed from ordinary society. In the paragraphs below, we work our way through the chart, starting in the upper right, moving across to the upper left, then down to the middle left, then across, and finally down to the very bottom.

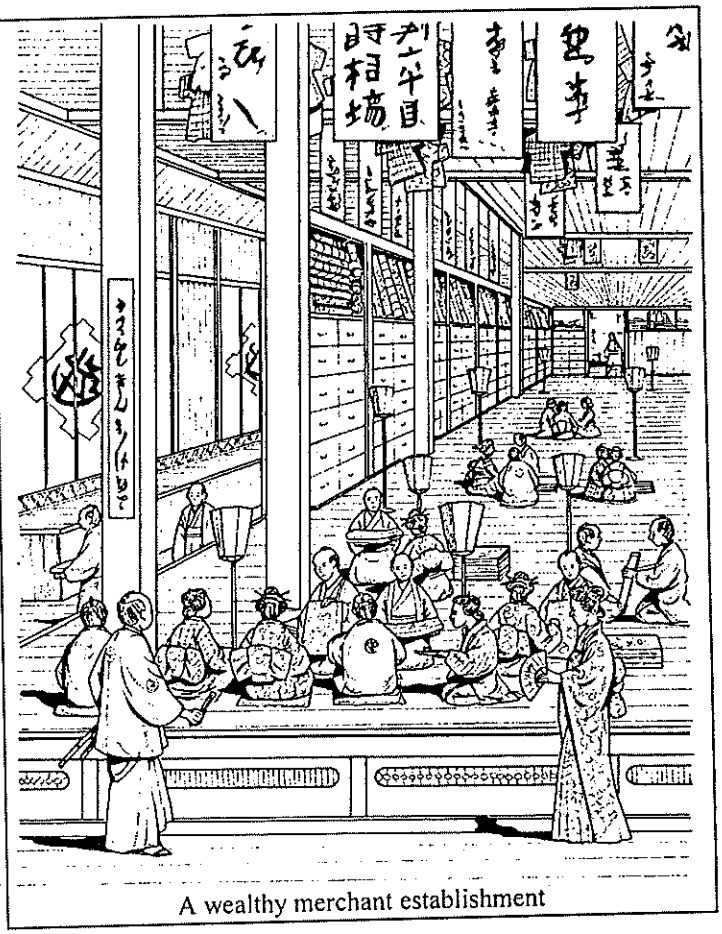
Membership in the ***samurai* class** was hereditary, based on the division between warriors and civilians that Hideyoshi established in the 1580s. *Samurai* were readily identifiable by their distinctive hair style and swords. When appearing in public, *samurai* generally carried a long and a medium sword. The laws and customary practices of the Tokugawa period required commoners to behave respectfully toward *samurai,* making way for them on the road for example. *Samurai* were entitled to kill any disrespectful commoner, although they rarely did so in practice.

Most *samurai* served the bakufu or one of the domains as warriors, police, and government officials, in return for which they received a stipend. Some domains recognized as many as 100 different gradations in *samurai* rank, which was ordinarily hereditary. Only high-ranking *samurai* were eligible to become government officials. The majority served as ordinary foot soldiers, and, because the Tokugawa period was generally peaceful, they often had little to do. Some of these relatively idle *samurai* turned to scholarship of one kind or another. Occasionally such *samurai* became so immersed in their studies that they resigned their posts and opened schools.


A cloth merchant

As the life in the Tokugawa period settled into peaceful routines, many domains found that they had too many *samurai.* Although it was not customary to fire unneeded *samurai,* some did lose their jobs owing to bakufu confiscations of their *daimyô*'s domain. Such masterless *samurai* 浪人 rarely found a new employer, though they did retain their status as *samurai* provided they did not begin working at "commoner" occupations. Some unemployed

samurai managed to make a living as bodyguards or security guards for wealthy merchants; some opened martial arts schools, and others drifted into the ranks of the commoners and took up ordinary occupations. A small number of domains, most notably Satsuma 薩摩 in the extreme south of Kyûshû, simply had too many *samurai* to support. These domains required the lowest-ranking *samurai* to make their living as farmers, though they retained their formal warrior status. Such *samurai* were known as *gôshi* 郷士, "village *samurai*" ("Farmer-*samurai*" in the diagram).



A wealthy merchant establishment

In theory, the exercise of political power was exclusively a *samurai* prerogative. Throughout the eighteenth century, however, the *samurai* class as a whole, from the *daimyô* down, became ever more financially pressed and ever more indebted to wealthy merchants 豪商. Wealth and political power are never completely separate entities, and, by the middle of the Tokugawa period, wealth was to be found in the larger merchant establishments (firms like Yasuda 安田, Mitsui 三井 and Mitsubishi 三菱, which today are giant multi-national corporations). Many *daimyô* became indebted to these businesses, which were a major source of loans. Eventually, wealthy merchant houses began to manage the finances of many *daimyô,* investing their tax revenues and paying out *samurai* stipends.

Printmakers

Thus, despite the theory, some **merchants** *did* wield significant political power, albeit indirectly. The heads of large merchant establishments typically sat on councils that governed the major cities (under the bakufu-appointed commissioner). While serving in such capacities, these merchants were often permitted to carry swords like *samurai.* When acting in their capacity as businessmen, they wore civilian attire, thereby blurring the theoretically rigid division between *samurai* and commoners.

Wealthy merchants resided in the major cities. Most began as cloth merchants and branched out into other lucrative fields, especially money changing and rice wholesaling. Currency exchange was a booming business because many different types of currency cir-

culated in Tokugawa Japan—various types of bakufu-minted gold, silver and copper coins (each of the same type would also differ in value depending on *when* it was minted, owing to frequent coinage debasements), various types of Chinese currency, Mexican silver dollars, domain currencies, and more.


Print merchants

Of course, not all merchants were wealthy and politically influential. Many were moderately well off, and many others barely managed to make a living. As a whole, however, it was the commercial sector of society that became increasingly wealthy. While much of this wealth was concentrated in a relatively small number of hands, most urban businesses flourished during the Tokugawa period. One reason Japan's economy grew at such a rapid rate in the modern era (late 19th and early 20th centuries) was that it had already become highly commercialized by middle of the Tokugawa period. The major merchant houses of the Tokugawa period took the lead in investing in new industries and technologies during the Meiji period.


Porcelain shop

A variety of people inhabited the ever-growing cities of Tokugawa Japan. A large number of these people were artisans (skilled craftsmen) and manual laborers of varying degrees of skill, many of whom worked for wages. The migration pattern was from the countryside to the cities, and many of the new arrivals in places like Edo or Ôsaka had no particular skill that would be useful in the urban job market. Such persons usually had to seek low-paying, miserable jobs such as collecting and hauling excrement (a valuable commodity sold to farmers as fertilizer by firms specializing in the trade). Many of these manual laborers did not prosper, often dying an early death from tuberculosis or some other ailment. Social mobility was difficult. But it was also possible. Significant upward movement usually took place across generations. With both hard work and luck, the children or grandchildren of the excrement hauler mentioned above might end up owning a fertilizer company and employ others to do the actual hauling. The hard work part of the formula for success was common. The luck part was much less so.


Excrement hauler

Although Japan's cities grew rapidly during the Tokugawa period, the majority of the population lived in the countryside, most making their living through **agriculture** or related work. Like urban dwellers, those living in the countryside varied in terms of wealth and political influence.

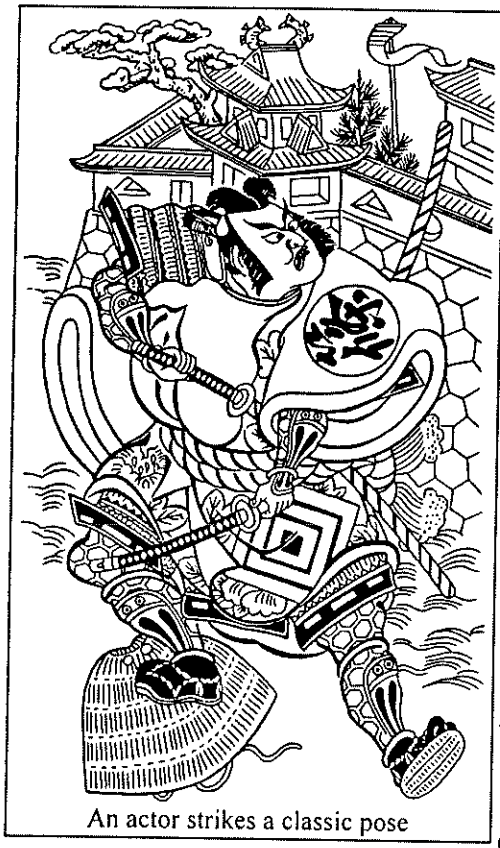

Backbreaking work: transplanting rice seedlings

Compared with urban dwellers, those in the countryside generally had lower social status, all else being equal. Some farmers owned (i.e., had the rights to farm—the concept of private property was vague at this time) large quantities of good land. These large-scale farmers 豪農 rented much of their land to tenants, who paid a substantial portion of the harvest as rent. Most farmers were smaller "owner"-operators, with the rights to roughly the same quantity of land that the family could cultivate. Even these smaller-scale farmers sometimes rented out parts of their land, and rented parts of others' land, depending on their specialized needs. It was possible, in other words to be both a tenant farmer and a landlord at the same time. Land use patterns in Tokugawa Japan were complex and reflected the mixed influences of customary practices, climate, technology, and market forces.

Farmers with little or no land of their own often lived hand-to-mouth. Even modestly well off farmers could be reduced to great suffering in times of drought or other natural disasters. One of the keys to successful farming during the Tokugawa period was keeping up with the latest knowledge of agricultural techniques and intelligently applying these techniques to one's own situation. The Tokugawa period was a time of great advances in applied sciences such as agriculture. Numerous books were available to those who could read them. Farmers with both education sufficient for reading basic Japanese prose and capital sufficient to purchase the best fertilizers and equipment usually enjoyed steady increases in production. Taxes, while heavy, remained constant in most domains throughout the Tokugawa period. Increased productivity, therefore, meant increased income for the farmer. Generally speaking, farmers already well off at the start of the Tokugawa period became even wealthier as time passed. The standard of living of those in the middle also went up, though at a much slower pace and with more vicissitudes. The lot of tenant farmers and agricultural wage laborers usually remained poor, but in some areas, the demand for labor became so high that one could make a decent living as a migrant agricultural wage laborer.


Collection of tax rice

Except in those few domains with farmer-*samurai,* the warriors lived in the domain's castle town, not in the **rural villages**. Villages, therefore, were largely self-governing. Typically, each village negotiated a tax payment with the domain government (or bakufu intendant). The payment would normally be whatever had been paid the year before, but, in times of poor harvests, village leaders would often press for a temporary reduction. Do-


An actor strikes a classic pose

main governments' insistence on full tax payments, even in times of drought or other natural disasters, sometimes caused local peasant uprisings 百姓一揆. These uprisings flared up from time to time, becoming quite frequent and serious by the end of the Tokugawa period. As long as villages paid their taxes in full and on time and caused no obvious trouble, the domain governments generally left them alone. Farmers rarely saw *samurai* unless they traveled to a major town.

The details of village government varied from place to place. In most cases the leading families (those with substantial wealth and/or long histories of residence in the village) had at least some say in matters of importance, either officially as members of a council or less formally. At the top of the political hierarchy in most villages was a **headman** 庄屋. Some of these village heads came from a single leading family, often one that had been part-time *samurai* prior to Hideyoshi's separation of military and civilian roles. Sometimes several prominent families provided village heads on a rotating basis. In other cases, the domain government designated village heads. The headman represented the village to the domain government (or bakufu representative). Like wealthy merchants serving on city councils, when performing official duties such as supervising the collection and transmission of tax rice and other produce, village headman often wore the swords of a *samurai*. Here, too, we see a small gray area on the border between *samurai* and commoner. The poorer members of the village often had little influence in decision making and, not surprisingly, bore a disproportionately large share of the village's tax burden.


A Courtesan

Tokugawa Japan was home to a number of **specialists**, most based in urban areas. Famous **stage actors**, for example, were social celebrities in the major cities, much like stars of the film industry are today. Unlike the case in earlier periods, there were no actresses throughout most of the Tokugawa period, by bakufu order. The bakufu tried to regulate prostitution in Edo (without much success), restricting it to one area of the city. Up until the early Tokugawa period, actresses had often been prostitutes. The stage became a platform for displaying themselves to potential customers, and their "acting" a means of enticement. Fights often erupted as members of the audience sought the favors of one or another of the actresses. It was in part to curtail such rowdiness that the bakufu banned women from the stage. The ban on actresses forced men to play all the female roles,


Elite courtesans

placing a premium on skill in acting. The bakufu attempt to separate the theater and prostitution, however, was not really successful because many, though not all, of these male players of female roles (*onnagata* 女形) also worked as prostitutes.

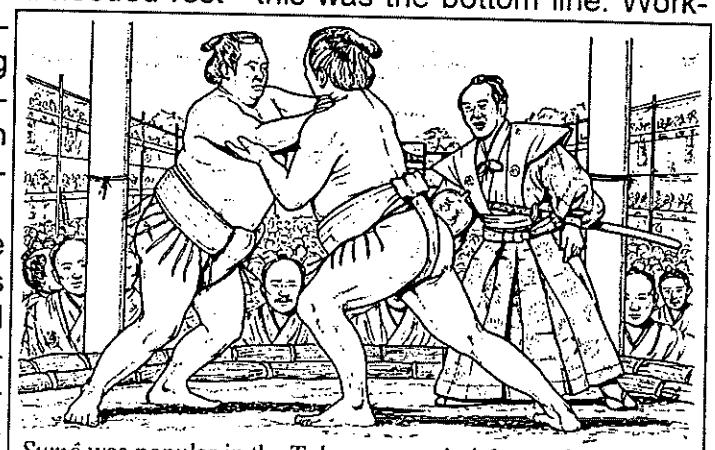
In many respects, the former actresses-prostitutes continued to perform similar roles even after the bakufu banned women on stage. At the urging of leading merchants (who stood to profit from the policy), the bakufu established an area of Edo that came to be known as **Yoshiwara** 吉原 as the exclusive site of the city's "pleasure quarters" (In the Japanese of the day: あ り ん す 国). Here, worked the **high-class courtesans** (general term: *keisei* 傾城, "castle destroyers," i.e., *femme fatales;* later: *oiran* 花魁 or 華魁). These courtesans commanded extremely high prices and enjoyed fame similar to today's film and sports heroes. They also suffered from many of the pitfalls of fame and fortune, much as do today's celebrities. Although one could always find a Confucian moralist to condemn the practice, for most people in Tokugawa Japan, high-class prostitution carried with it little or no moral stigma. It was part of an urban culture of consumption, pleasure, sensuality, and hedonism.

Wealthy "dandies" (*tsû* 通) and "Casanovas" (*iro-otoko* 色男) flaunted their money and sophistication in Yoshiwara, a district that also featured prominently in much of the fiction of the time. Yoshiwara was *not* known for out-of-the-ordinary sexual activities—for these there were other parts of town. Sex was certainly in the background at all times, but a trip to Yoshiwara was often an all-around aesthetic experience. The courtesans were highly trained in poetry, music, and other arts. They worked extremely hard, but their careers were generally short and lucrative. Courtesans put on an elaborate display for their clients. The courtesans were, in effect, actors in the tradition of their predecessors. And, beneath all the sophistication and glitter, the goal was to make as much money as possible. The day-to-day work load could be exhausting, as the following frank excerpt from a pleasure quarters instruction manual indicates:

> If you are drowsy and simply fall asleep, your client will feel rejected and angry. In preparation for lovemaking, first encourage him to drink much saké in the parlor; as soon as you retire to bed, let him have his way. If, afterward, he tries to withdraw, pretend to get angry a little and force him to make love to you again. He will probably do it. At that time, tighten your buttocks and grind your hip to the left and right. When the back is tightened, the "jade gate" will be squeezed. This will make him climax quickly. He will be exhausted and fall asleep. Then you can relax and sleep . . .
>
> When your jade gate feels dry, put some paper in your mouth and chew prior to making love. If the client asks, "What are you doing?" tell him, "This will avoid bad breath." Keep the moistened paper in your mouth. When the man be-

> gins to make love, say, "I'll help you," and quickly take out the paper and squeeze the saliva into the jade gate. But this is secret, do it stealthily.[1]

Wear him out quickly and get some well-needed rest—this was the bottom line. Working conditions for high-class prostitutes were generally favorable during the seventeenth and eighteenth centures. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, they steadily declined.



Sumô was popular in the Tokugawa period & remains so today

Prostitutes outside of the Yoshiwara system worked amid less glamorous surroundings and had lower social prestige, although the degree of moral stigma that many societies today attach to prostitution was much less in Tokugawa Japan. These lower prestige prostitutes bridged the social categories of "specialists" and "marginals" in the diagram above. During the Meiji period, the glittering, artistic world of the Yoshiwara courtesan faded rapidly. Most prostitutes in the twentieth century came from the poorest strata of society, and their work was anything but glamorous. In recent decades, there have been some changes in the demographics of prostitution in Japan. It has become more common for women from middle class backgrounds to work at certain forms of prostitution, and they usually do so part time (for example, to earn money during the college years).

Flower vendor

Other important types of specialists during the Tokugawa period included scholars and physicians. A great scholar would not have command the fame or income of a famous courtesan but could still make a good living teaching in one of the many private academies that flourished in Tokugawa times (we examine education and scholarship in the next section). Unlike China, there was little overlap between scholarship and politics in Tokugawa Japan.

The category of "**marginals**" included many types of low-prestige specialists. For example, wandering Buddhist monks of various types (六部 and others), traveled from village to village. For a fee, they offered to say prayers for various purposes such as curing an illness or, especially, to help a woman conceive (sometimes the monks did more than just pray in the case of conception problems). These monks also sold charms and other trinkets that they claimed would be effective for one purpose or another. The social status and function of such monks was roughly analogous to

[1] Quoted in Cecilia Segawa Seigle, *Yoshiwara: The Glittering World of the Japanese Courtesan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), p. 157.

traveling sellers of patent medicines in the western areas of the U.S. in the nineteenth century. Most people tolerated the wandering monks, and some even bought their services and wares. Many, however, regarded them with suspicion and considered their products and services worthless.

At the very bottom of society, outside it entirely in theory, were the **outcasts**, of which there were two types. *Hinin* 非人 (literally, "not human") usually acquired outcast status as a punishment for a specific act of misconduct. In some cases they were able to regain "human" status, and it was not necessarily the case that their offspring would be outcasts. Worse off were the *eta* 穢多 (literally, "much filth"). They were permanent, hereditary outcasts. The origins of this group are still unclear, particularly because doing research on them is taboo in Japan. A popular theory is that those who engaged in the slaughter of animals or made products from them became stigmatized as outcasts owing to Buddhist sanctions against killing. This theory has many problems, however, not the least of which is that few Japanese took Buddhist prohibitions of any kind overly seriously. The *eta* worked as butchers of animals and humans (there would always be a group on hand at the local execution grounds) and as producers of drums and shoes, which were made from hides. It was probably *because* they were outcasts, however, that they did this work, not the other way around. Most likely there were a variety of causes that eventually resulted in the creation of the *eta* as a legally-defined outcast group. Reflecting our modern-day fixation on "race," students often ask if *eta* "looked different" from most other members of society. They did not, at least in the sense that their basic physical features exhibited the same range of variation as did those of the larger population.

People no longer use the word *eta* today—there are a host of euphemisms—but the contemporary descendants of these "special people" (one of the euphemisms) still suffer strong discrimination. Major companies always do in-depth background checks on prospective employees, and public records for individuals in Japan are detailed and go back many generations. Such firms would never knowingly hire someone of "special" ancestry. Families often employ private investigators prior to marriages, the main purpose of which is to check for *eta* ancestry or recent Korean immigrant ancestry. Either would be unacceptable to most Japanese. Schools have "anti-discrimination education" (*dôwa kyôiku* 同和教育) and the government provides all manner of "guilt money" and set-asides for those willing to proclaim their *eta* ancestry. But, not only does discrimination remain strong, the special education measures and payments may actually enhance the sense of "difference"—a sense of difference with absolutely no "rational" or "substantive" basis. Incidentally, this is not a topic about which most Japanese want to talk, nor is it permissible even to mention in most books or articles in Japan. Were this book to be published in Japan, this discussion of *eta* and their modern-day descendants would have to be removed (along with many other "politically incorrect" parts—see especially Chapter Three).

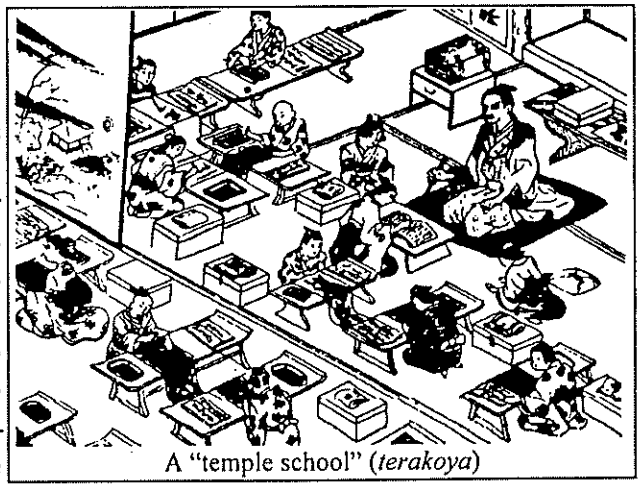
EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Education was widely available in Tokugawa Japan, at least compared with Europe of the same time. Literacy rates in Tokugawa Japan were comparable with those of Great Britain at any point in time during the period. Rough estimates indicate that about a quarter of the urban population in the eighteenth century was sufficiently literate to read basic instructions in Japanese and keep simple written records. Those with a full classical education would have been able to read and write all forms of Japanese and read classical Chinese. By the end of the Tokugawa period, urban literacy rates were even higher. Literacy in Japan during the Tokugawa period was substantially higher than in China, which is an important reason for Japan's comparatively rapid development as an economic and military power during the late nineteenth century.


Illustrated Japanese text of the *Twenty-Four Tales of Filial Piety*

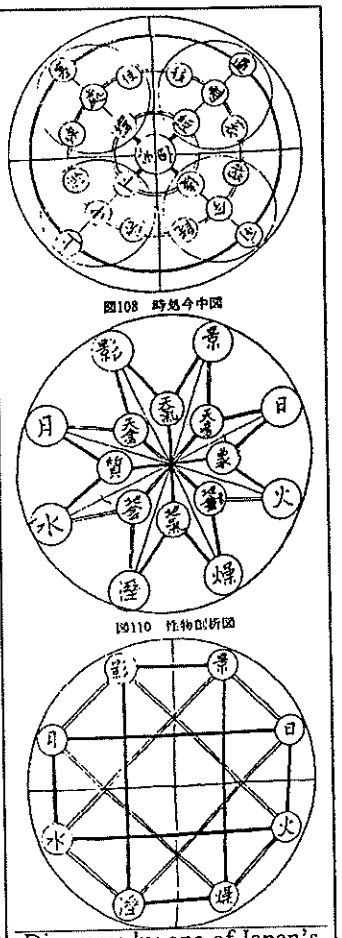
There were virtually no government-run ("public" we would say today) schools for most of the Tokugawa period. The bakufu established a Confucian academy in 1790 (actually it took over an already-functioning private academy) and, in the 1800s, the governments of most domains followed the bakufu's lead, each establishing a formal school. Even this late-Tokugawa level of government-sponsored schooling was but a drop in the vast bucket of educational institutions. Education in Tokugawa Japan, in other words, took place mainly within the context of private schools and academies.

Market forces produced a wide variety of educational institutions. Perhaps the most numerous type of school was the ***terakoya*** 寺子屋, which means something like "temple elementary school." In the Tokugawa period, however, many such schools were not affiliated with any temple, so it is best to think of them simply as "elementary schools." In return for a modest fee, these schools taught the "three Rs," often with a strong dose of moral education that emphasized popular, simple Confucian values like filial piety. Common textbooks included Japanese translations of the China's classic twenty-four tales of filial piety, some of which we examined during our study of China (for HIST 104 readers). A *terakoya*-level education would have been adequate for most urban occupations.


A "temple school" (*terakoya*)

For those who wanted to pursue more advanced or specialized education, there were a host of **private academies** 私塾 offering instruction in such subjects as Japanese

poetry, various kinds of music, Confucianism in all its many flavors, science, martial arts, the Dutch language, and more. Prior to the Tokugawa period, specialized knowledge was a form of cultural power passed on in family lineages and never divulged to outsiders. During the Tokugawa period, knowledge remained a form of cultural power, as it always is. Unlike previous ages, however, knowledge also became a market commodity, available to anyone who could afford it (with "afford" referring to time and energy as well as money). Owing to the general rise in Tokugawa urban prosperity, there were many who could afford to acquire specialized knowledge and did.



Diagrams by one of Japan's greatest minds, Miura Baien 三浦梅園 (1723-89), showing cosmic-moral interrelationships.

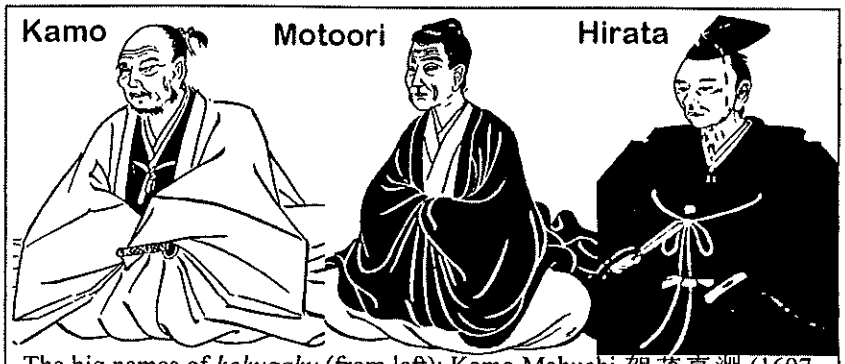
Buddhism dominated scholarship and literature during Japan's middle ages. In the Tokugawa period, however, **Confucianism** 儒学, in one form or another, was the most prestigious variety of learning. In fact, it was only during the Tokugawa period that Confucian learning became widespread in Japan. Buddhism, while not insignificant, had lost some of its intellectual vitality by Tokugawa times. Perhaps more important, Tokugawa culture in general valued worldly pursuits, conspicuous material consumption, sensual pleasures, and so forth, which ran counter to Buddhist teachings. Buddhism fit in well with a turbulent world at war; Confucianism was much better suited to a world of peace, stability and relative prosperity.

The undeniable importance of Confucianism in Tokugawa-period academic life has led many writers of textbooks on Japanese history to exaggerate the importance of Confucianism in Tokugawa social and political life. The usual, *inaccurate,* claim is that Tokugawa Ieyasu established the Neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi 朱子学 as "bakufu ideology" or "bakufu orthodoxy." There is no evidence, however, that Tokugawa Ieyasu, a rather poorly-educated warrior, had any interest in the highly sophisticated and nuanced teachings of Zhu Xi—or any other form of Confucian learning. To say that Tokugawa Ieyasu established Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism as the "official" philosophy of the bakufu is inaccurate, as a number of thorough studies have shown.[1] Confucianism dominated the academic world, but, in Tokugawa Japan, the academic world had little connection with politics.

Some Japanese Confucian scholars during the Tokugawa period were of outstanding caliber and made major contributions to Confucian learning. With but a few rare exceptions, their work was unknown in China, since few educated Chinese could imagine "barbarian" scholars producing anything beyond a second-rate imitation of the writings of Chinese masters.

Some Japanese Confucians taught simplified versions of Confucian learning, often mixed with a little Buddhism and other elements, to popular audiences. Ishida

[1] To mention only two, in English, see Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Ideology: Early Constructs, 1570-1680* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985). In Japanese, see Watanabe Hiroshi 渡辺浩, *Kinsei Nihon shakai to Sôgaku* 近世日本社会と宋学 (Tôkyô daigaku shuppankai, 1985).



The big names of *kokugaku* (from left): Kamo Mabuchi 賀茂真淵 (1697-1769), Motoori Norinaga 本居宣長 (1730-1801), and Hirata Atsutane 平田篤胤 (1776-1843)

Baigan 石田梅岩 (1685-1744), of peasant origin, is a good example. He created a relatively simple, straightforward moral philosophy called *Shingaku* 心学, "learning of the mind." Starting with Mencius' teaching that the fundamental nature of all humans is good, Ishida stressed the importance of practical application of basic Confucian and Buddhist moral values such as charity and filial piety. Commercial activity, said Ishida, was as much a viable arena for the pursuit of moral excellence as was any other sort of work. Although *shingaku* never became overwhelmingly popular, it is an excellent example of a popularized form of Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan.

Confucianism, of course, originated in China, and part of its prestige owed to its reputation as a "difficult" foreign body of knowledge. For some Japanese scholars, the foreign origins of Confucianism were unpalatable for reasons of ethnocentrism. They claimed that scholars from Japan should study *Japanese* classical books, not the foreign Chinese classics. Known as ***kokugakusha*** 国学者 (**nativists**; scholars of native learning), these scholars also tended to regard Japan as home to the most superior civilization on earth. By the same token, they tended to criticize Chinese civilization, the main rival, as evil in the extreme. The *kokugakusha* were the first group of Japanese to have a firm concept of "Japan" as both a country, and, in modern terms, as a nation. Although few shared their views in Tokugawa times, these nativist scholars helped pave the way for Japan's emergence as a nation (i.e., for the emergence of popular national consciousness) in the Meiji period.

One problem these nativists faced was the lack of a body of literature in Japan that was anything like the Chinese classics in terms of outlining a system of moral thought. To remedy this deficiency, the *kokugakusha* worked hard to *create* such a system of thought by re-interpreting classical writings such as *Myriad Leaves, Record of Ancient Matters,* and literature such as the *Tale of Genji.* Through their commentaries on these texts, which in some cases amounted virtually to re-writing them, nativist scholars created or popularized many of the raw materials for modern-day Japanese nationalism. Nativists, for example, began to use the word "***Shintô***" 神道 to mean a distinct, independent (of Buddhism), unique native Japanese religion—which remains its current dictionary definition. In fact, there never was such an "ancient" Japanese religion independent of

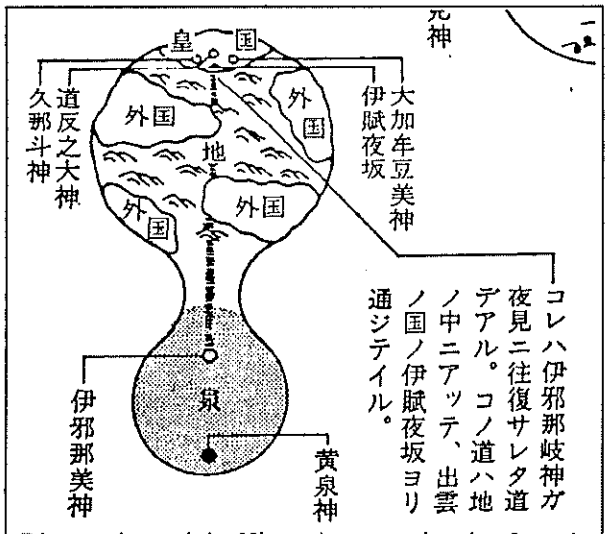


Diagram by nativist Hirata Atsutane showing Japan's superior relationship to other lands based on ancient mythology (which, of course, he regarded as factual).


Sugita Genpaku

Buddhism until the *kokugakusha* created it in the *eighteenth century.* Prior to that time, the word "*shintô*" had meant simply any local form of religion inside or outside Japan. Some other elements commonly regarded today as "ancient" Japanese cultural traditions can be traced back no farther than the Tokugawa-period nativists.

Another body of learning that flourished during the Tokugawa period was **Dutch Studies** 蘭学. Scholars of this type pursued, through Dutch books, the study of medicine and other applied and theoretical sciences as practiced in Europe. Dutch Studies became particularly important during the second half of the Tokugawa period. The most important promoter of Dutch scientific and medical knowledge was the physician **Sugita Genpaku** 杉田玄白 (1733-1817). He and other physicians were troubled by discrepancies between Dutch and Chinese medical texts in the depiction of internal organs. One explanation was simply that people from different parts of the world have different internal organs. Another theory of the day held that the onset of rigor mortis caused a rearrangement of internal body parts. In 1771, Sugita and some associates decided to observe the dissection of an executed criminal. Here is his own account of this momentous day and its aftermath:

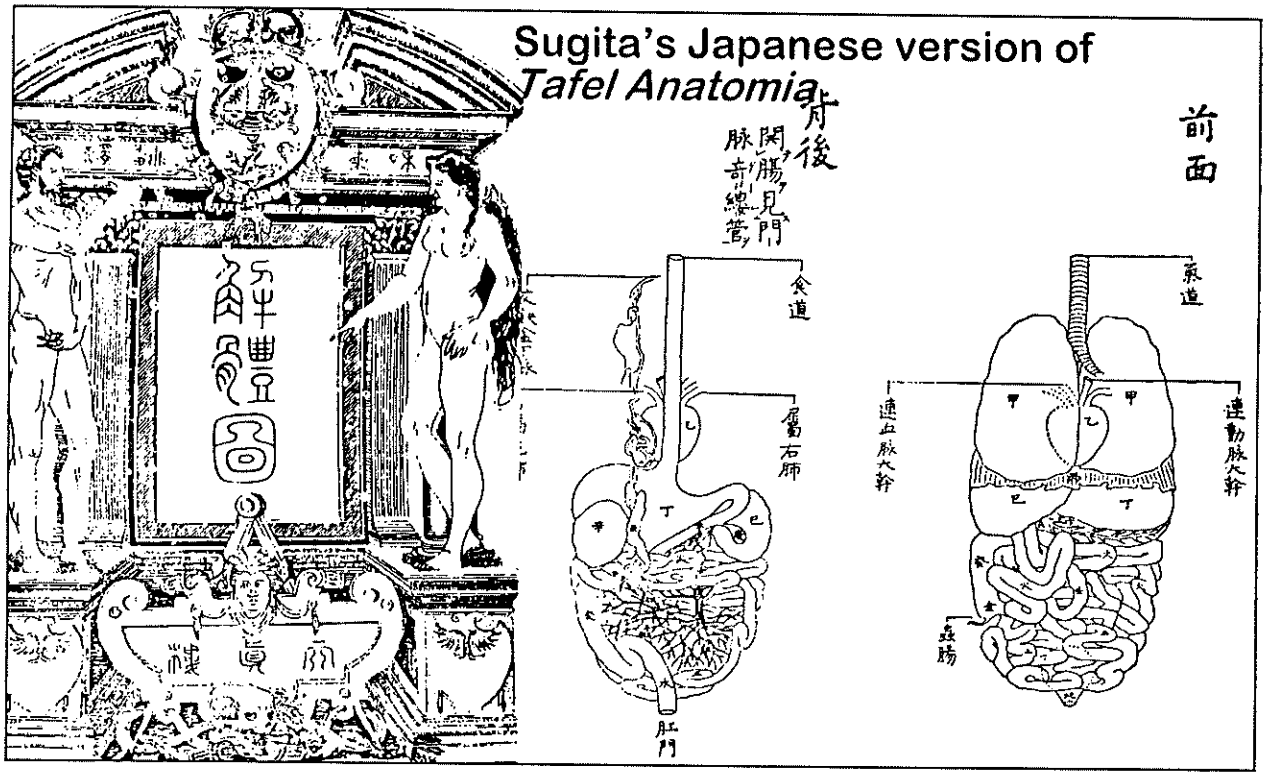
> . . . The corpse of the criminal was that of an old woman of about fifty years, nicknamed Aocha Baba, born in Kyoto. It was an old butcher who made the dissection. We had been promised an *eta* named Toramatsu, known for his skill in dissection, but because he was sick his grandfather came instead. . . . According to him up until this time people had left it up to him, and he had just shown them where the lungs, kidneys, and other organs were. They would pretend that they had studied the internal structure of the body directly. But the parts naturally weren't labeled, and they had to be satisfied with the way he pointed them out. He knew where everything was, but he had not learned their proper names. . . . Some of them turned out to be arteries, veins, and suprarenal bodies according to our anatomical tables. . . . We found that the structure of the lungs and liver and the position and shape of the stomach were quite different from what had been believed according to old Chinese theory.
>
> . . .
>
> On our way home we talked with excitement about the experiment. Since we had served our masters as doctors, we were quite ashamed of our ignorance of the true morphology of the human body, which was fundamental to the medical art. In justification of our membership in the medical profession, we made a vow to seek facts through experiment. . . . Then I suggested that we decipher the *Tafel Anatomia* without the aid of interpreters in Nagasaki, and translate it into Japanese. The next day we met at Ryôtaku's home and began the conquest of *Tafel Anatomia*. . . .
>
> We translated by conjecture, word by word, and gradually these increased in number. . . . When we met difficult words, we thought we would get them

someday, so we marked them with a cross in a circle. How often we had to do that! Gradually we got so we could decipher ten lines or more a day. . . . After two or three years of hard study everything became clear to us; the joy of it was as the chewing of sweet sugar cane.[2]

The translation by Sugita and his colleagues of this classic European anatomical text ushered in an era when increasing numbers of Japanese scholars began to translate Dutch books.

Scientific studies in Tokugawa Japan advanced under the rubric of Dutch Studies. There was also a strong scientific tradition associated with Confucian studies. Confucian scholars interested in science tended to focus on geography, horticulture and agriculture.

It should be clear, even from this brief account, that during the Tokugawa period, Japan was no intellectual backwater. Scholarship flourished as it never had before, and Japanese intellectuals had access to the latest advances in learning in both China and Europe (through Holland). Furthermore, many ordinary Japanese had access to basic education.



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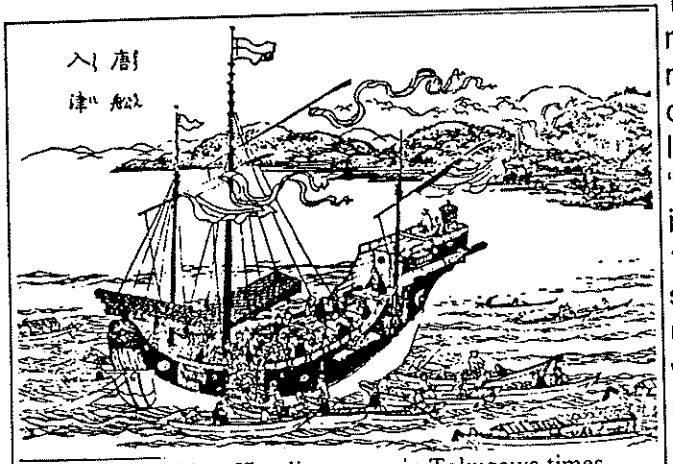
[2] Marius B. Jansen, *Japan and Its World: Two Centuries of Change* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Many textbooks portray Japan of the Tokugawa period as a "closed" country with no significant foreign relations. One, for example, claims that:

> for a period of over two centuries Japan essentially developed in total isolation. Despite sporadic contacts with China and Holland, when Japan was eventually forced to deal with the international environment she was almost totally ignorant of the intellectual, economic, scientific, technological and cultural advances made by the West during her seclusion period.[1]



Chinese ship offloading cargo in Tokugawa times

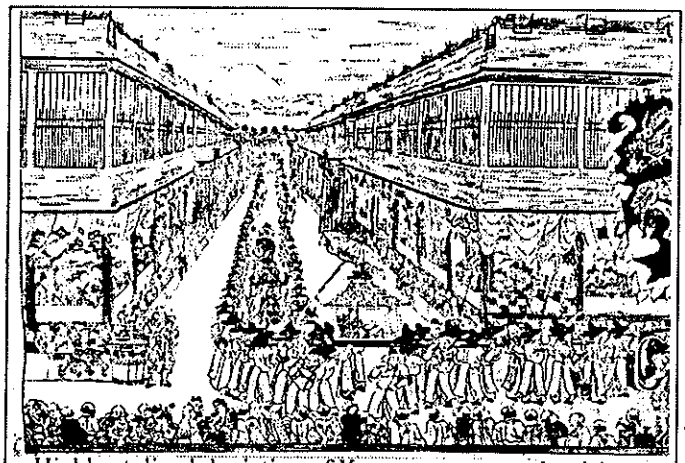
This allegation of almost total ignorance might have struck Sugita Genpaku or the many other Tokugawa Japanese scholars of European learning as odd. Yes, Japan's leaders were ignorant of many important "Western" ways when Japan broadened its foreign relations in the 1850s and 1860s. Furthermore, as we have already seen, the bakufu kept foreign relations under tight rein. Tokugawa Japan certainly was not a cosmopolitan place with a strong international presence. But the claim that Tokugawa Japan was a "closed" country, literally or intellectually, is simply *incorrect.*

Tokugawa Ieyasu had a strong personal interest in foreign countries and sought to develop for Japan a network of trade and diplomatic relations. There were a number of factors that hindered him in this task. Ieyasu sought to use foreign trade and diplomacy *to strengthen the bakufu.* He refused to agree to any arrangements that he considered detrimental to the wealth or prestige of his new government. He made two sustained attempts to forge a formal agreement with the Ming court that would allow bakufu ships and merchants to trade in China. Ming officials insisted that Japan participate in China's tribute system as a precondition for trade. Ieyasu and later shôguns rejected this demand.

Points to Bear in Mind

1. Ultimate purpose of Tokugawa-period foreign relations: to enhance bakufu wealth, authority, and prestige. The bakufu competed with the Chinese court for "centrality," creating a Japan-centered network of foreign relations
2. Another major goal: to keep out Christianity
3. Asian countries were of greater importance to Japan (the bakufu) than European countries, owing to their close proximity.
4. There was no significant technology gap between Western Europe and East Asia throughout the seventeenth century.
5. In East Asia, diplomacy was a matter of *li* 礼 (*rei* in Japanese)—**ritualized** expressions of superior-inferior relationships.

[1] Janet E. Hunter, *The Emergence of Modern Japan: An Introductory History Since 1853* (New York: Longman, 1989), p. 16.


Highly stylized depiction of Korean envoys to the shôgun

They would not agree to a relationship with another country in which Japan submitted to ritual subordination (which becoming a "tributary" of China would have required). Extensive trade did develop with Chinese merchants, but it took place in Japan and without the recognition of the Chinese court.

Under Hideyoshi, Japan had launched two massive invasions of Korea. As a result, Korea and China did not trust Japan in the early seventeenth century. One of Ieyasu's goals was to restore good relations with Japan's close neighbors. Although talks with Ming China ultimately failed, things worked out better with Korea. After difficult negotiations, the bakufu established diplomatic and trade relations with Korea, a country that became Japan's most important partner in foreign relations yet rarely receives mention in English-language textbooks.


Chinese in a festival procession in the streets of Nagasaki. Notice the close stylistic resemblance to the depiction of the Koreans above.

Another high bakufu priority was keeping Christianity out of Japan. Naturally, this policy worked against foreign relations with European countries. The bakufu insisted that any Europeans in Japan separate religion and trade and keep the former to themselves. Portugal and Spain were out because of bakufu fear of possible conquest by the combination of the cross and the sword for which these two countries had become famous (or infamous). France had little interest in Japan at this time. English merchants had all left by the 1640s owing to a lack of profitability in trade with Japan. The only remaining European country was Holland. Many textbooks refer to Holland as Tokugawa Japan's "window to the world." If, however, we do not regard Europe as being equivalent to "the world," then we should revise this statement: Holland was Tokugawa Japan's window to *Europe*. We should also keep in mind that Europe was less important to Tokugawa Japan, for perfectly good reasons, than was Asia. Although this situation would change in the latter half of the Tokugawa period, in the seventeenth

Japanese trading center/embassy in Pusan, Korea. This center was **25x larger** than the Dutch trading center in Nagasaki. What does this fact suggest?

There was a fascination with Dutch people in Tokugawa times, of which this vase is an indication.

century there was little in the way of arts, sciences, or manufactures that Europe had to offer Japan.

When the bakufu failed to establish equal-to-equal relations with Ming China, it began creating its own system of foreign relations with Japan at the center. Whatever its precise intentions may have been, *in effect,* the bakufu became a competing, alternative "center" to the Chinese court. The ultimate result was foreign relations with **four different countries**: Korea 朝鮮; Ryûkyû 琉球; Holland; China (明国; 清国 after 1644). The bakufu maintained full diplomatic and trade relations with Korea and Ryûkyû. It categorized these two countries as *tsûshinkoku* 通信国, "countries with which we exchange official correspondence." The bakufu designated Holland and China as *tsûshôkoku* 通商国, "countries with which we trade." In the case of China, the relationship was indeed only a commercial one, and no Chinese were permitted to travel outside of the port of Nagasaki. The relationship with Holland had some aspects that went beyond mere trade. Dutch representatives periodically traveled to the shôgun's palace, although the treatment they received was less dignified than that accorded representatives from Korea or Ryûkyû. The king of Holland sometimes sent communications to the shôgun, and the head of the Dutch trading post submitted a yearly written report on "world conditions" to the bakufu.

Part circus, part diplomacy: Dutch envoys traveling to Edo with exotic animals

Korean envoys enter the Shôgun's palace

Korea

Let us examine the bakufu's relationship with each of these four countries, starting with Korea. If we were to total the monetary value of bakufu trade with China *and* Holland, designating this value as *x*, the value of the trade between the bakufu and Korea would have been roughly 2*x*. The bakufu enlisted the *daimyô* of Tsushima 対島, an island between Japan and Korea, to serve as an intermediary in relations between the Korean king and the shôgun. Japanese from Tsushima resided in Korea year-round conducting trade and diplomacy. The daimyô of Tsushima benefited financially from his role as custodian of relations between Korea and Japan.

The Korean king sent periodic embassies to Japan, mainly to congratulate a new shôgun upon taking office. The bakufu attempted to use these embassies to the best possible ceremonial advantage. Remember that matters of ceremony and protocol were of the utmost importance in East Asian diplomacy. First, processions of Koreans to the Shogun's palace and to places of ritual importance such as the tomb of Tokugawa Ieyasu enhanced bakufu prestige vis-à-vis the domains. Among other things, such processions made statements to the effect that it was with the *bakufu* that the Korean king conducted foreign relations, not any other entity.


Yoshiwara courtesans amused themselves by dressing up like members of a Korean diplomatic embassy

The Korean embassies were often the occasion for wrangling between the Japanese and Korean side regarding the details of protocol. Japan and Korea were approximate equals in terms of size and general prestige. As a result, persons on both sides tried to upstage the other. The Korean court sent its best scholars, for example, in the hope that they would appear more impressive than their Japanese counterparts. The bakufu, in turn, invited the best scholars from all over Japan to "meet" with (i.e., to compete with) members of the Korean embassies. In addition, seating arrangements at banquets and ceremonies, the distance the Korean ambassadors had to walk as opposed to being carried in palanquins, and countless other details became sources of contention. These matters were quite serious. The Korean leaders of one embassy lost their lives upon returning home when word leaked out that they had allowed their Japanese hosts to embarrass them ceremonially.

The Korean embassies and bakufu trade with Korea had some effect on the general outlook of ordinary Japanese residing in urban or rural areas exposed to the Korean presence. For example, local people living along routes traveled by the Korean embassies began to perform dances in imitation of the Koreans, typically dressing up to look like Korean envoys. These dances were commonly called "dances of the Chinese" (*tôjin odori* 唐人踊り), because the term "Chinese" was a generic

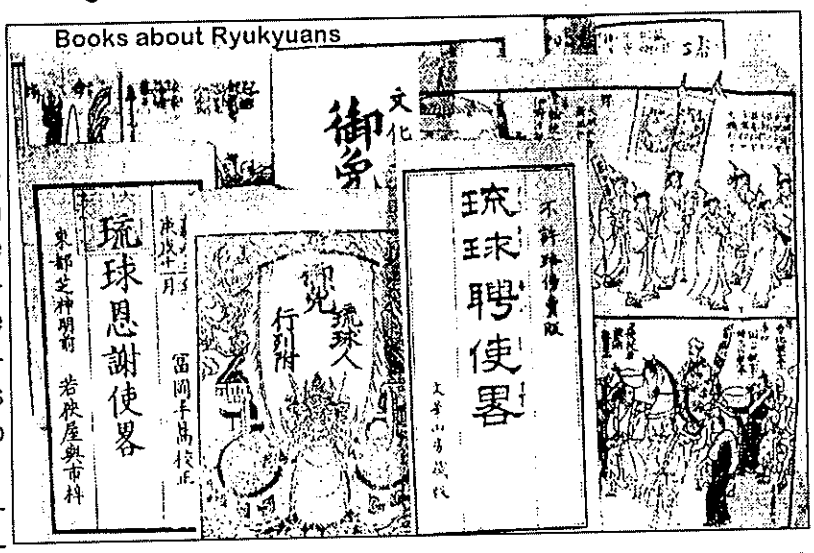

A festival in Yoshiwara in which hundreds of *Japanese* are dressed and marching in imitation of Korean envoys.


Present day "dance of the Chinese [=Koreans]" in Mie Prefecture

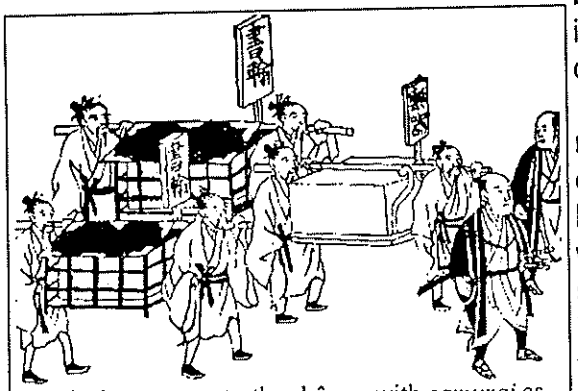
term at the time meaning something like "person from distant lands across the seas." Ryûkyûans, Dutch, and actual Chinese, in addition to Koreans, were all "Chinese" in Tokugawa times. Dances in imitation of Ryûkyûans and Chinese also developed during the Tokugawa period, again testifying to the visual impact foreign embassies had on Japanese of all walks of life.

Ryûkyû

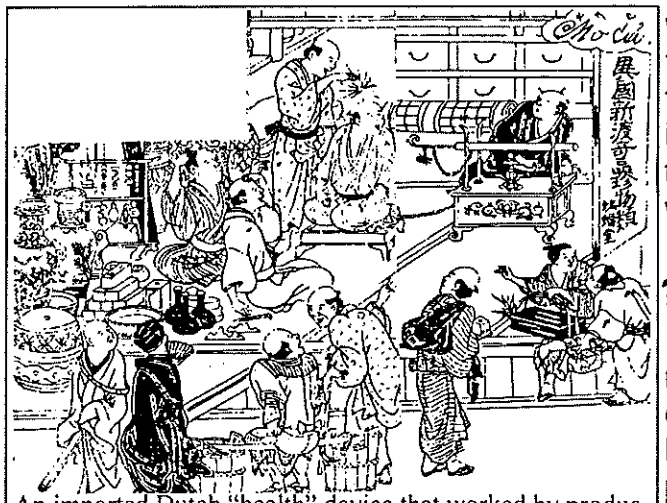
The bakufu's relationship with Ryûkyû involved the same elements of the relationship with Korea except that Ryûkyû, a much smaller country than Korea, lacked Korea's prestige and economic endowment. Throughout the first half of the Tokugawa period, most of Japan's sugar came from Ryûkyû, which was the kingdom's main export commodity. **Information** was perhaps an even more valuable an export than any particular product. Because Ryûkyû participated in the Chinese tribute system and kept its close relationship with Japan hidden from Chinese eyes, Ryûkyû became the bakufu's best source of information about China. There was a permanent center in Japan for debriefing Ryûkyûans who had recently traveled to China.



The *daimyô* of the domain of Satsuma served as intermediary between the Ryûkyûan king and the bakufu, much like the *daimyô* of Tsushima did in the case of Korea. There was one important difference: owing to its military weakness, the Ryûkyûan king had little choice but to obey the dictates of the bakufu and/or the *daimyô* of Satsuma. Ryûkyû, in other words, was under Japanese domination during the Tokugawa period.


Ryûkyûan envoys to the shôgun with *samurai* escort. The two boxes to the rear contain official correspondence from the Ryûkyûan king.

The bakufu extracted maximum ceremonial benefit from the small kingdom. Ryûkyûan embassies typically traveled overland, from the bottom of Kyûshû all the way to Edo. Along the way, crowds gathered to gawk at the exotic strangers on their way to see the shôgun. Members of these embassies received dignified treatment while in Edo, though not as elaborate as that of the Koreans owing to Ryûkyû's lower status. Overall, the Ryûkyûan embassies to Edo


An imported Dutch "health" device that worked by producing static electricity shocks. Later, Japanese began to manufacture these devices themselves.

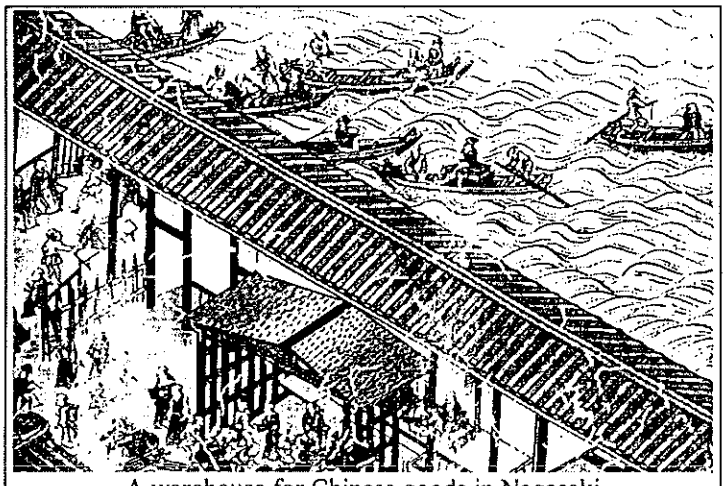
were a boost to the Ryûkyûan king's prestige, because, though Ryûkyû was about the size of an average Japanese domain, its envoys received much better treatment from the bakufu than a mid-level *daimyô* would have received.

Holland

The Dutch were undoubtedly the most exotic of all the foreigners, and were often called the "red-haired people." When Dutch embassies arrived at the shôgun's palace it seemed that their main purpose was to entertain those Japanese present. Requests of the Dutch included singing songs, dancing, removing their clothes, et ceteras. Even today, foreign visitors to rural areas of Japan who "look" substantially different than most of the population are sometimes surprised by strong reactions of others to their physical appearance.

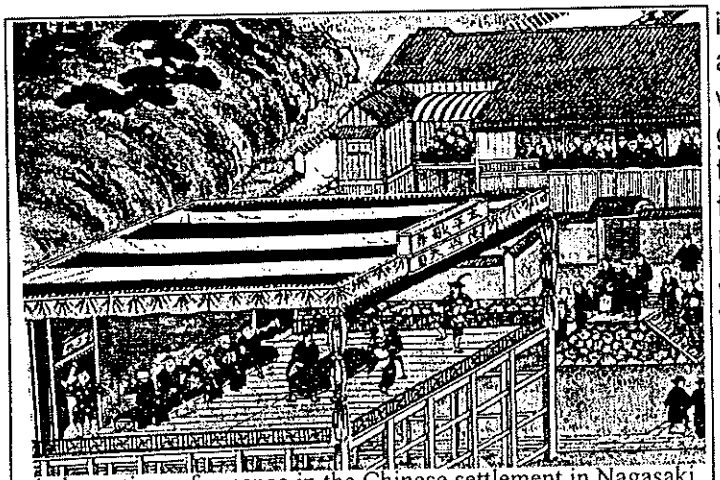

Red-haired People Enjoying Themselves to the Fullest, 18th century. Many in Tokugawa Japan were curious about the sexual & drinking habits of the exotic Dutch "red hairs."

The above point is not to imply that the relationship between Holland and the bakufu was frivolous or unimportant. On the contrary, the bakufu received valuable intelligence information from Holland, usually about European affairs and sometimes about Asian affairs. Through the medium of Dutch books, imported in large quantities beginning in the 1720s, Japanese intellectuals had access to most of the scientific and technical knowledge of Europe. At one point, Japanese medical officials even imported a large quantity of an experimental smallpox vaccine from Holland in the hope of cultivating it Japan.


A warehouse for Chinese goods in Nagasaki

China

Chinese culture had been important in Japan since before the Nara period, and it continued to be so throughout the Tokugawa period. There was a consistent demand in Japan for Chinese books, certain


A dramatic performance in the Chinese settlement in Nagasaki

items of food, medicinal ingredients, and other products. In China there was less demand for Japanese goods, although the superb swords that Japanese artisans made during the Tokugawa period were in demand in both China and Korea. Because Japanese tended to buy a greater value of Chinese goods than Japanese merchants sold to Chinese merchants, the trade with China resulted in a net outflow of specie from Japan. This situation eventually caused the bakufu to place significant restrictions on the number of Chinese ships that could come to Nagasaki each year. The result of these restrictions was an increase in smuggling, particularly around the coastal areas of Satsuma in the extreme south of Kyûshû.

While in Japan, Chinese traders lived in a settlement in Nagasaki. They were not permitted to travel beyond Nagasaki because of the lack of official relations between China and Japan. For at least a century following the collapse of the Ming dynasty, bakufu officials kept a wary eye on the Qing empire. Many bakufu and domain officials expected a Qing attack on Japan similar to a replay of the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century. The value of the relationship with Ryûkyû rose considerably during this time owing to Ryûkyûans' access to first-hand information about developments in China.

This overview of Tokugawa foreign relations has only scratched the surface. For a more detailed examination, read Ronald Toby's excellent study, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan.*[2] At this point, however, it should be abundantly clear that Japan was not a "closed" country during the Tokugawa period. Yes, foreign relations were limited and tightly-controlled. It was also the case that by the early 1800s, Japan's limited foreign relations had begun to cause friction between itself and the new Pacific powers of the United States and Russia. When Commodore Perry arrived in Japan, first in 1853 and then again the next year, he did not "open" a closed country. Instead he forced Japan's bakufu to *expand* its foreign relations beyond its traditional arrangements.

In the 1850s, Japan's foreign relations expanded. Here is an "American" from around this time, looking much like a Japanese *kabuki* actor.

[2] Ronald P. Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984; Reissued by Stanford University Press, 1991). Several thorough Japanese-language studies of Tokugawa-era foreign relations have appeared since Toby's book was first published.

CHAPTER SEVEN

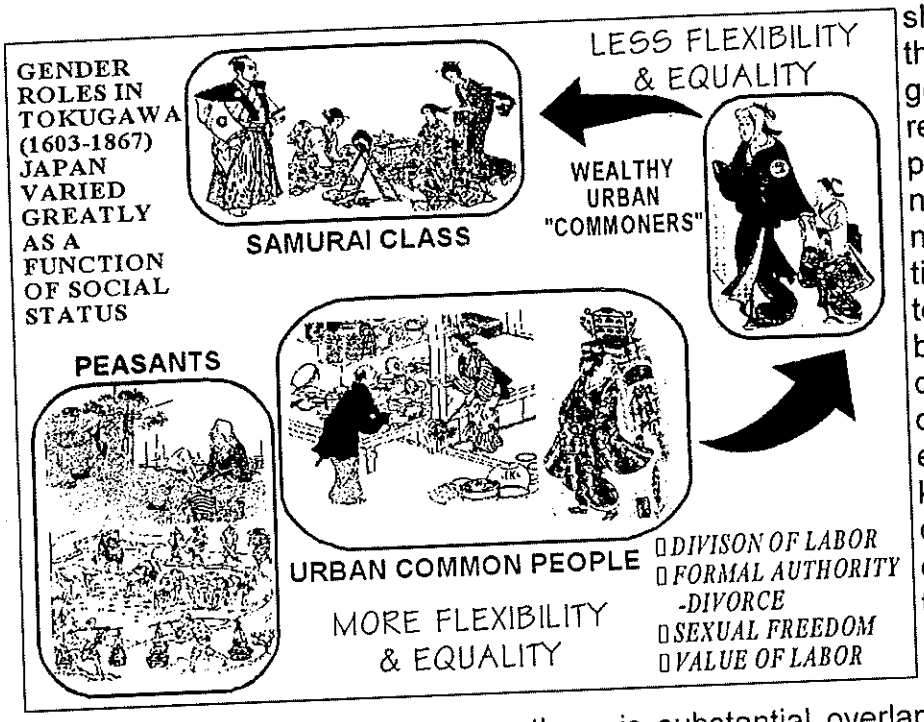
EARLY MODERN JAPAN II: GENDER ROLES, ART & ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MEIJI STATE

In this chapter we continue our examination of Tokugawa Japan, starting with social history. We also take a brief look at the most popular art form of the time, *ukiyoe* 浮世絵, "images of the floating world." In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in Japan with a substantial portion of the U.S. navy to demand that Japan expand its foreign relations to include the United States. The bakufu's accession to this demand, and to further expansions in trade, exacerbated anti-bakufu sentiment that had been slowly building throughout the nineteenth century. The bakufu fell in 1868, after a brief war, replaced by a relatively small group of young leaders who ruled in the name of the Emperor Meiji. With the fall of the bakufu, Japan entered headlong into the modern world.

GENDER ROLES & RELATIONS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN THE TOKUGAWA & MEIJI PERIODS

There is a tendency to assume that gender roles in Tokugawa Japan would have been more rigid and less equal (however "equal" may be defined) than during the "modern" Meiji period or the present day. There is no reason to assume, however, that there is or was anything about modernity (however that vague notion may be defined) that necessarily leads to any reduction in the strength of gender distinctions. In Tokugawa Japan, gender roles varied considerably as a function of social status. During the Meiji period this variation still existed, but gender roles became ever more uniform, and more uniformly rigid, owing in large part to pressure from the state in various forms.

Consider five groups—ordinary peasants, ordinary urban dwellers, wealthy farmers (uncommon "commoners"), wealthy merchants (uncommon "commoners") and *samurai*—as representative nodes on a continuum of social status. Gender roles would have differed markedly based on one's place in the continuum. Among *samurai,* gender roles were typically rigid and unequal in favor of men. Among ordinary commoners, especially peasants, gender roles were much less rigid. There was, in other words, considerable overlap in the activities of men and women. Furthermore, although formal law still favored men, among ordinary people, law was not nearly as important as customary practices. As a result, gender roles among peasants, and also among most urban commoners, were not characterized by a high degree of inequality. Of course, we



should keep in mind that the explicit questioning of gendered relations with respect to equality is a present-day phenomenon. To what extent ordinary people in Tokugawa times thought in these terms is difficult to say because they generally did not write about gender roles or anything else. We should also keep in mind that the discussion here is centered on the *social* realm, not the *sexual* realm. Sexuality is, of course, closely connected with certain social and cultural practices, so there is substantial overlap between the social and sexual realms. Still, an examination of relations between men and women with a focus on legal, economic and family relationships will usually yield a different picture than one that directs primary attention to sexual relationships. We take the former approach here.

Gendered Divisions of Labor

There was a gendered **division of labor** at all levels of society, but it was much more distinct among the *samurai* and the wealthy than among ordinary people. In peasant households in particular, the work of men and women was nearly interchangeable. **Two unwarranted assumptions** have often clouded the work of modern scholars looking at preindustrial gender roles in Japan and elsewhere. First, is the tendency to regard work life and home life as separate spheres—which is often the case today but was rarely the case for commoners in Tokugawa Japan. Second, is the tendency to look at gender roles of past ages in terms of modern or contemporary dichotomies—which often function more as ideological categories than analytical categories. One such common dichotomy is production/reproduction, with men typically associated with "production" "outside" the home, and women associated with "reproduction" "inside" the home. These dichotomies did in fact apply in both Japan and China in past ages, *but only among the wealthy and/or ruling groups* in society. In the case of Japan, Kathleen S. Uno makes the following observations regarding ordinary commoner households:

> From the Tokugawa period into the mid-twentieth century, both productive work, which sustained the [household] by producing essential goods and income, and reproductive work (childrearing, cooking, and house-keeping), which maintained [household] members, took place at home. The proximity of production and reproduction allowed men, women, and children alike to participate in tasks crucial to the household's survival. The full significance of this unity of pro-

> duction and reproduction for the division of labor in the small preindustrial Japanese household is not easily comprehended by scholars who assume the physical separation of work and home life. For example, participating in [household] economic activities did not preclude helping with cleaning, cooking, or child care. Today the long workday and grueling commute allow salaried male workers scant time to spend with their children, but during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods the workplace of most fathers was near their children.[1]

Notice that the production/reproduction and inner/outer dichotomies often used to analyze gender roles had little meaning among ordinary Japanese of the Tokugawa period, roughly 80% of the population. Unlike the case in an industrial environment, there was no distinction between work and home. In short, both men and women raised children, did housework, ran small businesses, worked in the fields, and so forth. Gender-based divisions of labor were minimal for these Japanese.

Among most *samurai* and wealthy merchants, however, there was a separation between the realms of home and work. There was also a clear division of labor along gender lines, with women in charge of the "reproductive" work of the "inner" sphere and men charged with "productive" work in the "outer" spheres. Chinese Confucian norms influenced conceptions of ideal gender roles among members of these elite groups, particularly from the eighteenth century on, when most *samurai* had at least a minimal exposure to Confucian teachings. One of the most influential books among Tokugawa-period elites was a short work called *Onna daigaku* (女大学, the *Great Learning for Women*). Among other things, this work called for a rigid separation between the sexes:

> Women, from the time they are young, are to observe the correct separation between males and females and are to hear and see absolutely nothing of frivolous contact [with males]. The ancient [Chinese] text *Record of Rites* [礼記] states that males and females are not to sit in the same place, not to stow their clothing in the same location, and not to bathe in the same place. Passing things between each other should not be done directly, hand to hand. When traveling at night, [a woman] must always carry a lantern. Even husbands and wives, brothers and sisters—not to mention strangers—should maintain proper separation between the sexes. The households of today's ordinary people [民家], are ignorant of such norms. There are people who wreak havoc on the rules of proper conduct to the detriment of their reputations, bringing shame to their parents and siblings, living their entire lives in dissoluteness.[2]

Morality books such as this advocated gender separation as rigid and complete as did any Chinese text. Whether anyone regularly lived up to such ideals, even in *samurai* households, is doubtful. The text itself acknowledges, and laments, that commoners did not adhere to, or even know of, the rules of gender separation. Books such as the *Great Learning for Women* had little or no effect on the behavior of ordinary people, but they did inform the ideals of *samurai* and wealthy commoner households.

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[1] Kathleen S. Uno, "Women and Changes in the Household Division of Labor," in Gail Lee Bernstein, ed., *Recreating Japanese Women,* 1600-1945 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 25, with minor modification.

[2] Author's translation of the text in Araki Kengo 荒木見悟 and Inoue Tadashi 井上忠, eds., *Kaibara Ekken, Muro Kyûsô* 貝原益軒・室鳩巣 (Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, 1970), p. 202.

In ordinary commoner society, not only did women perform work similar to that of men, the **value of their labor** was also approximately the same. Typically, both a husband and wife would have to put forth full effort in order for the household to get by.[3] In *samurai* households, the man's labor often had much greater value, for he was the sole person who brought in an income. Among wealthy households, there would often be maids and mistresses in addition to the male household head's primary wife. A maid, for example, could be replaced with relative ease compared with the male head of the household.

Illustrated edition of *Great Learning for Women.* Pages shown here include part of the passage quoted above.

Gender and Formal & Informal Authority

Bakufu and domain laws always gave greater **authority** to men than to women, all else being equal. As stated above, however, laws were mainly for the *samurai* class. Among ordinary people, customary practices were more important than law in governing most aspects of behavior, including those related to relations between men and women. As you might expect, among society's elites, men clearly had greater authority than women. Among ordinary people, authority was more evenly distributed.

There is even evidence indicating that among some urban commoners, women may often have enjoyed greater authority within the family than their husbands. The following passage describing an urban family is from a Tokugawa-period record of observations of life of the lower classes (『世事見聞録』):

> Even in the house in back of the tenement building on which the sun set, the daughter wore good clothes and was in and about passing the time with her boyfriend. Though the husband was out working hard selling items he carried with a

[3] A partial exception: in the case of female agricultural *wage laborers*, what limited evidence we have indicates that they did receive less pay than men except at crucial times in the agricultural cycle when their wages were nearly on a par with those of men. See Anne Walthall, "The Life Cycle of Farm Women in Tokugawa Japan," in Bernstein, ed., *Japanese Women*, p. 57.

> pole across his back, in his absence, his wife complained to the neighborhood women who had gathered to play Mahjong about his obstinate nature. The young men were drinking, walking about and enjoying themselves. Moreover, though the husband who had returned was exhausted, there was no show of sympathy for him, and he even had to get his own water and do his own cooking. It was almost as if he were used as a servant.[4]

This was hardly an example of a husband who lorded over his wife and the other household members. The author of the *Great Learning for Women* would probably have been shocked to see such treatment of a man by his wife.

Demographics reveals a possible reason why urban commoner women often enjoyed significant freedom vis-à-vis men. Even as late as the 1840s, there was a significantly higher proportion of commoner men than women in urban areas. An 1844 census for Edo, for example, indicated a 52% to 48% ratio. Popular songs and other folklore from the time also indicate that women tended to enjoy better working and living conditions than did men.[5] Compared with women, it was more common for men (typically younger sons of the household head) to leave the farm and seek their fortunes in the cities. Even among farm households, there does not seem to have been a large difference in gendered authority, except among the large, wealthy farm households.

When textbooks and other writings describe women in Tokugawa Japan as downtrodden and oppressed, they usually cite customs and laws connected with **divorce** as evidence. For example:

> [A] wife's position was not secure under this marriage system that developed in later medieval times and continued during the Tokugawa period. She could be divorced for any of the following reasons:
> — disobedience
> — lewdness
> — jealousy
> — leprosy
> — talking too much
> — stealing.
> The husband could decide when these conditions had been met and could simply hand his wife a three and one-half line written notice—she would have to leave. . . . These Japanese women had no grounds for divorcing their husbands. In cases of abuse, the best a wife might do was to escape to a Buddhist convent.[6]

Like many other books by non-specialists, the one containing this passage takes the external, ideal values of the *samurai* class at face value and generalizes them to the

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[4] Quoted in Ishikawa Eisuke 石川英輔, *Edo kûkan* 江戸空間 (Tôkyô: Hyôronsha, 1993), pp. 92-3. Author's translation here and hereafter.

[5] Ibid., p. 96.

[6] Marjorie Wall Bingham and Susan Hill Gross, *Women in Japan: From Ancient Times to the Present* (St. Louis Park M.N.: Glenhurst Publications, Inc., 1987), pp. 102-103, with minor modification. For additional examples of such an interpretation, see Laurel L. Cornell, "Peasant Women and Divorce in Preindustrial Japan," in *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society,* Vol. 15, No. 4 (Summer, 1990), especially pp. 710-711.

entire population. Critical historians should always be on guard against such oversimplified interpretations of the past.

It was indeed the case that according to law, men recognized a divorce by writing a document commonly known as *mikudarihan* 三下り半, "three and a half lines," in which he specified the reason(s) for the divorce. When used as evidence of alleged overwhelming power of men vis-à-vis women, we often hear two assumptions about divorce in Tokugawa times, neither accurate. The first is that individual men were free arbitrarily to divorce their wives even over relatively petty matters. The second is that the stigma of divorce was so great for women as to make such persons virtual outcasts in society. Let us examine these areas further.

Marriage in Tokugawa Japan at any level of society was not a bond between two individuals but between two families. Few individuals would have had the power to decide as weighty a matter as divorce without wide consultation. A prominent legal scholar in Japan has examined 550 divorce decrees (the *mikudarihan* mentioned above) from the Tokugawa period. He found that divorce was not normally a matter of the husband forcing out the wife. Instead, most divorces took place only after intense discussion between members of both families and had the agreement of all parties. The written decree was the legal instrument that finalized the divorce. These decrees generally placed more emphasis on the fact that the woman was free to marry again than on the divorce itself. Here is a typical example of the text of such a decree:

> To my wife. It is my pleasure to divorce you. There is no objection to your marrying anyone whomsoever.
>
> Witness my hand, this day and month[7]

The three and one-half line decrees, therefore, were more like *remarriage licenses* than divorce decrees. Analysis of the details of actual divorces shows numerous instances in which the man's family paid money or other items of value to the woman's as part of the settlement.[8] Laurel L. Cornell has come to similar conclusions, pointing out that "there is reason to question the notion that divorce, at least in preindustrial Japan, was as arbitrary and ruthless as this evidence [i.e., the divorce decrees] leads us to believe."[9]

What was the divorce rate in Tokugawa times? Among peasants at least, it seems to have been quite high—higher than in contemporary Japan. Historian of Tokugawa society Anne Walthall describes divorce customs and frequencies in the following paragraphs. Notice the sharp difference between the *samurai* class and ordinary persons:

> The question of divorce highlights further differences between samurai morals and customs on the one hand and diverse peasant practices on the other. According to samurai teachings, widows and divorcées were not expected to remarry. Tales of virtuous women recount how they committed suicide rather than accept a second marriage—behavior praised also in China, where chastity was the crucial expression of female fidelity. Only a man, furthermore, could initiate divorce, either by copying a prescribed three and one-half lines telling his wife to leave, or simply by sending her baggage back to her natal home. A woman could do nothing to prevent the divorce or to protect her access to her children.

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[7] Quoted in Cornell, "Peasant Women and Divorce," p. 710.
[8] Ishikawa, *Edo kûkan*, p. 195.
[9] Cornell, "Peasant Women and Divorce," p. 711.

> Peasant practices, in contrast, often ignored the norms of the military aristocracy. For one thing, the divorce rate, according to one study of village ledgers near Osaka was at least 15 percent (possibly even higher since these documents include only cases where the marriages had lasted over a year). In addition, peasant women as well as men initiated divorce. The eldest daughter of Sekiguchi Toemon married and had three children before deciding to live alone in a temple. In 1857, a woman named Nobu, claiming "disharmony in the household," appealed to the local government office for a separation from her husband. He was a heavy drinker, and her father paid him one *ryô* to agree to a divorce.[10]

Divorce practices are another of the many areas of relations between men and women that differed sharply among different social groups.

Ishikawa points out that, while divorce came to receive social disapproval during the Meiji period, in Tokugawa times, the fact of having been divorced *per se* presented no problem in remarrying.[11] Cornell comes to the same conclusion, pointing out that the consequences of divorce for peasant women "were not *in fact* very serious." Most divorces, she points out, took place early into the marriage, and, in such cases, divorced women were just as eligible to remarry as those of similar age who had not yet married. In fact, "her chances of remarrying were [statistically] greater if she were divorced young enough to be part of a pool of women considered eligible for marriage [than had she never been divorced]."[12]

A women who wanted to divorce her husband had several options. Buddhist temples often facilitated divorce. The bakufu recognized two temples specifically as "divorce temples" (*enkiridera* 縁切り寺) but others performed this role as well. Walthall explains one possibility for divorce:

> For women in a hurry, Buddhist temple officials served as divorce brokers. They would go to the husband's village and camp at the headman's door until he summoned the husband and forced him to agree to an amicable divorce. In most cases, just the news that the temple officials were coming was enough to produce a letter of separation. For their services the officials charged a stiff ten *ryô*.[13]

Buddhist temple officials, in other words, sometimes functioned like divorce lawyers in today's society and apparently charged comparable fees. Other places a woman might go for help in securing a divorce included residences of powerful warriors, the intendant's office (in bakufu-administered areas), official checkpoints, and the residences of certain wealthy peasants. She could also simply pack up and return to her natal family in some cases. Ishikawa points out that obtaining a divorce was generally much easier, for either men or women, than would have been the case in Europe at any point in time throughout the period. Italy, to take an extreme example, did not recognize divorce until 1973.[14] For about 80% of Japanese in Tokugawa times, there was not a marked difference in authority between husbands and wives.

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[10] Walthall, "Farm Women," p. 60. For more detailed analysis of divorce rate statistics, see Cornell, "Peasant Women and Divorce," pp. 717-719. Many of her data reveal a rate less than 15%, but still high relative to contemporary Japan.
[11] Ishikawa, *Edo kûkan*, p. 195.
[12] Cornell, "Peasant Women and Divorce," pp. 720-723.
[13] Walthall, "Farm Women," p. 61.
[14] Ishikawa, *Edo Kûkan*, pp. 196-7.

Sexual Behavior and Degrees of Sexual Freedom

The same general point applies with respect to **sexual freedom**. Like divorce, sexual behavior is often cited as evidence of female oppression during the Tokugawa period. For example: "Under the restrictive Tokugawa code, adultery committed by a wife was punishable by death, while a husband might keep women as concubines in his own home—and have other sexual affairs without restrictions."[15] As you might have guessed by now, this assertion would be accurate only among some *samurai* households, and perhaps the wealthiest of the merchants, but not the majority of the population.

Although we have a great deal of information on the sexual behavior of urban dwellers in connection with prostitution and the world of courtesans, research on sexual behavior among ordinary persons, especially peasants, is still sparse. Data that are available suggest regional variations in sexual norms and practices. According to research summarized by Walthall, in some areas there was extensive, sanctioned premarital contact, sexual and otherwise, between men and women. One study of a particular rural area showed that no more than 2 percent of unmarried young women were virgins, and all married women had had sexual relations before marriage. Local village youth associations 若者組 often encouraged young people to experience a variety of short-term sexual encounters, the idea apparently being "try before you buy" (my expression). On the other hand, in some parts of Japan, sexual encounters between young men and women were much less free.[16] After marriage, social norms in most areas expected couples to be faithful to each other, though the social price one paid for deviating from these norms varied.

The keeping of concubines, "secondary" wives and so forth, by males was characteristic only of elite society. Among the common people, monogamy was the rule. In contrast with today's Japan, which some commentators are now calling the "sexless age" with respect to marriage,[17] sex and sexual satisfaction seem to have been major elements in commoner marriages and definitions of family harmony. Even many Confucian-influenced moral tracts intended for the education of peasants stated that sexual relations were the basis of a harmonious marriage. For example: "The married couple is the foundation of morality. A couple is basically lustful, and if they get along, produce a righteous harmony, but if they do not, everything falls apart."[18] This thinking was one reason for the common, though not universal, custom of allowing or encouraging young men and women to experiment sexually before marriage to ensure a good match.

To summarize, sexual behavior differed significantly between the elite groups in Tokugawa society and the majority of ordinary people. In the case of the former, men had a great deal of freedom, women little or none. Furthermore, the consequences, for women, of deviating from these rigid standards of behavior were often quite serious. Among ordinary people, a much greater degree of sexual freedom prevailed, particularly for young people before marriage. Prior to marriage, while married, and after mar-

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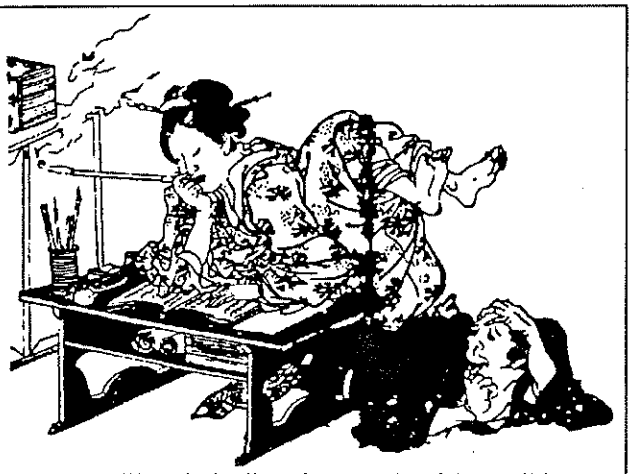
[15] Bingham and Gross, *Women in Japan,* p. 103.
[16] Walthall, "Farm Women," p. 51.
[17] See, for example, a series of articles on the "sexless age" in *Fujin kôron* 婦人公論, May, 1994, pp. 112-171.
[18] Quoted in Walthall, "Farm Women," pp. 55-56.



In the Meiji period, alleged reversals of the traditional gender roles of the upper classes became common themes in cartoons depicting social change. As Sharon L. Sievers points out, "By 1874 the discussion of women's issues was country wide; arguments were full of contradictions, and the debate itself carried in growing numbers of newspapers and periodicals, often lapsed into silliness and superficiality."[19]

riage (for whatever reason), men and women lived with similar degrees of sexual freedom. It was also less likely that deviation from norms regarding sexual behavior would have resulted in serious consequences. Whereas moral codes aimed at *samurai* often stressed controlling or conquering sexual desire, peasant society typically accepted lust as normal and desirable.

The Modern Transformation of Gender Roles

Gender roles began to change as Japan industrialized during the Meiji period, and, today, they resemble more a watered-down version of Tokugawa *samurai* ideals (with one major addition: motherhood) than they do the traditional peasant and commoner values. The reasons for these changes in gender roles are twofold. First, they were the result of broad economic and social changes that accompanied modern urban industrial life. Second, these changes were the result of specific state educational policies and other forms of social engineering. Uno explains these Meiji-era changes as follows:

> After the 1868 Meiji restoration, new political and economic policies fostered a greater separation of public and private spheres, which impinged on the household division of labor. The separation of school and workplace from the home affected increasing numbers of children, then men, and finally women. Although early policies did not aim specifically to alter the family roles of children and men, by the end of the nineteenth century private educators and government officials deliberately sought to reshape conceptions of womanhood. The cumulative effects of all these changes slowly became visible by the early decades of the twentieth century, reshaping the daily lives of women, particularly among the new urban middle class.[20]

Here we examine these changes only briefly. Take HIST 416 (Modern Japan) for more detailed study.

One of the earliest policies of the new Meiji government was to strengthen the military and enrich the state 富国強兵. To this end, the Meiji state promoted rapid industrialization through various financial incentives. Industrialization led to urbanization. It also led to a spatial separation of work and home. Effective industry required a literate, numerate workforce. By the end of the nineteenth century, Japan's government had created a centralized system of state-operated schools, and law required that all

[19] Sharon L. Sievers, *Flowers in Salt: The Beginnings of Feminist Consciousness in Modern Japan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983), p. 16.
[20] Uno, "Division of Labor," pp. 35-36.

attend elementary school. By the turn of the century, the majority of Japanese children, even in rural areas, were in school. This change led to a spatial separation of education, work and home. Spatial separation required, for all practical purposes, a division of labor. Government took care of education; men went to work in the factories, and women, after marriage, took care of the home. For urban dwellers, a majority of the population during the first decade of the twentieth century and thereafter, a gendered division of labor became the norm.

An ad for Quaker Oats from the early Taishô period reflecting the spread of a new definition of womanhood: women as mothers .

There was a debate in intellectual and journalistic circles during the first two decades of the Meiji period concerning gender roles and the proper place of women in society and the family. Some Japanese argued that the strength of Western Europe and the United States derived in part because women there received more dignified treatment than had *samurai*-class women in Japan. These writers called for greater dignity for women, but few if any were willing to accept women in significant roles outside the household. Most early Meiji writers were former members of the *samurai* class, and all were male. These writers faced a challenge "to find a plausible (if not logical) argument, carefully drawn to make the distinction clear: Japanese women were not 'ready' for significant social roles outside the family, but they were more than capable of assuming greater power in the family to influence and educate Japan's future generations."[21]

Thus far we have said little about **motherhood**. The main reason is that the concept of motherhood was relatively unimportant in the Tokugawa period, except in the narrow sense of giving birth to children. To the extent that motherhood means raising and educating children, it was not a major issue in Tokugawa times. Among the common people, men and women both participated in the raising and educating of children. As Japan became more urbanized during the Meiji period, it was women who increasingly bore the sole responsibility for raising children.

The idea gradually developed that the ideal social role for women in the new Japan was to nurture and educate children, that is,to be "good" or "wise" mothers. The mother, went the argument, sets the child on a course in life that not even the power of the state can alter. Good mothering, therefore, was essential in creating a strong Japan. This argument received its first public articulation by the scholar and social commentator Nakamura Masanao 中村正直 (1832-1891) in a speech, "Creating Good Mothers," which he gave on March 16, 1875. Here is one part of his argument:

> Thus we must invariably have fine mothers if we want effectively to advance the people to the area of enlightenment and to alter their customs and conditions for the good. If the mothers are superb, they can have superb children, and Japan can become a splendid country in later generations. We can have people

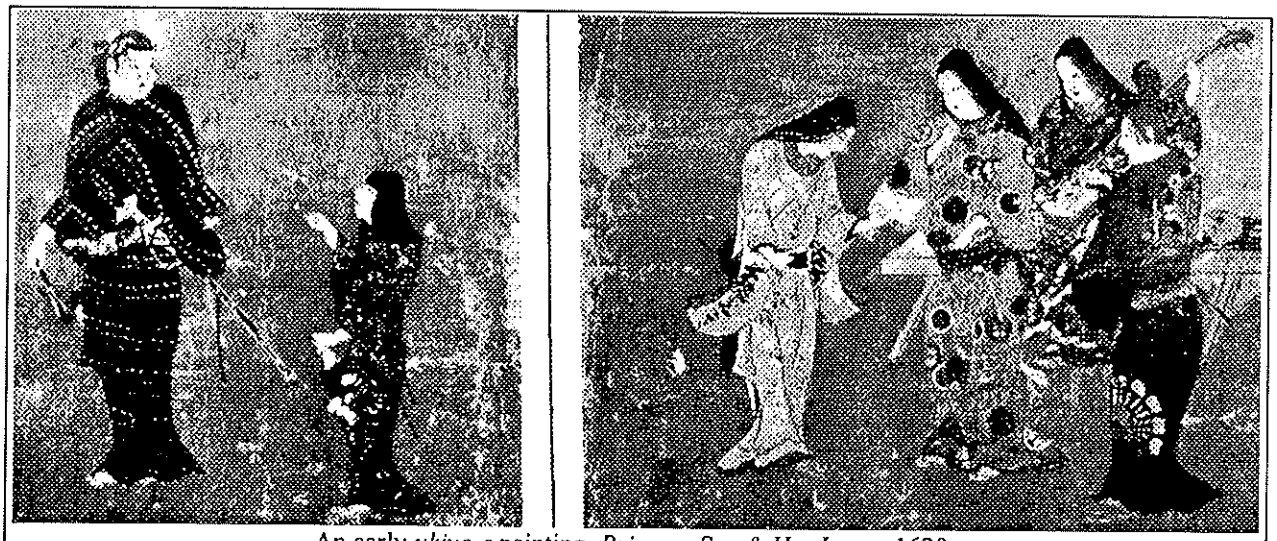
[21] Ibid., p. 22.

> trained in religious and moral education as well as in the sciences and arts whose intellects are advanced, whose minds are elevated, and whose conduct is high. Not having had adequate prenatal educational nourishment, I am at middle age unable sufficiently to realize my ambitions, only sadly languishing in shabby quarters [Japan] and envying the enlightenment of Europe and America. I have a deep, irrepressible desire that later generations shall be reared by fine mothers.[22]

Were Nakamura alive today, he could perhaps become a successful criminal defense lawyer in the United States! Joking aside, Nakamura went on to advocate education for women as the means to make them good mothers. Like many advocates of women's education in late Ming China (HIST 104 readers), Nakamura did not challenge the basic premise that a women's sole legitimate sphere of action was the home and family.

It was not until the turn of the century, however, that Japan's central government adopted a deliberate policy of promoting good motherhood, or at least its idea of good motherhood. The slogan ***ryôsai kenbo*** 良妻賢母, "**good wife; wise mother**," expressed the state's new definition of ideal womanhood in concise terms. It became the official cornerstone of the school curriculum at all levels in 1911.

In many respects, Meiji-era gender roles for the general population came increasingly to resemble Tokugawa-era gender roles of society's elites—but without the high social status. Gender roles had become more rigid and separate. Men came to hold much greater power in all aspects of the social sphere, a power, reinforced by law, that affected nearly everyone. The new ideal of motherhood, however, was a major departure from *samurai*-class thinking about gender. As Uno explains: "*Ryôsai kenbo* presumed a greater degree of female competence; if properly educated, mothers could prepare their children to be good subjects of the emperor by instilling in them diligence, loyalty, and patriotism. Mothers thus would render service to the nation from the house."[23] Even today, Japanese, both male and female, tend to regard the roles of a good mother as the highest womanly ideal. The situation is similar to that of Ming and



An early *ukiyo-e* painting, *Princess Sen & Her Lover,* 1620s

[22] Quoted in William Reynolds Braisted, trans., *Meiroku Zasshi: Journal of the Japanese Enlightenment* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 401-2. Note: the 1870s was a time when many Japanese intellectuals expressed strong feelings of inferiority vis-à-vis the "West."
[23] Uno, "Division of Labor," p. 38.

Qing China in that today's Japanese children, particularly males, are under intense pressure to pass a grueling series of exams that will determine the trajectory of their entire careers. It is the mother that usually bears the responsibility for coaching and pushing her son(s), and to a lesser extent her daughter(s), through the process of exam preparation and competition.

ART OF THE FLOATING WORLD

Prior to the Tokugawa period, the term "***ukiyo***" 浮き世, "**floating world**," conjured up mental pictures of sadness and anxiety regarding the transitory nature of this world. The term, of course, is of Buddhist origin. In the Tokugawa period, however, the term *ukiyo* underwent a transformation. It came to mean a place of pleasure, consumption, sensuality, and hedonism, *but* with a positive connotation of something like "the world of pleasure." In the words of art historian Richard Lane:

> for the newly liberated townsmen of the seventeenth-century Japanese Renaissance "floating world" tended to lose its connotations of the transitory world of illusion and to take on hedonistic implications. It denoted the newly evolved stylish world of pleasure, the world of easy women and handsome actors, all the varied pleasures of the flesh.[24]

The most distinctive and popular art form of the Tokugawa period was the ***ukiyoe***, depictions of the floating world.

The earliest *ukiyoe,* in the first decades of the Tokugawa period were figure paintings. A representative early example is *Princess Sen and Her Lover,* which depicts a granddaughter of Tokugawa Ieyasu, surrounded by her ladies-in-waiting, receiving a letter from a *samurai* lover. Passion lurks beneath the surface of the painting as the princess eagerly reads the *samurai's* letter. In *Bathhouse Girls* 湯女 we find bold sensuality mixed with a sense of strength and confidence. Public bathhouses were numerous in Tokugawa Japan, and most were simply places to bathe, with no connection with prostitution. In certain areas, however, one could find "special" bath houses, staffed with voluptuous attendants who did more than simply scrub customers' backs. The bakufu banned such bathhouses in 1657, but, despite some occasional attempts at enforcing the ban, the bathhouses continued to exist. They exist today as well and are known by the generic term "soapland." Perhaps the most common theme of the early *ukiyo-e* paintings were the courtesans who inhabited the pleasure quarters found in every major urban area. *Courtesans at Leisure* is a large screen painting depicting eighteen courtesans in various scenes from ordinary life. Ordinary life was the subject of much of the later *ukiyo-e* as well.

Major Topics in *Ukiyoe* Prints Include:

1. Celebration of Celebrities
   a) courtesans
   b) actors & sumô wrestlers
2. Celebration of Wealth & Consumption
3. Celebration of Youth & Youthful Love
4. Celebration of Sexuality
5. Celebration of Human Emotions
6. Celebration of Nature

[24] Richard Lane, *Images from the Floating World: The Japanese Print* (New York: Konecky and Konecky, 1978), p. 11.

Lovers Surprised, late 1660s. detail in facial expressions, clothing & posture gives the effect of a third person's presence.

Bathhouse Girls, 1640s

By the 1660s, the first prints began to appear, mainly as part of handbooks on sex. These prints were created from sets of wooden blocks and could, therefore, be produced in quantity. Although initially expensive, the price of these prints dropped steadily as more efficient methods of production developed along with greater consumer demand. We should bear in mind that these illustrated sex manuals were perfectly legitimate books in their day. As Lane points out, "these erotica must be regarded in the light of seventeenth-century Japanese life and mores. Sex was considered a very natural function, and ways of increasing enjoyment of this function were felt to be more commendable than censurable."[25] The subject matter soon broadened well beyond sex manuals, but sexuality, in one form or another, remained at least a subtle presence in many *ukiyo-e* prints. During the eighteenth century, technical advnaces in the print making process led to multi-colored prints.

Unlike the case in Europe, Japanese artists rarely celebrated the nude figure in their work in any medium, until the late Meiji period. During the eighteenth century, in Japanese popular art, detailed polychrome prints of famous beautiful women, nearly all courtesans, were the rage. These prints emphasized the subtle, often elaborate

Part of *Uta makura* (Poems of the pillow) by Utamaro, 1788

[25] Ibid., p. 37.

Woman Taking a Bath—an obvious example of voyeurism

facial features, gestures, long hair, and richly decorated clothing of these women to convey a **sense of erotic beauty and sexual power**. Partial nudity—often revealing the "jade gate" and "jade stalk" in exaggerated detail—was common in depictions of sexual acts, but it was the combination of partial nudity, clothing and behavior that made such prints appealing to consumers. The nude male or female figure itself was not an object of artistic depiction in Tokugawa times, whether to convey a sense of the erotic or for any other purpose.

Uta makura 歌枕 (Poems of the pillow) by the famous *ukiyoe* artist Utamaro 喜多川歌麿 (1753-1806), produces a particularly striking sense of sensual passion. The interplay of legs and sheer clothing, the grasping hands, and the man's intense right eye (look closely just below the woman's hair) as the two lovers embrace contribute to the overall impact of the print. There is another erotic element to the picture that is specific to Japanese culture: The nape of the neck, which the woman displays prominently in her passion, was a highly erogenous part of the body. It was common for *ukiyoe* prints to include poems, usually about something in nature, with obvious sexual connotations. The poem on the man's fan reads:

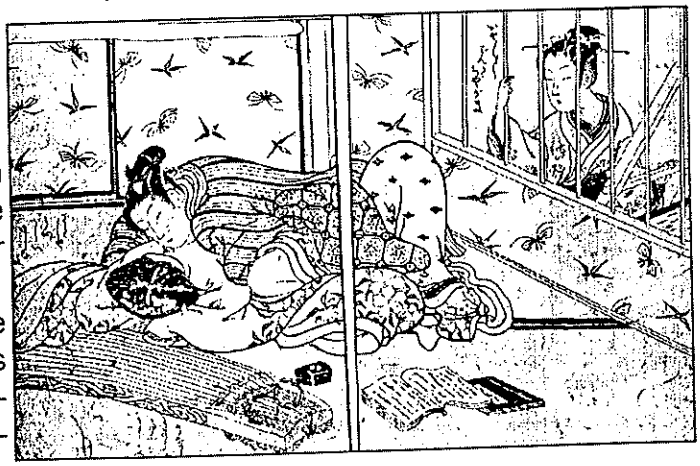
Its beak caught firmly in the clam's shell 蛤にはしをしっかりとはさまれて

The snipe cannot fly away 鴫たちかぬる

On an autumn evening 秋の夕ぐれ

Most Japanese, then and now, regard autumn as the best season, a time when the intense heat and humidity of the summer had passed, and the evenings had become pleasantly cool.

Some *ukiyoe* prints have a voyeuristic quality, commonly achieved by depicting women bathing. Consumers were particularly interested in behind the scenes depictions of courtesans as they might appear while at rest. Explicit sexual depictions between a man and woman often featured a third party watching the activity. Sometimes this third party was a serving maid. In other cases, the artist would include a diminutive male or female figure who would watch the activities of the main characters and comment on them. Even today, **voyeurism**, eavesdropping on the sexual activities of others, is a major element in Japanese eroticism.



"Few peoples, said Lane, "have ever pursued the cult of artistic erotica as assiduously as the Japanese."[26] Nevertheless, one should not get the impres-

[26] Ibid., p. 113.


Girl Tying Verse to a Cherry Branch, (c.1740s)

sion that all *ukiyoe* prints were about eroticism. The prints dealt with the many other aspects of relations between men and women, as well as other topics. The parting of lovers, usually in the morning, was a common theme. Such depictions are somewhat reminiscent of Heian-period sentiments, but the Tokugawa-period versions tend to convey a stronger **sense of mutual, poignant emotions**.

The *ukiyoe* prints also celebrated the **excitement of courtship**, particularly among teenagers experiencing, perhaps for the first time, the full force of emotions connected with love and lust. A closely related point is that this art form **celebrated youth**. One rarely sees anyone in an *ukiyoe* print who appears over forty; youths in their very early teens are quite common. Many scholars have commented that Tokugawa-period intellectual thought tended to celebrate nature's vitality. The youthful vitality evident in many of the *ukiyoe* prints may be a popular manifestation of the same tendency. Toyonobu's 豊信 (1711-85) *Girl Tying Verse to a Cherry Branch* is an example of this type of print. Here, a teenage girl at a festival strains to tie a love poem to a cherry branch in full bloom, the spring season corresponding to passion and love in Japanese symbolism.


Lovers Parting

Famous, beautiful courtesans became perhaps the most representative subject matter of the color prints of the eighteenth century. Recall that the elite courtesans were famous celebrities. Prints of these courtesans, therefore, functioned roughly like photographs or posters of famous actors, actresses, popular musicians, et cetera did and do in more recent times. The elaborate dress of the elite courtesans provided an excellent opportunity for artists to display their talent. Because the courtesans' robes were multi-colored and bright, artists could strive for a realistic effect while still providing consumers of the prints with a rich array of bright color.

Ukiyoe prints also dealt with subjects other than relations between men and women. Prints often, for example, depicted different types of **occupations** such as wood cutters and vendors of various types. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, **landscapes** enjoyed a period of intense popularity. Modern copies of these landscape

prints still figure prominently in materials intended for tourists or consumption outside Japan. Why? Because they convey nice, wholesome image of the quaint Japan of bygone days—an image that still has great appeal to the imaginations of many people outside of Japan. This is not to imply, however, that there was anything artistically lacking in the best of the *ukiyoe* landscape prints, for many are magnificent accomplishments of the highest quality.

Koryûsai 湖龍斎 (fl. 1760s-80s), *Courtesan, Her Maid & a Client*

The bakufu sometimes attempted to **regulate or censor** *ukiyoe* prints. But remember, while a small segment of Confucian-influenced moralists did condemn the celebration of sexuality in art, their views were not representative of most Japanese of the time, *samurai* or commoners. Bakufu regulations, therefore, rarely took serious aim at "rectifying morals" by reducing exposure to sexually-explicit art. The **primary objective** was to reduce luxury consumption and spending. Bakufu officials tended to have an antiquated view of economic laws, often regarding luxury spending as a drain on the economy as a whole. Because *ukiyoe* prints were not necessities, and because they were extremely popular, the bakufu often sought to "rectify morals" by limiting such things as the size, paper quality, number of colors and so forth. These regulations usually had a temporary effect but were never successful in the long run in curbing public consumption of large, brightly-colored prints. Another area of censorship involved **politics**. One artist, for example, received a brief prison sentence for depicting Toyotomi Hideyori (Hideyoshi's son, killed by Tokugawa Ieyasu). Anything even indirectly connected with questions of bakufu legitimacy was dangerous ground, although it was rare that an artist would receive more than a mild punishment (e.g., a short period of house arrest) for running afoul of the bakufu in this way.

In the Meiji period and later, censorship of art and literature became much more strict, and sexuality itself gradually came to be regarded as a corrupting influence on morality. Sexually explicit art still flourished in modern times (as it always does), but it was no longer in the mainstream as it had been during the Tokugawa period. Today, mainstream attitudes about sexuality and nudity in Japan have a distinctly "Puritanical" quality quite similar to the situation in the United States. The modern state, through its censors, educational system, and by other means has helped destroy the celebratory attitude toward sex and pleasures of the flesh that was common in Tokugawa times.

Interestingly, the idea of Japan as a sexual paradise for men was common in this country (the U.S.) a generation ago, and the image still lingers. This distorted image was the product of the immediate postwar generation of U.S. soldiers who, owing to their power as conquerors and possessors of highly-valued dollars, found sex readily available. As one competent observer of contemporary Japan has noted:

> Buried somewhere in the minds of many Western men is an image of pliant raven-haired beauties, all trained in the most contortionist ways to please a man. Although their numbers are mercifully dwindling, there are still some American men who only want to hear about "geisha girls" when they learn that I have lived in Japan. . . . [I]t is a shock for many Westerners to discover that in terms of sexual latitude, Japan lies closer to Spain and Portugal than to Sweden.[27]

Sexuality is still a major part of life in Japan, of course, as it is in all societies—even the power of the modern state cannot fully suppress it. In Japan, sexuality permeates advertising, fashion and many other realms of life. The point here is simply that moral attitudes regarding sex have undergone significant changes since the Tokugawa period.

THE FALL OF THE BAKUFU

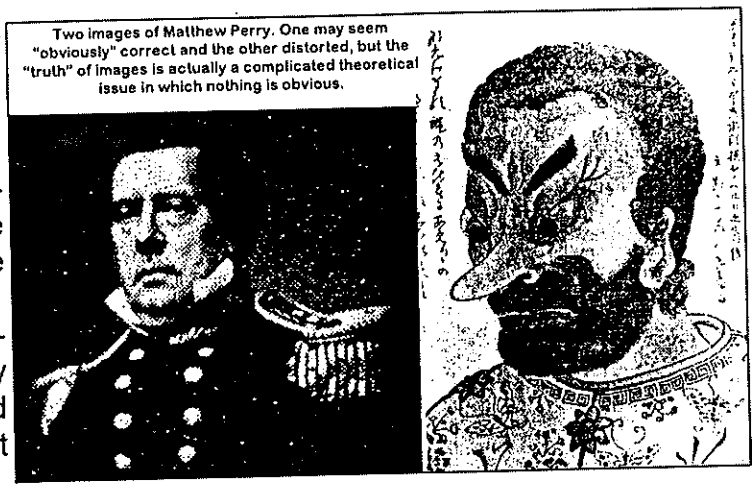
Lengthy books have been written analyzing the fall of the Tokugawa bakufu. Our discussion of this complex matter, however, shall be extremely brief and superficial. Starting in the 1840s, natural disasters, famines, and epidemics swept through Japan. Economic decline became pronounced in many regions. The frequency of peasant uprisings increased dramatically, as did membership in unusual religious cults. Organized society did not collapse, but many at all of its levels became uneasy about the future.

This political satire from 1837 cost artist Utagawa Yoshitora 50 days in handcuffs. In the foreground, Oda Nobunaga and his assassin beat the rice into dough. Behind them Toyotomi Hideyoshi prepares the rice dough. In the back, Tokugawa Ieyasu eats the finished rice cakes (= make the bread, bake the bread, eat the bread). It was this sort of art that the bakufu sought to censor, though not always with much success.

Intellectually, nativism (*kokugaku*) had become firmly entrenched as a legitimate branch of scholarship. While it did not become more popular than Confucianism or Dutch studies, Confucian scholars and others began to accept certain of the core concepts of nativism. In particular, the prestige of the emperor—yes, the long-forgotten, obscure emperor—began to rise as scholars explored, and in substantial part *created,* Japan's "ancient" past. By the 1840s, the **theory that the emperor delegated his authority to the shôgun**, who ruled on the emperor's behalf, had become widely accepted. Recall that no such thing had happened back in Ieyasu's time. Ieyasu and the early shôguns ruled because of raw power, the majority of which they pos-

[27] Jared Taylor, *Shadows of the Rising Sun: A Critical View of the "Japanese Miracle,"* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1983), p. 185.

sessed. By the 1840s, however bakufu power had faded, as had that of many domains. If the shôgun ruled as the emperor's appointee, of course, it would then be conceivable that the emperor could fire the shôgun and his government were he to prove incompetent.



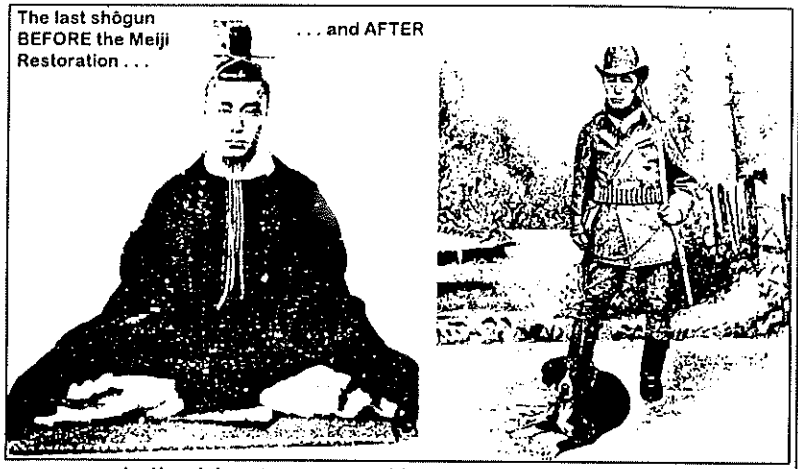
Two images of Matthew Perry. One may seem "obviously" correct and the other distorted, but the "truth" of images is actually a complicated theoretical issue in which nothing is obvious.

The patterns of foreign relations established by the early shôguns gradually became rigid bakufu traditions, for reasons that need not concern us here. Throughout the 1800s, ever larger American whaling and trading vessels, and sometimes shipwrecked sailors, began to appear in Japanese waters. Ships in distress sometimes made their way into Japanese ports. The Japanese response was typically to provide such vessels with a bare minimum assistance and send them on their way with a warning not to come back. Shipwrecked sailors were usually repatriated via Chinese or Dutch ships sailing out of Nagasaki, which took them to Guangzhou. As U.S. whaling and trade with China increased, the desire grew to establish formal diplomatic and commercial relations with Japan. When it became known in the U.S. that Japan possessed coal in significant quantities, one senator joyfully exclaimed that "God" had sent coal to us! Congress authorized Commodore Matthew Perry to sail to Japan with a large naval fleet to establish formal relations.

Perry

Perry arrived in 1853, landed, stated his intentions, and then told bakufu officials that he would return the next year. After several months in China, Perry returned to Edo with an even larger fleet, the purpose of which was to intimidate the bakufu with a show of potential force. For various reasons, Perry's strategy worked, and the bakufu, with some reluctance, signed a diplomatic treaty with the U.S. Commercial treaties in 1858 opened several major ports in Japan to European and American residence and commerce. While some Japanese welcomed this expansion of foreign relations, others interpreted it as a sign of bakufu weakness and incompetence. Diverse groups began to unite in their dislike of the bakufu, adopting the slogan "***sonnô jôi***" 尊王攘夷, "Revere the sovereign; expel the barbarians!" The "sovereign" in this case meant the emperor, and the "barbarians" were the American and European foreigners. Those who disliked the bakufu for whatever reason began to rally around this slo-

Perry's sailors in a brothel



gan, and dissident *samurai* began a campaign of terror by assassination.

By the early 1860s, a rough consensus had developed, shared even by many in the bakufu, that major changes would be necessary were Japan to avoid China's fate at the hands of foreign imperialists. The shôgun sought to preserve a major role for the Tokugawa family in the new order, but bakufu opponents would settle for nothing less than complete retirement from official life. Warfare on a relatively small scale broke out over this issue during the last months of 1867 and the first months of 1868. When the shôgun realized that he lacked sufficient support to prevail, he gave up to prevent large-scale loss of life. He received a generous financial settlement from the new government and went into retirement. The Tokugawa family still maintains a cultural foundation to preserve important historical documents and artifacts and to promote research.

Young, handsome, athletic, with a vigorous appetite for horseback riding, food, wine, and sex—but not the tedious details of government administration—the Meiji emperor was a perfect symbol of the new nation and a perfect tool for a new generation of political leaders. Why? Because he looked great on display but left governing to the politicians.

The event that toppled the bakufu are known collectively as the **Meiji Restoration** 明治維新 because, in theory at least, the emperor had been restored to his rightful place as Japan's actual head of state (recall that it was 1333 when this sort of thing last took place). As time when on, the emperor became a tremendously potent *symbol* of Japan as a nation (see the next chapter). By the 1930s, it had become illegal for ordinary people even to look at him directly—so lofty had his status become. Precisely *because* of their lofty status, however, Japan's modern emperors did not administer the country directly. Had they done so, they would have appeared too human and

In this 1850 depiction, a Spanish *samurai* named "Koronbus" has an audience with Queen "Isaberla," dressed in a Korean-style outfit.

too fallible. When things went poorly, Prime Ministers and cabinet members could resign, and the emperor remained above the level of political struggle. When things went well, the emperor could and did share in the glory. All of Japan's modern emperors have been, for the most part, passive sovereigns, content to follow the lead of their advisors.

The real movers and shakers behind the new government were a small group of young *samurai* from four key domains. Within their first ten years in power, this oligarchy established a strong central government, abolished the domains and the *samurai* class, and established the core of what would become, in later years, a powerful military. This small group of leaders remained in power until the 1920s, all the while influencing the course of Japanese politics, economic development, and foreign affairs either directly or from behind the scenes (this should sound familiar). Their passing left a power void that elements of the military eventually filled. The growing influence of the army and navy in internal politics contributed to (but was *not* the sole cause of) Japan's collision course with the United States and other countries, which culminated in the Pacific War of the 1930s and 40s.

In 1855, a massive earthquake shook parts of Japan, causing great damage and loss of life. The images shown here are from the tabloid press of the day. Why does each feature a catfish. To what classical work of art might the image above refer?

Chapter Eight

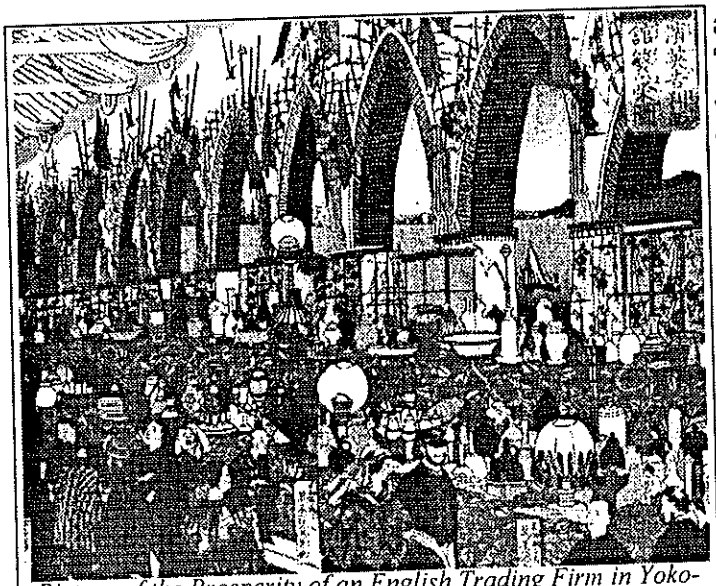
Meiji Japan and Beyond: Topics in Social and Cultural History

Japan's Meiji period was a time of rapid change in nearly all segments of society. The early decades of the Meiji period saw the circulation—in political, business, educational and other circles—of a wide variety of ideas about what Japan should be like. As the power of the state grew stronger, however, the acceptable range of these ideas, views that could be safely expressed in public, steadily narrowed. In the short space of approximately a half century, Japan underwent a transformation from a loose confederation of over 200 different domains to a nation-state with a strong central government. This chapter examines topics in the realm of society and culture connected with this transformation. The discussion of some topics extends beyond the Meiji period. Japan's modern social and cultural development took place in a world dominated by the power of Western Europe and the United States. Much of our discussion, therefore, concerns ways in which Japanese dealt with this power. There is no attempt to be comprehensive. For a more detailed examination of modern Japan, take HIST 416.

Poster from the 1860s warns Japanese of the consequences of marrying the new foreigners.

CLASH OF CULTURES: JAPANESE CONTACT WITH EUROPE & THE UNITED STATES

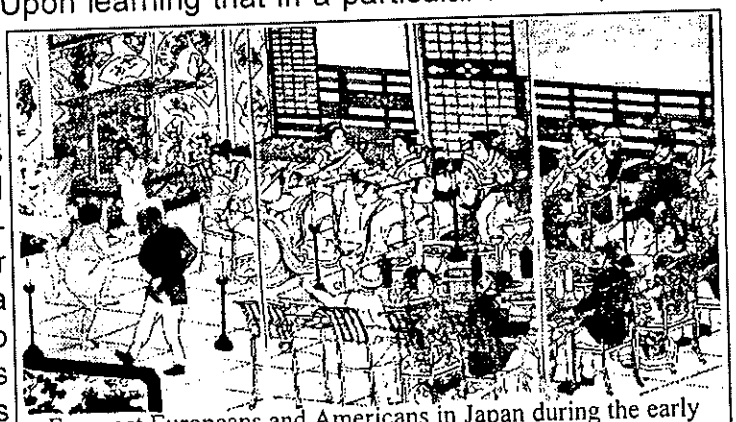
In 1858, the bakufu signed a series of **unequal treaties** with the United States and the major European countries. Similar to the treaties imposed on China in 1860, they granted extraterritoriality to most foreign nationals in Japan and specified a low tariff rate on foreign goods. In 1868, the new Meiji government inherited these unequal treaties, and its highest foreign policy priority was their elimination, although doing so ultimately required three decades of effort. From the standpoint of the European countries, extraterritoriality in Japan was necessary owing to its alleged backwardness. Because Japan was not fully civilized, the (European) thinking went, it would be unaccept-



Picture of the Prosperity of an English Trading Firm in Yokohama, 1871. Notice the bewildered-looking Japanese toward the left. Prints such as this reflect Japanese perceptions of European power in early Meiji times.

able for Europeans to be subject to the "barbaric" laws and judicial customs of Japan. Such ethnocentric assertions often enraged Japan's new leaders, but the Europeans had the bigger guns at the time. The Meiji leaders, therefore, realized the necessity of convincing the European powers that Japan was indeed civilized—with "civilized" defined by European standards. As a result, the Meiji government made strenuous efforts to make the customs and behavior of ordinary Japanese—at least those within sight of European and U.S. foreigners—appear in rough conformity with European social and moral norms.

Concern with Europe was widespread in Meiji Japan, motivated by more than simply a desire to eliminate the unequal treaties. The late nineteenth century was the peak of European economic and military power and the high point of imperialist expansion. By the start of the Meiji period, China was already under the yoke of European-imposed unequal treaties. China's losses in the Opium and Arrow wars were shocking to those in Japan who monitored foreign affairs. Most of India had become a British colony. As European power expanded on the Asian continent, thoughtful Japanese began to wonder about the fate of their country. In 1862, just before the start of the Meiji period, the bakufu sent a number of officials and scholars to China to study the situation there. Regarding the city of Shanghai, one of the Japanese recorded in his diary, "The Chinese have become servants to the foreigners. Sovereignty may belong to China but in fact it's no more than a colony of Great Britain and France." Upon learning that in a particular location, French and British soldiers had seized a Confucian temple and used it for their barracks, the same Japanese observer wrote, "Standing before this outrage perpetrated by the British, I find this truly detestable, truly lamentable." Another Japanese observer quoted the following verse from a classic Chinese book of poetry to express the implications of China's plight for Japan: "Ah, the dangerous lesson is close at hand, only separated from us by a stream."[1]



For most Europeans and Americans in Japan during the early Meiji period, significant cultural interaction with residents of Japan was minimal. In this Japanese artist's conception, foreign men enjoy themselves in a special, expensive brothel district established for them in Yokohama.

[1] Passages quoted in Joshua A. Fogel, *The Cultural Dimension of Sino-Japanese Relations: Essays on the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), pp. 86, 92, and 93 respectively.

Move over *National Inquirer!* By the end of the Tokugawa period, the tabloid press had become a major industry in urban areas. Insert left: a peasant woman in Yamashiro gave birth to a child with a horse's head. Right: A family looks on in wonder as frogs attack and kill a snake that was about to strike their daughter. They attributed the miracle to their faith in the god Benten.

Whether the immediate emotional reaction was outrage, fear, curiosity, or something else, Europe began to loom large in the thinking of most educated Japanese.

By the early Meiji period, it had become clear to even the most anti-foreign Japanese (and attitudes toward the new foreigners ranged from loathing to adulation) that the Europeans and Americans coming to Japan in ever greater numbers could not be dislodged by force. Many Japanese began to discuss the causal factors underlying the tremendous military and economic power of the new foreigners. Various cultural traits came up as possible reasons. Perhaps these foreigners have a superior religion? Some Japanese who saw the answer here became Christians, though usually only for a short while. Perhaps these foreigners have superior systems of knowledge? Many Japanese elites began to study European languages and technology. Perhaps the strange dress of these foreigners gives them some kind of advantage? It soon became the fashion among well-to-do urban residents to dress in a formal European style (top hat and frock coat for men; formal gowns for women) on special occasions and adopt some aspects of European clothing for ordinary wear. Perhaps these foreigners gain their apparent physical and mental strength from a superior diet? Disgusting though many Japanese initially found the practice, **beef eating** became a fad in the early 1870s. Let us examine this phenomenon in more detail.

Smacking His Lips Over Beef Stew, a satirical portrayal of participants in the beef eating fad of the early 1870s.

Although some Japanese in remote areas hunted wild boar and other animals and ate their flesh, the majority of Japanese during the Tokugawa period ate little or no animal flesh other than fish. One reason was a general Buddhist discouragement of killing animals. More important was a lack of grazing land, which made raising herds of cows or pigs economically impractical. Fukuzawa Yukichi, an expert on "Western" cultures, wrote an essay urging Japanese to fortify themselves by eating beef. By 1871, restaurants featuring beef dishes (especially *sukiyaki,* a type of beef stew) could be found in Yokohama, Tôkyô, and other major cities. Patrons

typically wore the latest European attire, adding further to the exotic atmosphere.

This sudden interest in beef consumption produced satirical comment by some writers and artists. In one book of amusing monologues called *Sitting Around the Stewpot* (*Aguranabe* 安愚楽鍋), a customer introduced as "a young man fond of the West" extols the excellence of beef:

> We should really be grateful that even people like ourselves can now eat beef, thanks to the fact that Japan is steadily becoming a civilized country. Of course, there are some unenlightened boors who cling to their barbaric superstitions and insist that eating meat defiles you so much you can no longer pray before the Buddha and the gods. Such nonsense merely proves that they don't understand natural philosophy. Savages like that should be forced to read Fukuzawa's article on eating beef.[2]

The Enlightenment of the Buddhist Deity Fudô. In this Japanese satire of the blind adoption of European ways, the great Buddhist deity reads a popular tabloid while attendants cut and prepare beef that he will eat.

Although humorous in part, there is a **serious message** here, namely, a critique of the centrality of Europe and its culture as the standard by which to distinguish the "civilized" from "savages," "unenlightened boors" from the learned members of society, and so forth. Throughout the Meiji period and later, Japanese society produced numerous critics who rejected (and continue to reject) a Euro-centric standard for culture and civilization. In nearly all areas of endeavor except the hard sciences, modern Japan was the site of a **tension between the acceptance and rejection of European cultural forms**. Many intellectuals and politicians struggled to find ways to take the best of what Europe and America had to offer, while avoiding cultural subordination to the "West." We can still see signs of this struggle today.

French cartoonist George Bigot was often critical of Japanese adoption of European cultural forms.

As more of Japan's well-to-do urban dwellers adopted European styles of dress, diet, and other cultural forms, foreign commentators quickly took note. We have seen the words and images of some

[2] Quoted in Julia Meech-Pekarik, *The World of the Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization* (New York: Weatherhill, 1986), p. 75.

Japanese critics above. What was the **reaction from Europeans**? Although there was no single attitude, many European commentators reacted negatively to alleged Japanese "aping" of European ways. There seem to have been two related tendencies underlying this negative reaction. First was a desire in the minds of many Europeans for Japan to remain quaint and exotic. Second was a feeling of cultural and racial superiority such that no non-European people could possibly master the ways of Europe in any deep or "true" fashion. Japanese adoption of European cultural forms must, therefore, be a case of mere superficial imitation or "aping" of their European betters.

As an example of this sort of attitude, consider the outrage expressed by a German physician in Japan in 1877:

> On the New Year's Day we have the plainest demonstrations of the grotesque way in which misunderstood European customs are being apishly imitated in Japan. Europeans in this country, even the English, have dropped a good deal of western etiquette, so that (for instance) one hardly ever sees a foreigner in a tall hat. The Japanese government, however, has, in its wisdom, thought it fit to prescribe frock-coat and tall hat as the official dress for New Year visits. For this reason, today the streets have been full of figures more comical than you could possibly imagine. They look positively ridiculous, these unfortunate Japanese, in their incredibly ill-fitting frock-coats and trousers! On their heads are tall hats which look equally out of place. Their hands are adorned with white gloves, and hang stiffly by their sides, as if they were afraid of touching their "European" clothes. Not only full-grown men, but even boys of ten to twelve are sacrificed to this preposterous convention. You simply cannot imagine how absurd they look as they go about the streets or wait in antechambers. Yet these same Japanese have a very fine appearance, dignified and distinguished, when dressed for great occasions in their native finery.

In the minds of many European observers "the Japanese" came out behind in the scale of "civilization" no matter what they did. They were inferior because of their "traditional" or "native" customs and culture, but were even worse for having the audacity to "apishly" imitate the ways of Europeans (i.e., not staying in their proper place).

Referring to the same phenomenon as does the diary passage on this page from the German physician, British sketch artist Charles Wirgman captioned this drawing, "Modern Japanese in their official dress paying New Years visits, 1874. Aint they lovely?" In a similar drawing of Japanese teenagers, he wrote in part: ". . . you may wear spectacles till you are blue in the faces, [but] you never can look like Germans, positively never."[3]

Whether expressed blatantly or indirectly, this **arrogant attitude** on the part of many Europeans and Americans took its toll on mutual goodwill. Speaking of those Westerners who were scornful

[3] Shimizu Isao 清水勲, ed., *Waaguman Nihon sobyôshû* ワーグマン日本素描集 (Tôkyô: Iwanami shoten, 1987), pp. 90, 99.

of Japan's adopting Western institutions and practices, the influential journalist, one-time Christian, and one-time avid advocate of "Westernization," Tokutomi Sohô 徳富蘇峰, wrote as follows in 1894:

> [Westerners] regard the Japanese as a race close to monkeys, or as monkeys who are almost human. . . . They regard Japan's great reform of thirty years ago [the Meiji Restoration] as a kind of sleight of hand. Regarding us as savages who have suddenly imitated civilization, they are impressed only by Japanese skill in imitating. . . They overlook the fact that we have nurtured elements of civilization for three thousand years.[4]

Tokutomi's anger was justified, and such anger played a role in Japanese militarism during the last decade of the nineteenth century and thereafter. When war broke out between Japan and China in the summer of 1894, for example, Tokutomi made the following declaration:

> We must remember that we are fighting before the whole world. Why do some Japanese say we fight in order to reform Korea, or to vanquish Peking, or to establish a huge indemnity? They should realize that we are fighting to determine once and for all Japan's position in the world. . . . If our country achieves a brilliant victory, all previous misconceptions will be dispelled. The true nature of our country and of our national character will suddenly emerge like the sun breaking through a dense fog.[5]

One-time advocate of beef eating and large-scale adoption of Western culture, Fukuzawa Yukichi, also became less enamored of the West as time went on. His reaction to Japan's war with China was similar to that of Tokutomi.

THE MODERN STATE & POPULAR CULTURE: THE CASE OF NUDITY

Private individuals were relatively free to criticize European feelings of cultural superiority (and in the age of scientific racism, "cultural" also meant "racial"). Meiji Japan's government, however, had to tread with greater caution. Placed at a severe disadvantage by the unequal treaties, the government went to great lengths to regulate the behavior of ordinary Japanese living in the cities in which foreigners also resided (the treaties restricted foreign residence, but not travel, to several of the large ports). A study of these regulatory measures provides insight into the growth of the power of the modern Japanese state and its use to constrain "carnivalesque" dimensions of social life. "Carnivalesque" in this context refers not only to popular forms of entertainment, but also to popular cultural forms the state deemed immoral or immodest.

Although during the Tokugawa period, the bakufu and domain governments periodically issued regulations aimed at improving the moral life of ordinary people, the premodern state lacked sufficient "reach" to enforce such regulations. Recall that rural villages were largely autonomous as long as they paid taxes on time, and the bakufu lacked the power and will to effect significant social control in the cities. A general characteristic of **modern states** throughout the world is a great increase in "reach," usually

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[4] Quoted in Kenneth B. Pyle, *The New Generation in Meiji Japan: Problems of Cultural Identity, 1885-1895* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 177.
[5] Quoted in Ibid., p. 173.

down to the level of the individual. Furthermore, most modern states have taken an active role in attempting to shape culture in general and individual moral behavior in particular. In this respect, the modern states have taken over many of the socializing functions once performed by families, neighborhoods, and religious institutions. Japan's Meiji state followed this general pattern. Takashi Fujitani explains the matter as follows:

Modern states have often frowned on (or actively restricted) the "carnivalesque" dimensions of popular life such as this festival dance in the Tokugawa period. Hard work, frugality, and a low-key lifestyle are usually more to the state's liking.

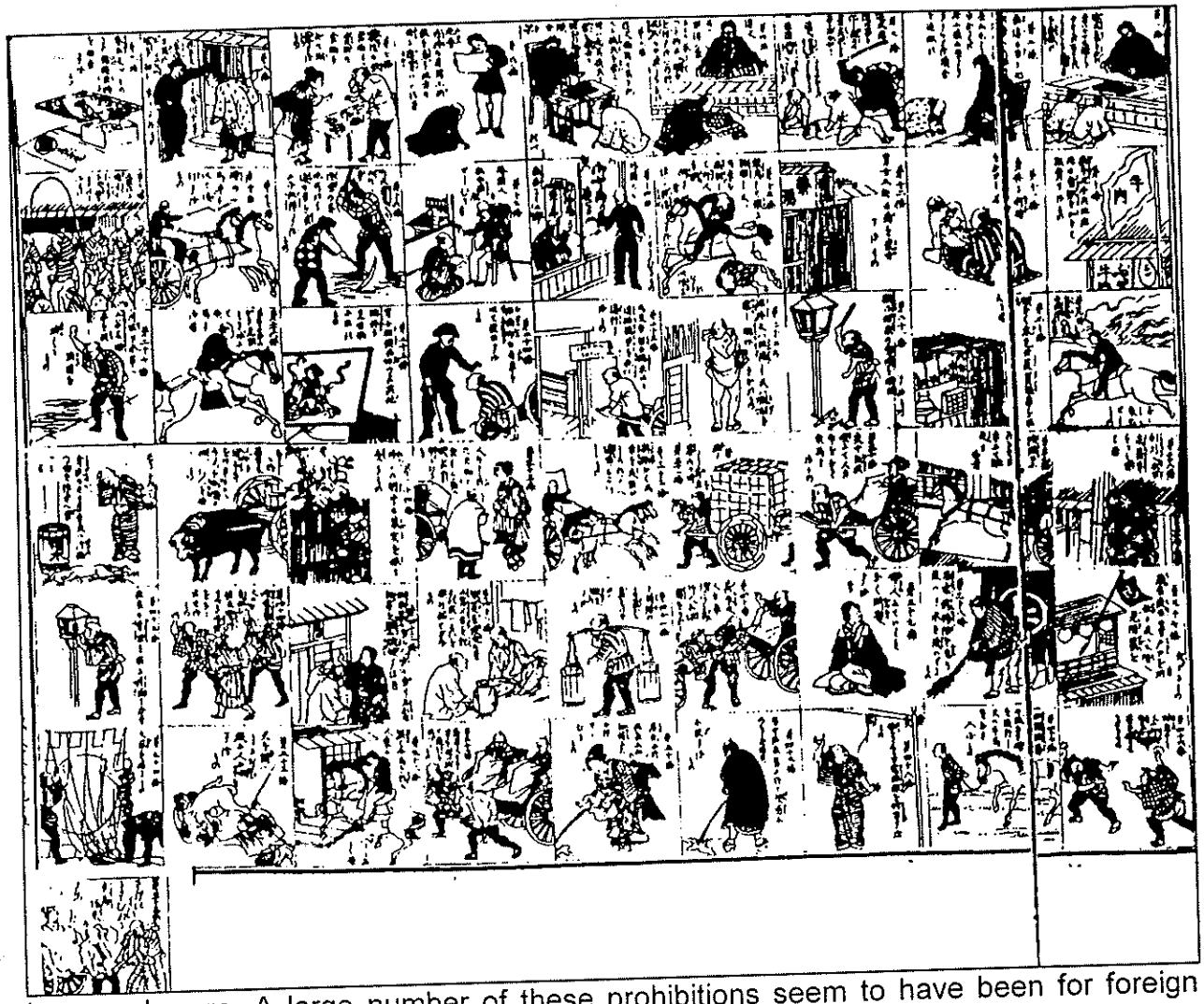
> This new conception of rule unleashed a torrent of policies aimed at bringing the common people into a tightly disciplined national community and a unified and totalizing culture. A kind of cultural terror, understood as being pedagogical, swept through local communities as the state's agents attacked folk religions through the destruction or manipulation of local shrines and the suppression of "irrational" beliefs . . . while also instructing them in the proper forms of worship. The new rulers preached ideas about "civilization and enlightenment" while also prohibiting numerous folk practices such as extravagance in festivities . . . or excessive leisure or gambling. From a very early date, in fact, the cultural policies reached down to the most mundane level. In Tôkyô, for example, the authorities launched aggressive campaigns against mixed bathing, public nudity, and urinating in public (*tachi shôben*). In 1876, the Tôkyô police arrested 2,091 people for nudity and 4,495 others for urinating in public. And in what was then called Toyooka prefecture, the authorities prohibited a seemingly innocuous summer custom, daytime napping.[6]

Incidentally, public urination was commonplace throughout Japan in the Tokugawa period and, though illegal, remains so today. We examine the situation regarding nudity below.

The first major attempt to modify public behavior and morality came in 1871 when the Meiji government issued a series of **regulations against inappropriate behavior** (違式註違条例). These regulations applied to the residents of the capital and surrounding urban areas and specified fines for violators. Rendered into a series of pictures with simple text for the benefit of illiterates, the regulations were posted throughout Tôkyô. As you see from the statistics Fujitani provides above, all indications are that the police were diligent in enforcing them.

The complete set of regulations is shown here. Included are prohibitions against: selling spoiled or diseased meat; public sideshows and freakshows; transporting excrement (a valuable commodity) in uncovered buckets; brawling in public; women getting short haircuts without permission of fathers or husbands; public urination; throwing objects up onto telegraph wires; and shouting out of windows to people passing by be-

[6] Takashi Fujitani, "Inventing, Forgetting, Remembering: Toward a Historical Ethnography of the Nation-State," in Harumi Befu, ed., *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia: Representation and Identity* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1993), p. 99.



low—and more. A large number of these prohibitions seem to have been for foreign consumption, that is, they addressed behaviors that Japan's new leaders were embarrassed to have foreigners see. Throwing objects onto telegraph wires, for example, not only might damage the wires, but might also suggest to a foreign observer rustic or child-like lack of appreciation for important modern technology. One version of the drawing illustrating this prohibition (not shown above) shows a foreigner walking down the street as Japanese men and women laugh while throwing objects into the telegraph wires. Also, foreigners were often the objects of insults or comments shouted out from the safety of upper-story windows and sometimes complained about being sold bad meat. These regulations are **significant for two reasons**. First, they indicate a growing willingness of the state to "micro-manage" personal behavior. Second, they indicate the importance the government placed on putting on a good appearance when under the gaze of Europeans and Americans. Significantly, regulations such as those mentioned here *did not* apply to all or even most Japanese. At their widest, they applied only to residents of the port cities open to foreign residence.

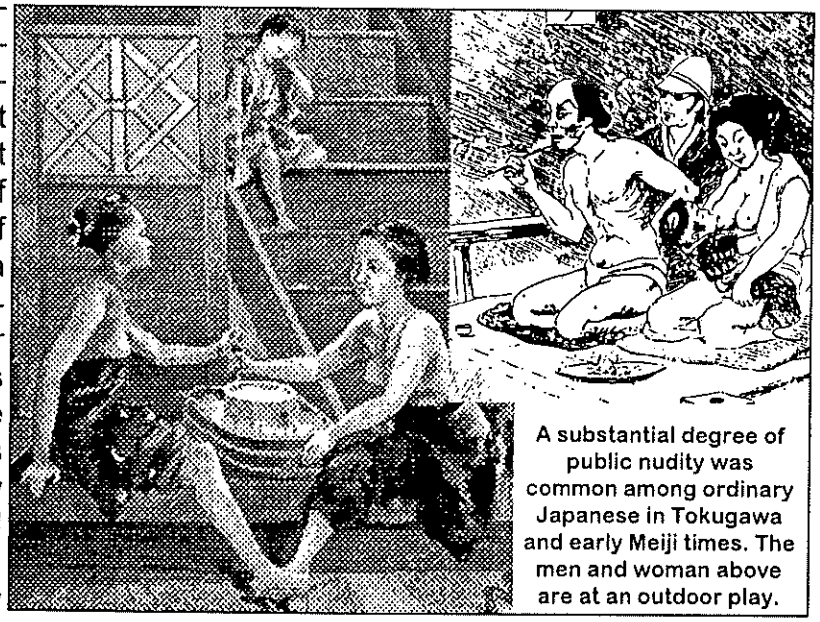
Nudity is, of course, an issue closely related to appearances. Below we explore **nudity in Japan** from the Meiji government-sponsored and other attempts to regulate period through the 1930s, with some comparative reference to Europe and the U.S. Our investigation will shed light on a number of issues connected with cultural differences,

cultural power, the power of the state, social class, views of the body, and more. The material presented here derives in large part from a series of essays, *Civilization and Nudity* 文明と裸体, by Inoue Shôichi 井上章一, which appeared throughout 1992 in *Gekkan Asahi*. Specific references to the series will appear in parentheses as (month:page#).

Nudity in Daily Life in Tokugawa & Early Meiji Japan

Members of the *samurai* class, men and women, did not (or at least were never supposed to) appear in public without being fully clothed. Many norms and values of the *samurai* class resembled those of Chinese elites, for whom incomplete dress indicated incomplete civilization. In Japan's terribly hot and humid summers, men and women performing manual labor outdoors often worked semi-naked. Scant clothing, therefore, was mainly an indication of manual labor, and one way *samurai* distinguished themselves from laborers was by their more formal and complete attire. In the summer, male laborers in rural and urban areas commonly wore only a loincloth both during work hours and while relaxing. Women often went topless and in any case did not wear underwear (more on this below).

It is common in today's world to link nudity with sex. Clothing serves as a personal boundary marker, and its removal or lack in the sight of others is typically an invitation to intimacy. But clothing or its lack need not function this way in all circumstances. Recall that sexuality is largely a product of complex social codes. In Tokugawa and early Meiji Japan, certain types of clothing worn in certain ways and accompanied by certain gestures typically conveyed sexual messages. A scholar of the relationship between clothing and eroticism explains: "In general, when anything is constantly exposed to view, it leaves nothing to the imagination, tends to be perceived as ordinary, and, eventually, is hardly noticed at all. The eye becomes jaded; habitual nudity is notably unerotic."[7] The sex act itself, of course, involved varying degrees of nudity, but routine nudity while going about one's daily routine was not sexy. The best example of this point is in the area of bathing. During the Tokugawa period, even ordinary Japanese bathed frequently (a major contrast with European habits and one reason for Japanese characterization of Europeans as "stinking of butter"). Only the wealthy, however, could afford to build and maintain their own bathtubs. Especially



A substantial degree of public nudity was common among ordinary Japanese in Tokugawa and early Meiji times. The men and woman above are at an outdoor play.

[7] Valerie Steele, *Fashion and Eroticism: Ideals of Feminine Beauty from the Victorian Era to the Jazz Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 42.

Edo (Tôkyô) public bath with *samurai* patrons. Segregated bathing was the norm only for society's elites. Even here, however, men and women mingled outside the main tubs (foreground).

in urban areas, most Japanese went to public bath houses. There, they would wash themselves outside the main tub, in which they would later soak for relaxation. In most public bath houses, men and women bathed together in the same tub. In fact, in most cases there was only one tub, for reasons of economy if no other.

Men and women of all ages bathing in close proximity to each other was, of course, shocking to American and European visitors. A British observer in the early 1860s recorded an interesting encounter in his diary. He and some other foreigners were traveling though the streets of Edo (Tôkyô). As they neared a public bath, someone inside the bath noticed that exotic foreigners were in the vicinity and let the other bathers know. They all came running out of the bath house, completely naked of course, to gawk at the British travelers, who no doubt did some gawking of their own. According to the diary: "Men and women were all bathing together. They all came running out of the bath hut to gawk at us as we passed by. Not a single one made any attempt to cover up. *They were like Adam and Eve before the fall*, appearing to us just as they had been born" (8:206; keep the reference to Adam and Eve in mind for later). Another British traveler made the following observation regarding bathers at a natural hot spring (*onsen* 温泉): "Two short, attractive women had come out of the hot spring. The two women appeared without wearing so much as a thread and proceeded to dry themselves in the sun. Then, within plain view of the town's residents who were walking across the bridge, they put on their clothes" (8:206).

Tokugawa-period public bath

Among the foreigners, **two views of Japanese nudity** developed. One, not surprisingly, held that public nudity was proof that Japan was obviously a depraved, sinful society. One American wrote, "There is no other country on earth in which men and women conduct their lives together by such indecent manners" (8:207). Perry's interpreter, Rev. S. Wells Williams, while generally a sympathetic observer of Japanese customs, nevertheless declared Japan the "most

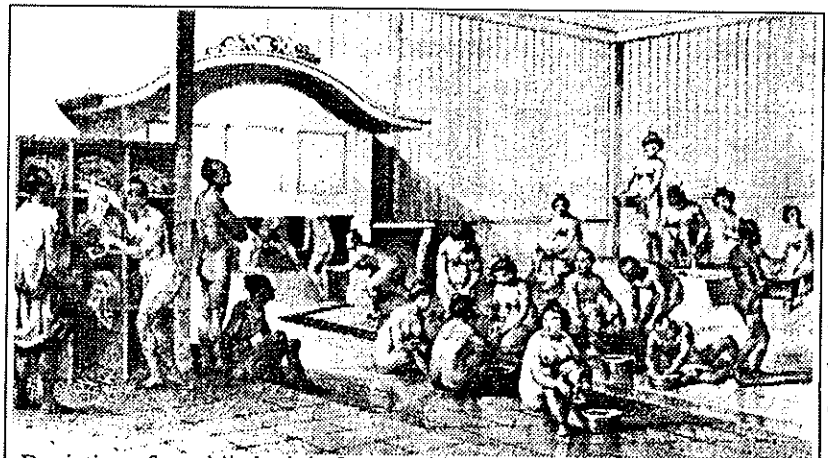
lewd" of "all the heathen nations" he had ever described. He continued:

> Modesty, judging from what we see, might be said to be unknown, for the women make no attempt to hide the bosom, and every step shows the leg above the knee; while men generally go with the merest bit of rag, and that not always carefully put on. Naked men and women have both been seen in the streets, and uniformly resort to the same bath house, regardless of all decency. Lewd motions, pictures and talk seem to be the common expression of the viler acts and thoughts of the people, and this to such a degree as to disgust everybody.[8]

"Combining work and pleasure" is how French cartoonist Bigot described the labors of this male bath attendant.

Presumably, the "everybody" disgusted by these practices was limited to other prudish foreigners, for it would not have included most Japanese. Incidentally, the first edition of the official narrative of Perry's expedition to Japan included a modest oil painting of a public bath (pictured below) produced by the expedition's artist. The inclusion of such a "lewd" picture caused such an uproar in the U.S. that it was removed from all subsequent editions of the book.

Other foreign observers provided a different interpretation. Townsend Harris, for example, perceptively pointed out that mixed bathing was not at all proof of a lewd or degenerate people. "Indeed," he said, "the case is quite the opposite. This exposure serves to weaken the force of the passions excited by mystery and distress" (8:206). Recall the British observer's reference to the innocent Adam-and-Eve-like quality of the nude bathers that came to stare at him. Some foreigners, in other words, regarded the non-self-conscious, non-sexual nudity of Japanese daily life as proof of a primitive innocence akin to Eden's original inhabitants. For Harris, the prevalence of nudity in everyday life actually helped reduce "the passions" (i.e., sexuality) by de-mystifying the body. Although this alleged innocence was certainly a more positive characterization than that of lewdness and sin, it points to a persistent stereotype about Japan and its people as childlike.

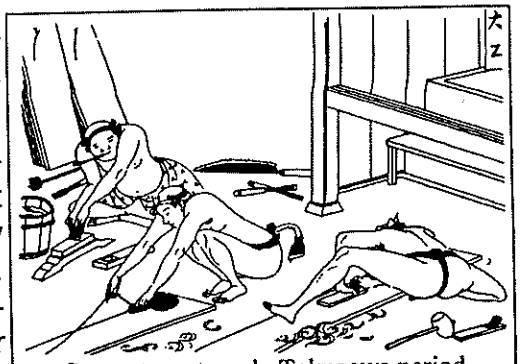


Depiction of a public bath in Japan, which appeared in the first edition of *Narrative of the Expedition,* an account of Perry's visit to Japan. But it was removed from all subsequent editions owing to public uproar in the U.S. over the printing of such an "indecent" painting

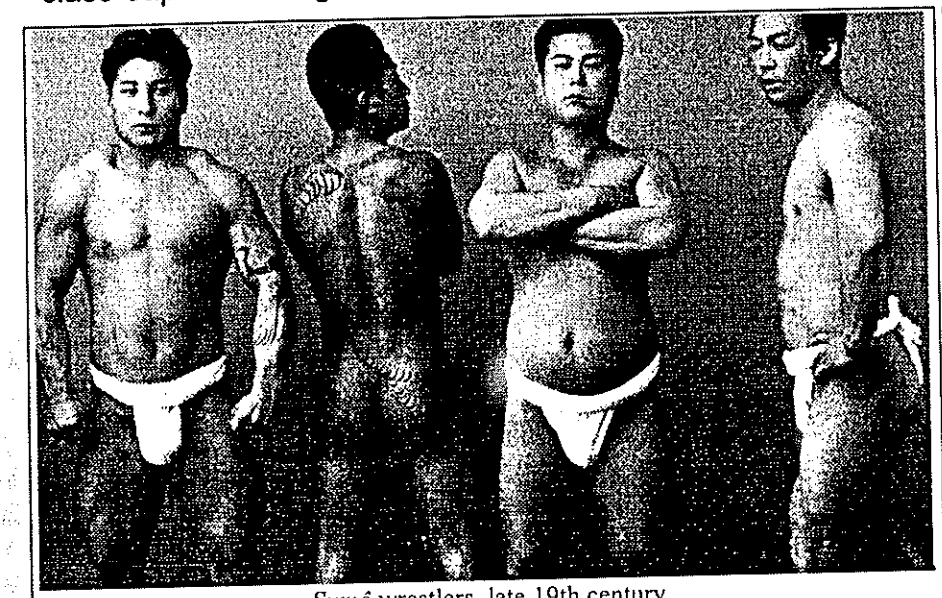
[8] Quoted in Masao Miyoshi, *As We Saw Them: The First Japanese Embassy to the United States (1860)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 77.

An example: after the Second World War, General MacArthur characterized Japan as a "nation of twelve-year-olds," much to the chagrin of his many Japanese admirers.

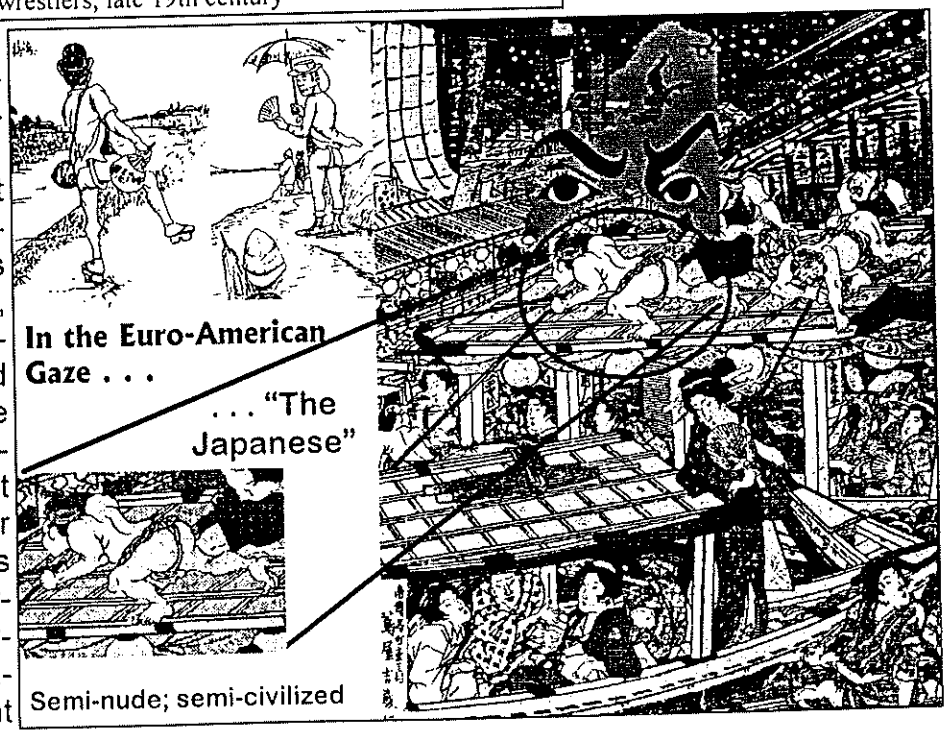
In the Tokugawa period, *samurai* and well-to-do members of society felt no embarrassment about the scant attire of the laboring masses. That they wore few clothes seemed perfectly reasonable. When Japan came under the close gaze of Europeans and Americans in the 1860s, however, upper class Japanese began to realize that most foreigners regarded *all* Japanese as essentially similar. When the bakufu sent its first diplomats abroad in the early 1860s, they were, of course, accompanied by servants who carried the diplomats through the streets in palanquins and performed other labor services. A *samurai* diplomat in Prussia in 1862 was shocked one day to see a full page picture of a "typical" Japanese in the local newspaper. The picture was not of the impeccably-dressed, dignified *samurai,* but of one of his loincloth-wearing servants. As the sense of nation, the feeling of "we Japanese" strengthened during the 1870s, the Meiji government became concerned that *all* Japanese appear acceptable in the eyes of the powerful foreigners. To the government, Japan's laboring masses went



Carpenters at work, Tokugawa period



Sumô wrestlers, late 19th century



from being *kamin* 下民, "the lower orders," to *kokumin* 国民, "citizens." With "citizenship" came new burdens such as higher taxes, military service, and increasing state intervention in the realm of personal behavior.

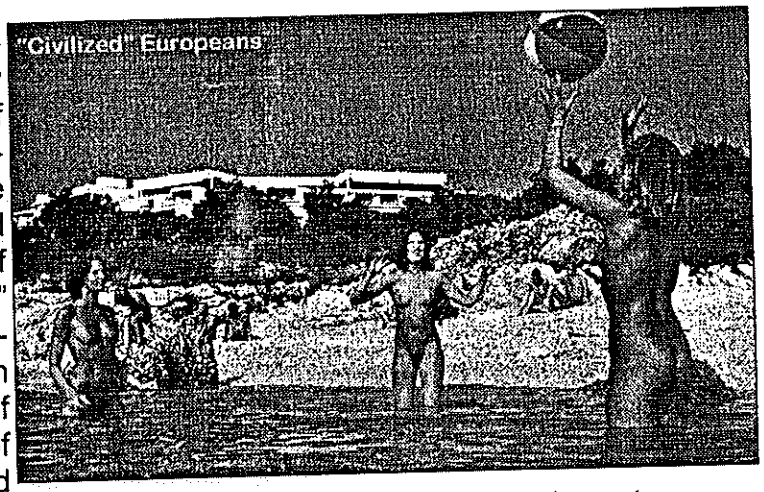
In 1872, it became illegal to appear in public *in Tôkyô* (not elsewhere) with the thighs exposed or with a nude upper torso. This law applied equally to men and women, and the fine was double for total nudity in public. Police enforcement of the law brought forth a brief period of public protest—in the form of streaking—but the reaction of the state was to crack down even harder. People began to cover up. In 1890, the Tôkyô police issued an order prohibiting mixed bathing (police had broad powers to issue orders for the "public good"). Most bath owners could not afford elaborate renovations, so they typically ran a rope across the center of the tub to separate it into sections for men and women. In this way, they complied with the letter of the law but not its spirit. In 1900, the prohibition became more serious when the Home Ministry 内務省 **prohibited mixed bathing** throughout the country and required walls and other structures to prevent men and women from bathing within sight of each other. As the prohibition gradually achieved its intended purpose, a new problem developed: peeping Toms (出歯亀). Once it became forbidden for men to see women bathing, secretly doing so became thrilling for many men. And not only for men. In at least some cases, women, having become aware that men might be peeping at them, found sexual meaning in what had once been a non-sexual behavior (recall also the strong erotic appeal of voyeurism form the previous chapter). Mixed bathing remained the norm at hot spring resorts and was not uncommon even in the 1980s, but is extremely rare today.[9] For reasons we explore in greater depth below, most residents of today's Japan are just as self-conscious and embarrassed about their bodies as are their American (but not necessarily European) counterparts—a sign of superior "civilization" no doubt!

. . . or perhaps not . . .

Cultural Power

Let us pause to consider the issue of **cultural power** and the image gap between Japan and "the West" as reflected in concerns over nudity. In the 19th century, Europeans and Americans looked at the relative lack of inhibitions connected with nudity in Japan and regarded it as a sign of backwardness. At best, public nudity indicated an innocent, childlike backwardness; at worst it was a sign of lewdness and depravity. Japan's Meiji-period leaders had little choice but to try and make Japanese conform to European standards. Recall that revision of the unequal treaties was the highest priority, and this goal required European acceptance of Japanese as "civilized." As a result of substantial state intervention, the tendency in Japan from the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century was increased prudery.

[9] In Post-war Japan, until the mid-1980s, visiting hot spring resorts was popular mainly among the elderly. By the start of the 1990s, however, such visits had become popular among young people as well. With this development, it became the norm for bathers to wear swim suits.



In the twentieth century, inhibitions regarding nudity gradually began to weaken in some parts of Europe. The first nudist organizations began in Germany in the 1920s. Nude bathing beaches and resorts became examples of "natural" living and "progressive" thinking. By the mid twentieth century, the relative prudery of Japan regarding nudity became a sign of "backwardness" in the eyes of many "enlightened" Europeans, and Japan had no nudist organization until 1962. "Backward" in the nineteenth century owing to a lack of inhibitions concerning nudity and "backward" in the next century for excessive inhibitions, again we see again that in the minds of many Europeans, Japan and its people could never quite measure up. Attitudes regarding nudity and the changes in lifestyle connected with them is but one example of the disparity in cultural power between Japan and "the West" in the modern world. This disparity, of course, was based on "the West's" superior military and technological power. Had the military power of Japan been superior to that of "the West," what judgments might Japanese have made regarding the inferiority of European culture and its barbaric American offshoots?

A Brief Look at Late 19th-Century Europe

We have seen that early attempts by Japan's government to suppress certain forms of nudity were motivated mainly by the perceived need to make Japan look "civilized" in European eyes. We have also seen that most American and European observers associated nudity with sexuality. What was the situation in Europe (and by extension, the U.S.) with respect to nudity and sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century? This question is too complex for an adequate answer here, and there is much disagreement even among specialists. We can, however, make a few general observations that help shed light on the reactions of many Europeans and Americans to the nudity they encountered in Meiji Japan.

Common, recurring theme in art and literature: male fear of the power of female sexuality

There are **three points** to emphasize. First, much like attitudes in China, Europeans of nearly all social classes and groups saw clothing as an indicator of civilization and refinement. Second, clothing was also connected with sexuality (as it nearly always is), particularly in the case of female dress. The relationship between clothing and sexuality is and was highly complex, and Valerie Steele is correct to criticize the many overly

These four works from the early career of Edvard Munch illustrate several variations of the male fear of the disruptive and destructive power of female sexuality so common in Europe around the turn of the century.

simplistic theories advanced to explain it.[10] For our purposes, we should note that European and American fashions of the late nineteenth century served both to promote modesty by covering the sexual body and, at the same time, to enhance the beauty and sexuality of individual bodies. Roughly the same, incidentally, could be said about many societies, including Tokugawa Japan among the upper classes.

Third, European art often featured female nudes. A common theme in this art was the power of female sexuality to subsume, and therefore destroy, male identity. By extension, female sexuality had the potential for disrupting the social order, at least in the minds of many men. Although most historians would agree that male fear of female sexuality was a major cultural theme of the time, its significance remains in dispute. Many interpreters point out that this male fear led to oppression and suppression of women in Victorian times. Others disagree, pointing out a variety of empirical and theoretical flaws in this argument. This issue, however, need not concern us here. The main point for us to bear in mind is that the nude female body, unrestrained by layers of clothing, represented a source of potentially disruptive (morally, spiritually, socially, politically) sexual power to many American and European men in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, many of the early European and American interpreters of Japanese culture were Protestant missionaries. As a group, these men would have been most likely to react negatively to public displays of nudity. Notice that it was the pragmatic diplomat Townsend Harris who interpreted nudity in Japan as a sign of a lack of passions. On the other hand, the otherwise culturally sympathetic Rev. Williams could not conceal his disgust for what he interpreted as lewdness.

This chapter continues on the next page

[10] *Fashion and Eroticism.*

Nudity at the Beach: Differences of Social Class

It was not until the late 1880s that the first bathing beaches opened in Japan, for swimming in the ocean had previously not been a form of recreation. Even in the 1880s, bathing at the beach was more a form of therapy for certain nervous disorders than a recreational activity. Until the 1920s, nearly all bathing beaches in Japan were segregated by sex. Swimming suits for men and women during this early period covered all or nearly all of the body. Despite the segregation and thorough coverage, many women who went to the beach during the Meiji period reported feeling self-conscious or embarrassed. Famous women's rights advocate Hiratsuka Raichô 平塚雷鳥, for example, in an essay reminiscing on her childhood, wrote of her first visits to the beach in the late nineteenth century. It was the summer after she had entered a girls' high school, and she was dressed in a one-piece suit that covered the whole body. Nevertheless, she felt embarrassed to be at the beach when others might see her, and wrote, "I felt embarrassed to be at the beach during the mid-day hours because I would be seen by others, so I always went early in the morning before sunrise" (10:193). This situation seems quite different from the urban public baths described above. What might have been going on?

Woman at the beach as pictured by Bigot in early Meiji times

Fashionable beachwear, 1907

Moving from the Meiji period into the Taishô and early Shôwa periods (roughly the 1920s), it seems that beaches had changed significantly. By the 1920s, few beaches were segregated by sex. Newspapers and other popular media frequently reported "shocking" incidents of women changing into bathing suits at the beach in full view of crowds without any sense of embarrassment (men, too, did this, but the press seems to have regarded it as problematic only for women). In 1929, a women's magazine reported that 70-80% of women at the beach were "vulgar and uneducated," bathing nude and carrying only a small towel for cover (19:195). This situation seems more like the urban public baths of the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods. **Why the change?** Why the increase in nudity, despite an outcry against it from the media?

Typical beach scene, 1920s

The key to understanding lies in the two beach scenes by Bigot (previous page and below). The first depicts a women dressed like Hiratsuka was, that is, in a full bathing suit. The second depicts a large crowd of men and women, all nude or nearly so. They are chatting, relaxed, and seem completely unembarrassed about their nudity. The different scenes reflect **different social classes**. During the Tokugawa period, there was a major difference in attitudes about nudity, sex, and gender roles between *samurai* and wealthy commoners and everyone else. This difference continued well into modern times. It was members of the upper classes who controlled the Meiji government and sought to impose European-style modesty on the common people.

With regard to bathing at the beach, in the late nineteenth century, *only the wealthy* could afford to go to the beach for recreation. Transportation was by carriage, and just getting to the beach took a long time. In the early Meiji period, bathers typically stayed for several days or weeks at private beach houses. Only the rich could afford to purchase or rent such houses and take the time out from work or other affairs to recreate at the beach. Most ordinary Japanese were hard at work in the fields day in and day out. For them, a day at the beach was unimaginable.

By the turn of the century, however, the majority of Japan's population shifted to urban areas. As Japan rapidly industrialized, unskilled and semi-skilled laborers poured into the cities to work in the factories. The hours were long and the work exhausting. Nevertheless, factory workers had an occasional day off, and their wages usually provided a slight surplus beyond the essentials. By the 1920s, trains and streetcars provided access to beaches. It became possible, in other words, to go to the beach on one's day off, leaving early in the morning and returning in the evening. Trips to the beach became popular among factory workers and

Another beach scene by Bigot, this one from the late Meiji period. Notice the great difference in bathing attire. Beach bathing in this manner would have been typical of the "blue collar" crowd.

other "blue collar" Japanese from around the time of the First World War (which was a time of great prosperity for Japan) onward. Many of these Japanese were recent arrivals from the countryside, where bathing habits and attitudes about nudity in general followed older, less inhibited patterns of behavior and thought. As with many other matters, "Japanese" culture often differed significantly from one group of Japanese to another.

Kuroda Seiki, *Morning Toilette*

Nudity and the Boundaries of Art

Owing at least in part to Chinese influences, Japanese art lacked a tradition of celebrating the nude human figure (except in limited contexts such as bathing) until well into the Meiji period. Some members of Japan's first diplomatic embassy to the U.S. in 1860 took open-air baths after arriving in San Francisco, which led to angry complaints by women residing nearby. Local authorities then required that curtains be placed around the tubs. Many of these same embassy members regarded the many statues and paintings of nude figures on display in public buildings—not to mention the bare shoulders of American women in formal evening gowns—as barbaric and obscene.

Throughout the nineteenth century, European-style art gradually became accepted in Japan as worthy of attention. It was not until 1894, however, that a Japanese artist painting in European style first produced and publicly displayed a nude as a serious work of art. The artist was Kuroda Seiki 黒田清輝, and the painting was ***Morning Toilette*** 朝妝. The oil painting features a totally nude woman standing in front of a mirror arranging her hair. When Kuroda displayed his work in Tokyo, it caused a minor uproar. When he displayed in the artistically more conservative Kyôto, it caused a major uproar, becoming an object of discussion and controversy.

Bigot caricatured this public outcry in a cartoon shown here. In it, the members of the audience stare in amazement, mouths agape. This cartoon is not only a critique of Japanese art sensibilities. The female member of the audience just to the right of center adds an additional layer of complexity to Bigot's message. In order to lean foreword and get a better view, this woman has hiked up her robes, exposing a substantial portion of the legs above the knee. Doing so was common in Japan at the time, with no suggestion of impropriety, the typical reason being to keep clothing out of rainwater or mud as one walked. To European sensibilities, however, for a woman to pull up her clothes like this in public was a shocking breach of proper conduct. Now notice the European woman in the audience who is just as shocked by the Japanese woman as

Bigot's parody of the public outcry over Kuroda's *Morning Toilette,* 1894. Notice the woman in the foreground, just to the right of center with her clothes pulled up.

the Japanese viewers are of the painting. There is **an important point** here: customs concerning clothing and nudity are arbitrary and specific to a certain time and place. There are no universal standards of morality or decency with regard to such matters, though most people assume that their own time and culture is the "natural" and obvious standard for all human beings.

By breaking the ice, Kuroda paved the way for European-style nudes to be accepted in Japan as legitimate works of art. By 1910, nude paintings were fully acceptable as "art" provided that frontal nudes showed no pubic hair. By the 1930s, even pubic hair, as long as it was not overly detailed, was getting past the police censors who monitored artistic and literary output.[1]

Japanese businesses quickly learned that nude figures can attract attention in advertising. As European-style nudes became acceptable as art, advertisers began to use oil paintings depicting female nudes in one form or another to help sell beer, cigarettes, and other products. Because advertising images reached a wider and, presumably, less discriminating audience, government censors were more strict in what they permitted. The more nudity of an exotic or alluring nature, the more attention the ad would attract from potential customers. But it would also attract the attention of police censors. Penalties for violating "decency" regulations were stiff, but the precise boundaries of what the police would allow were vague and often arbitrary. Police would not usually approve items in advance. They would only impose fines and confiscate relevant property *after the fact,* which made mistakes quite costly.

Let us consider **an actual case**. The collection of images below features three advertising posters and one piece of museum art (*Reclining Nude*). All feature nudity to one degree or another. One caused public outcry and prompted a police investigation for possible violation of obscenity regulations. Which one? Is it not obvious? Of course, it was the Akadama Port Wine ad of 1923 (top center) that was obscene! The Sapporo Beer ad (top left) features a woman draped in a thin, sheer cloth that reveals the con-

[1] Modern Japan had an extensive censorship system, most agents of which were members of a special wing of the police department. Police had broad powers to censor art, literature, speeches, public meetings, and so forth. Although their main concern was political content, "moral" content was also a criterion for censorship. In today's Japan, pubic hair is the main marker of the boundary between what is "obscene" (and thus prohibited by law) and what is not. Nearly anything is legal for sale so long as it does not display any pubic hair. As you might guess, this strictly-enforced prohibition has generated a particularly strong interest in pubic hair among many Japanese men. Very recently, display of pubic hair has been permitted, but only for "artistic" (definition?) works. What will be next? Is morality about to go to the dogs?!

Sapporo, 1905

Akadama, 1923

Tengû, 1900

Which one of these was indecent? Why?

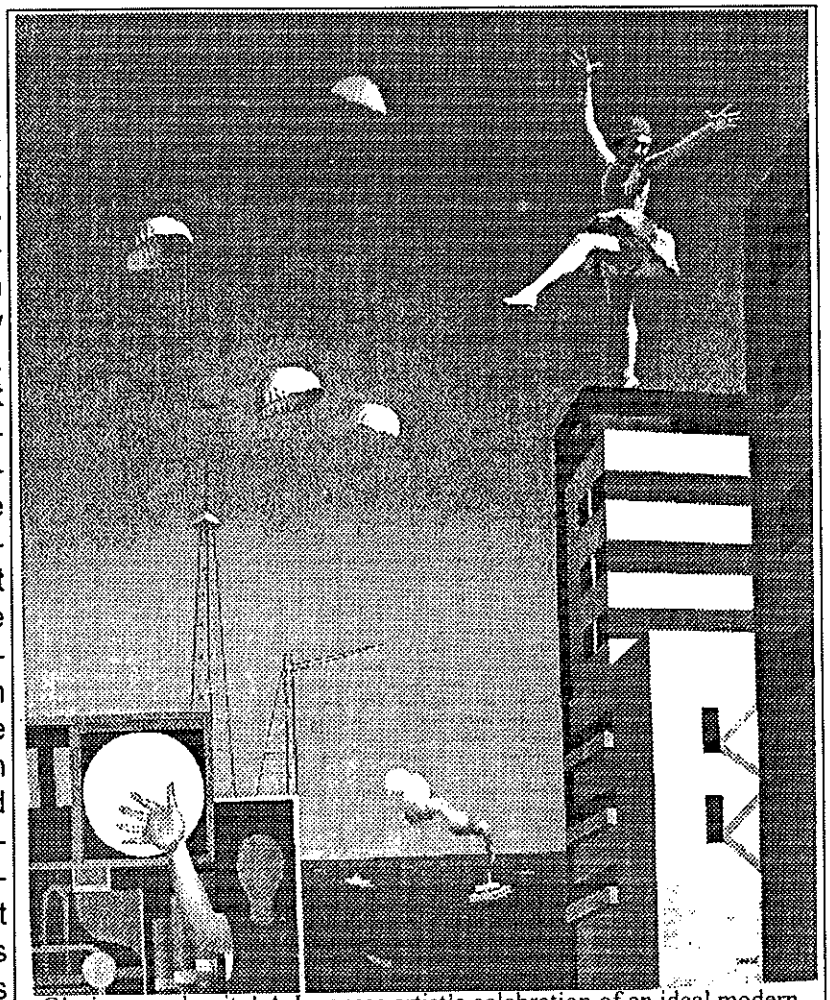
Reclining Nude, 1930

tours of her figure and two bare breasts. The ad for Tengû Cigarettes (top right) features a woman nude from the hips up before a mirror. *Reclining Nude* features full frontal nudity and even includes pubic hair, long a key element in attempts to define that which is indecent. Why, therefore, was the Akadama ad so controversial?

The ad features a retouched photograph of opera singer Matsushima Emiko 松島栄美子 holding a glass of port wine. She appears to be nude, at least the upper torso, but only the shoulders and top of the breasts are actually visible. In a 1975 interview, Matsushima recalled the controversy surrounding the ad as follows: "As soon as we finished, [the ad] was scrutinized for possible censorship. It passed through many hands and finally received [in house] approval. Though there is nothing comparable today, at the time, the fact that it was a nude caused a big commotion. As a result, I even had to stop having visits from my relatives, and the police came to inquire. It was difficult" (7:207). The difficulty arose not so much because of the nudity per se but because the ad poster was based on a *photograph.* Nudity, even to a high degree of explicitness, was acceptable for *art* (and by extension art used in advertising), but few in Japan and the time considered photography a real art form. After all, one only need press a button to take a photograph, unlike all the skill and labor required to produce an oil painting—at least that was the common assumption of the day. So the Akadama ad caused problems because it used a new technique that placed it outside the arbitrary category called "art." It was only during the 1950s that most Japanese came to regard photography as an art form on a par with painting. To what extent does the boundary

topic in popular discourse of the time.

It seems that the main motivation for many of those active in encouraging Japanese women to wear underwear was a desire to "modernize" lifestyles to better fit their own conceptions of Japan's new modern society. Of course, there is no inherent reason that underwear is necessarily "modern," but that was the perception among activists at the time in the various lifestyle improvement movements. But most ordinary Japanese of the 1920s and 30s were not interested in such movements or in making major changes to the way they dressed. The notion that women of the 1920s and 30s were so modest as to prefer death to exposing themselves is part of a presentist and modernist bias, argues Inoue Shôichi. He further states that since the Second World War, there has been a sharp increase in prudery and self-consciousness about breasts, in the case of women, and the external sexual organs, in the case of both men and women. This development, he says, is the direct result of underwear becoming a standard item of clothing in postwar Japan. Postwar Japanese, in other words, have learned to become ashamed of the parts of the body they cover up with underwear (11:188-89).



Glorious modernity! A Japanese artist's celebration of an ideal modern society in 1930. Notice that the oversized woman atop the building is happily wearing underwear.

In 1925, the police issued a policy against the wearing of sheer garments by women (In Japanese, 女の薄もの取締り). Notice that previous police orders connected with nudity were aimed at controlling the behavior of ordinary people. The policy prohibiting sheer garments, however, was aimed at the well-to-do, for they were the only ones who could afford to wear the expensive and fashionable sheer styles popular in the 1920s. The rationale for the prohibition is that sheer clothing would entice young men into "inappropriate acts." In other words, the police were aware of the erotic dimension of fashion and in this case tried to suppress it. It seems that (male) fear of female sexuality had arrived in full force in Japan just as it was beginning to abate somewhat in Europe.

In **conclusion** to our study of nudity in modern Japan, there are several points to ponder:

Officer Tanaka hard at work keeping the streets safe!

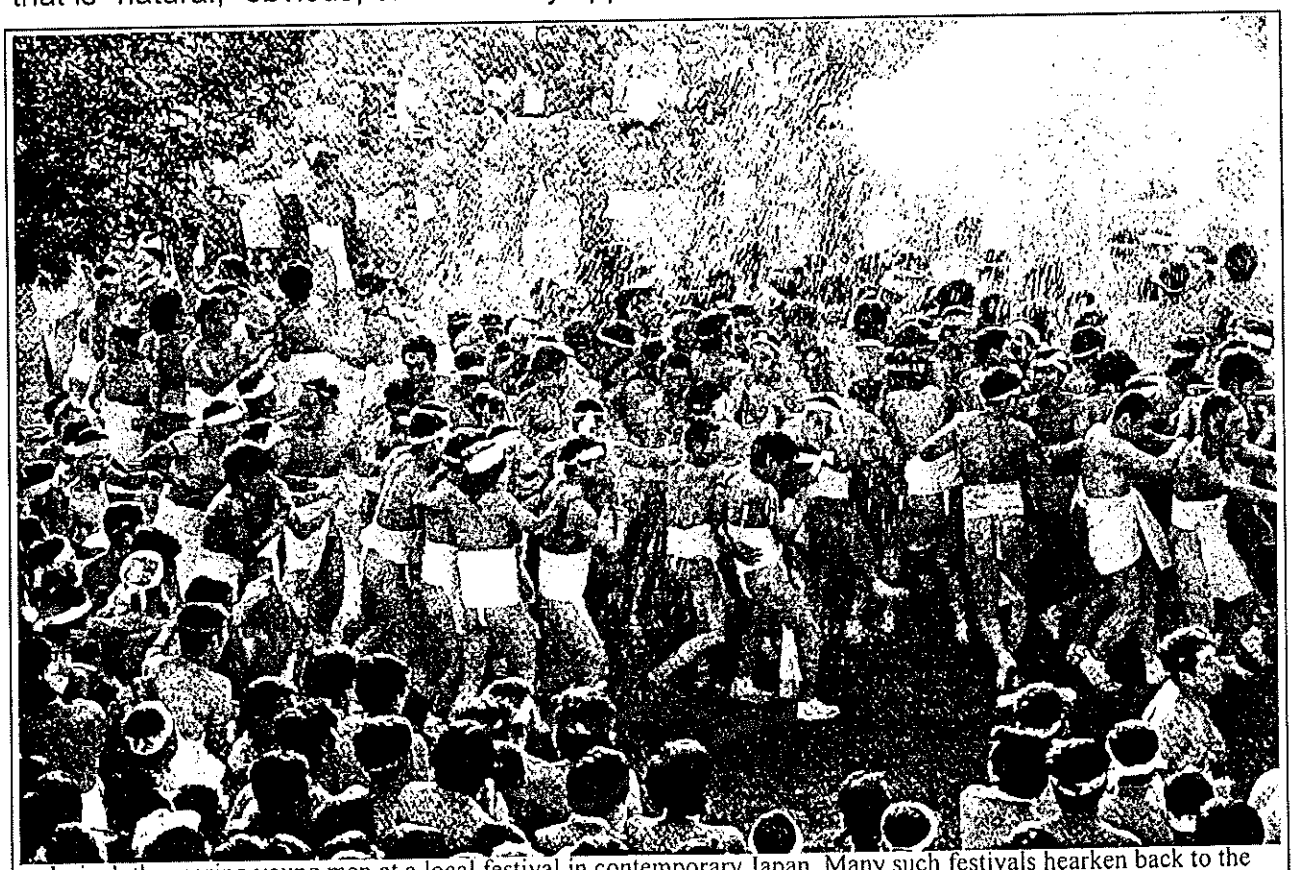
1. Notice the importance of proper appearances both within Japanese society and in the conduct of Japan's modern foreign relations.

2. Notice the strong cultural influence of "the West" in modern Japan. This is *not* to say that most Japanese in Meiji times or today accept(ed) "Western" culture unproblematically, but they did have to deal with it.

3. In a related point, notice the close connection between cultural power and global military and economic power. Culture is never apolitical.

4. Notice that with respect to attitudes toward the body, postwar and contemporary Japanese have a much higher tendency to feel ashamed or self-conscious of their bodies than did their predecessors.

5. Finally, notice that there is little or nothing about cultural attitudes concerning nudity that is "natural," obvious, or universally applicable. Culture is highly arbitrary.



Loincloth-wearing young men at a local festival in contemporary Japan. Many such festivals hearken back to the peasant past of the Tokugawa period or earlier, which is reflected in the clothing.