3

The Court at Its Zenith

IN 794 THE COURT MOVED to the newly constructed city of Heian or Kyoto, about twenty-eight miles north of Nara. The decision to leave Nara was apparently made for several reasons. Many people at court had become alarmed over the degree of official favor accorded to Buddhism and the manifold opportunities presented to Buddhist priests to interfere in the business of state. Their fears were particularly aroused when an empress (Shōmu's daughter) became closely involved with a faith-healing priest named Dōkyō (d. 772). Before the loss of his patroness, who died in 770, Dōkyō rose to the highest ecclesiastical and ministerial positions in the land and even sought, through the pronouncement of an oracle, to ascend the throne itself. Dōkyō thus achieved notoriety in Japanese history as a commoner who blatantly challenged the imperial family's sacrosanct claim to reign exclusively over Japan. The Dōkyō affair appears to have convinced the court of two things: that Nara, with its many Buddhist establishments and its ubiquitous priesthood, was no longer satisfactory for the conduct of secular affairs; and that henceforth the line of succession to the throne should be confined solely to male members of the imperial family.

Another reason for the move to Kyoto was that Nara, situated in the mountainous southern region of the central provinces, had become too cramped as a location for the court. Kyoto provided much freer access, both by land and water, to the rest of the country. In particular, the court could more readily undertake from Kyoto the expansion and consolidation of its control over the eastern and northern provinces, a region that had until this time been occupied chiefly by recalcitrant tribesmen known as Emishi.

The Emishi, referred to in early accounts as "hairy people," have often been identified with the Ainu, a race of Caucasian-like people who live in Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's major islands, and number today only a few thousand. It was long believed that the Ainu occupied all of Japan during the Neolithic Jōmon age—that they were the "Jōmon people"—and, driven steadily eastward and northward by the advance of civilization in Yayoi times, suffered a fate similar to that of the American

Indians. Since the Ainu, like Caucasians, have considerably more body hair than the Japanese, it appeared obvious that they were the very "hairy Emishi" mentioned in the pages of the *Nihon Shoki* and other historical accounts. Yet, there are several reasons to doubt this linking of Ainu and Emishi. For one thing, the expression "hairy people" was loosely and pejoratively applied in both China and Japan to uncivilized people in general—people who were regarded as unkempt, dirty, and uncouth—and did not necessarily imply that such people were racially endowed with a greater quantity of hair. Also, mummified bodies of Japanese warrior chieftains of later centuries in the north, who reportedly had Emishi mothers, have been examined and found to possess none of the bodily characteristics of the Ainu.

There is, then, a strong possibility that the Ainu, whose precise origins remain a mystery, never settled extensively south of Hokkaido; and that the Emishi were in fact ethnically the same as the Japanese, but were not incorporated into the Yamato state when it was established in the central and western provinces during the fourth through the sixth centuries. In any event, after several failures, armies dispatched by the Heian court finally inflicted decisive defeat on the Emishi in the early years of the ninth century and thus eliminated the threat posed by these ferocious tribesmen on the eastern frontier.

After the move to Kyoto, the court attempted to encourage the activities of Buddhist prelates who would devote their attention to spiritual rather than worldly matters. Among the first to receive court patronage was Saichō (767–822), who journeyed to China in 804 and returned to found the Tendai sect of Buddhism at the Enryakuji, a temple he had earlier opened on Mount Hiei northeast of Kyoto. The Enryakuji was in a particularly favorable spot, since it was believed that evil spirits invaded from the northeast and it could serve as guardian of the capital.

Tendai was broadly founded on the teachings of the Mahayana or Greater Vehicle school of Buddhism. Its basic scripture, the *Lotus Sutra,* purportedly contained Gautama's last sermon, in which he revealed to his disciples the universality of the buddha potential. The Buddha asserted that until this time he had allowed individuals to practice Hinayana, the Lesser Vehicle, and to seek their own enlightenments. Now mankind was prepared for the final truth that everyone could attain buddhahood. In the Buddha's words as found in the sutra:

> Those harassed by all the sufferings—
> To them I at first preached Nirvana
> Attainable by one's own efforts.
> Such were the expedient means I employed
> To lead them to Buddha-wisdom.
> Not then could I say to them,
> "You all shall attain to Buddhahood."

> For the time had not yet arrived.
> But now the very time has come
> And I must preach the Great Vehicle.[1]

We noted that the universalistic concept of Mahayana was accompanied both by a tendency to regard the Buddha as a transcendent, rather than earthly, being and by adulation for the bodhisattva, or buddha-to-be, who would assist others on the path to buddhahood.

The *Lotus Sutra* is not only the basic text of Tendai, but the principal writing of all of Mahayana Buddhism. Drawing within its pages the entire range of Buddhist thought, both Hinayana and Mahayana, the *Lotus* is held to be the "one vehicle," the sole and ultimate source of religious truth. Its influence has been especially great in the countries of East Asia, where it has been revered not only as a text for religious study, but also an object of devotion in and of itself. Thus, according to some Buddhist sects, one need not try to understand the *Lotus*'s contents but simply to worship it. And believers have through the ages sought religious merit by copying the *Lotus,* a task requiring considerable effort because of the sutra's great length.

The Tendai center at the Enryakuji played an extremely prominent role in premodern Japanese history. It became a vast complex of more than three thousand buildings, where priests engaged in a wide range of both spiritual and secular studies. In the best Far Eastern tradition, the Tendai priests sought to synthesize all known religious truths and practices; and ultimately it was Tendai that, beginning in the late Heian period, spawned the various popular sects that finally spread Buddhism to the common people throughout Japan.

Another, and less edifying, way in which the Enryakuji attained distinction in premodern times was as a center for *akusō* or "rowdy monks." During the Nara period, the court had strictly limited the entry of people other than members of the aristocracy into the Buddhist priesthood. But after the move of the capital to Kyoto, entry restrictions were relaxed and the more important Buddhist temples, which were already in the process of acquiring great wealth in landed estates, hired increasing numbers of peasants to serve in their private armies. By the tenth and eleventh centuries, these hordes of *akusō* had become regularly engaged not only in fighting among themselves but also in intimidating Kyoto into meeting their demands for such things as ecclesiastical positions at court and titles to desirable pieces of estate land.

The manner in which the Enryakuji monks commonly made their demands upon the court reveals something of the ties that had evolved by this time between Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. Obtaining the sacred *kami* emblems of the Hie Shrine located at the foot of Mount Hiei, the monks placed them in a portable car and transported the car to the capital, where they deposited it at a busy intersection near the palace.

Since no one dared touch the car, activities simply ceased in that part of the city until the monks, their demands met, condescended to remove it and carry it back to the mountain.

Although the Tendai sect's Enryakuji Temple became a great national center for Buddhist studies in Japan, the particular kind of Buddhism that exerted the strongest influence at court during the early Heian period was Tantrism. Tantrism was a branch of Mahayana Buddhism established independently in India about A.D. 600 and subsequently transmitted to China and Japan. Because of its stress on incantations, spells, and primitive magic, Tantrism has been viewed by many outsiders as a corrupt and decadent phase of Buddhism after the period of its greatest historical flourishing. Insofar as one part of Tantrism became associated with Indian Shakti practices dealing with death, destruction, and living sacrifices, there may be justification for this view. But the form of Tantrism that spread to the Far East did not embrace such grotesque practices. Known also as esoteric Buddhism because of its insistence on the secret transmission of its teachings, Tantrism came to hold a unique appeal for the aristocracy of the Heian court and provided a powerful stimulus to the arts in Japan during the ninth and tenth centuries.

Tantrism was introduced to Japan as the Shingon (True Word) sect by the priest Kūkai (774–835; also familiarly known by his posthumous canonical name of Kōbō Daishi, or Great Teacher Kōbō), who traveled to China in 804 on the same mission as Saichō. Kūkai, who founded a Shingon center atop Mount Kōya near modern Osaka, was without question one of the most outstanding figures in Japanese history. The distinguished British scholar of Japan, Sir George Sansom, has said of him:

> His memory lives all over the country, his name is a household word in the remotest places, not only as a saint, but as a preacher, a scholar, a painter, an inventor, an explorer and—sure passport to fame—a great calligrapher.[2]

Among other things, Kūkai is credited with inventing the *kana* syllabary.[3] Most likely *kana* was more the product of evolution than invention. But it is also believed that knowledge of Sanskrit provided at least some of the inspiration that led to *kana,* and Kūkai is known to have become an avid student of Sanskrit during his three-year stay in China.

Kūkai's scholarly accomplishments were imposing. In a tract entitled *The Ten Stages of Religious Consciousness,* he made perhaps the most famous attempt in Japanese history to synthesize and evaluate various religious beliefs according to their higher or lower "stages of consciousness." At the bottom, Kūkai placed the animal passions, where no religious consciousness at all existed; he then proceeded upward by stages through Confucianism, Taoism, various Hinayana and quasi-Mahayana sects, fully developed Mahayana and, finally, to the ultimate religious consciousness of Shingon itself.

Shingon is centered on belief in the cosmic buddha Vairochana (in

Japanese, Dainichi). All things—including the historical Buddha, Gautama, and such transcendent beings as Yakushi (the healing buddha) and Amida (the buddha of the boundless light)—are merely manifestations of this universal entity. In order to enter into communion with Dainichi and realize the essential oneness of all existence, the supplicant must utilize the Three Mysteries of speech, body, and mind. Proper ritual performance requires the coordinated practice of all three mysteries; but perhaps the most important is that of speech, which calls for the recitation of spells or "true words" (mantras in Sanskrit; *shingon* in Japanese). The use of words as spells has fascinated man throughout his existence, and the mantras of esoteric Buddhism derive from an ancient tradition. Probably the most famous mantra is the Tibetan phrase *Om mani padme hum* ("The jewel is in the lotus!"), but there are a great many others also employed in the religious supplications of esotericism.

The mysteries of the body are based primarily on the hand poses known as mudras. We have seen the use of mudras for iconographic purposes in sculpture and in pictorial representations of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In Shingon ritual, on the other hand, mudras are struck by the *believer* as he addresses himself to these superior beings.

A device used in Shingon as an aid to meditation is the mandala, or cosmic diagram (fig. 21). Mandalas may simply be sketched on the ground and expunged after the completion of a rite; or they may be permanently produced as carvings and paintings. In Japan the most common type of mandala is the hanging scroll, although there are also a number of mandalas carved in relief and painted on temple walls. These diagrams, which usually depict Dainichi surrounded by the myriad lesser figures of the Shingon pantheon, are often superior works of art. And indeed in the Heian period the exceptional visual attraction of the mandalas and other Shingon icons greatly helped to endear esotericism to the Kyoto courtiers, who were finely sensitive to beauty in all its forms.

It was by no means simply the visual delights of Shingon that made it so popular at the Heian court. Despite efforts during the Taika or Great Reform era to create a Confucian-type meritocracy under the throne, Japan's ruling class had remained preponderantly aristocratic: that is, birth almost invariably took precedence over ability or achievement. In the Nara period there was some opportunity for men of modest backgrounds to advance by entering the Buddhist priesthood or by specializing in Chinese studies; but in Heian times the court reverted to a rigid hierarchical ordering of society determined solely by family origins. It is not surprising, then, that the Heian courtiers found congenial a sect like Shingon, which similarly asserted a fixed hierarchy among its pantheon of deities headed by Dainichi. Interestingly, Dainichi is written with the characters for "great sun"; and the Japanese were not slow to identify him with the supreme Shinto deity, the Sun Goddess. Going a step further,

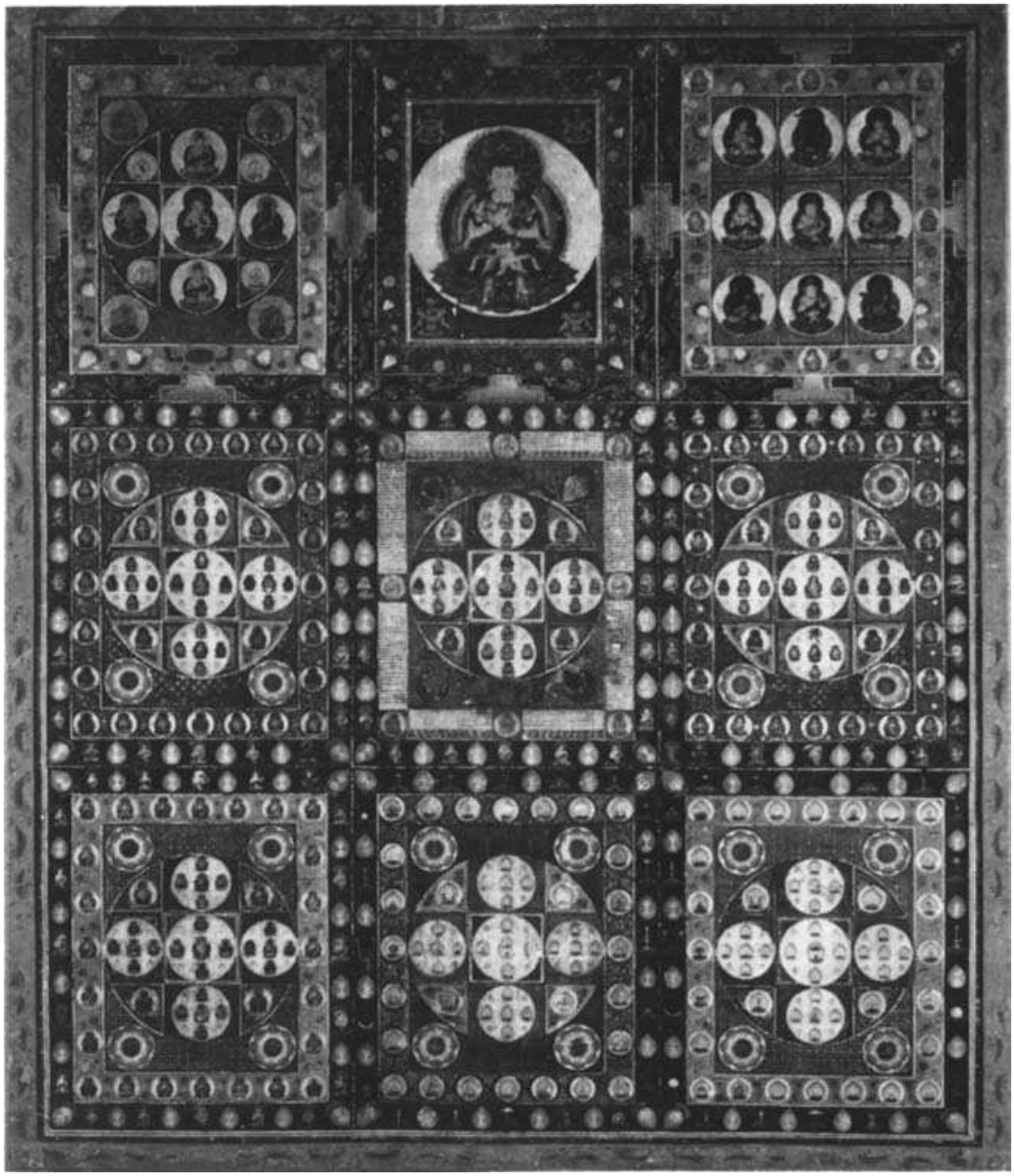

Fig. 21 Mandala *(courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum)*

they were able to liken the gods of Shingon collectively to the community of *kami* from whom all the great courtier families claimed descent.

The exclusive, esoteric character of Shingon also appealed greatly to the Heian courtiers. Although Shingon, like Mahayana Buddhism in general, preached the universality of the buddha potential, in practice it confronted its would-be followers with such complex and time-consuming practices that only priests or leisured aristocrats could hope to master them. And in any case Shingon gave the general populace little chance even to attempt the practices by keeping them secret from all but a favored few. The mysteries of Shingon were theoretically transmitted solely by the teacher, or guru, to his direct disciples. Outsiders might

derive some satisfaction from contemplating with awe the dark wonders of Shingon, but as the uninitiated they would forever be denied the highest rewards it promised.

So strongly did the courtiers favor Shingon that, in order to meet the competition, the Tendai sect also evolved a form of esotericism. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that esoteric Buddhism, particularly during the ninth and tenth centuries, permeated every aspect of the lives of the Heian aristocracy. Its aestheticism, exclusivity, and promise of realizing through arcane practices the buddha nature in this life were irresistible to the courtiers. Yet, esoteric Buddhism, although it may have been established on a high plane by Kūkai and his immediate successors, was particularly susceptible to corruption; and in the late Heian period, it degenerated to the point where its clergy engaged in base practices, accepting fees from the laity to secure direct benefits in health, fame, and prosperity.

An important trend among the new sects of Heian Buddhism was their move away from the busy centers of temporal life and political activity to mountainous, remote regions. Kyoto eventually became as clustered with temples as Nara, but at least the example was set for some temples to locate where the temptations of worldly pleasures were minimal and where monks could truly lead the disciplined and meditative religious life.

Buddhism had entered Japan as part of a great reforming process aimed at centralization, and it was surely a sign of maturity that, after some two centuries, an increasing number of both secular and religious leaders saw the importance of drawing a distinction between the proper spheres of activity of the court (as an administrative body) and the Buddhist church. The Heian sects sought to sustain the idea of Buddhism as the guardian of the nation, and rowdy monks engaged in ugly quarrels over quite mundane issues; but still there was general recognition of the need henceforth to keep church and state separate.

The founding of temples in mountainous regions also brought significant changes in Buddhist architecture. Only two buildings remain from the early Heian period—the golden hall and pagoda of a Shingon temple, the Murōji, situated in a dense forest of towering cryptomeria about forty miles from Kyoto—but we can tell from these, as well as from various reconstructions, what the new trends in architecture were. The orderly, *garan*-type layouts were abandoned by the mountain temples in favor of adapting the shapes and placement of their buildings to the special features of rough, uneven terrain. This kind of architectural integration with the natural environment seems to have been particularly to the liking of the Japanese. It was reminiscent of earlier Shinto architecture and, at the same time, revealed the Far Eastern impulse to merge with—rather than seek to overcome—nature. A keen sensitivity to nature and a desire to find human identity with it in all its manifestations are among the strongest themes in the Japanese cultural tradition.

Fig. 22 Shishinden of the imperial palace in Kyoto *(photograph by Joseph Shulman)*

Other features of Shinto architecture incorporated into both temple and secular buildings in the early Heian—or, to art historians, Jōgan—period were the elevation of floors above ground level and the thatching of roofs with cyprus bark instead of clay tiles. (See the end of Chapter 1 for other remarks about the influence of granary style architecture on both shrine and palace buildings.) These features can plainly be seen in the old imperial palace (Shishinden) in Kyoto (fig. 22). The buildings of the palace compound were frequently destroyed by fire, and the present structures, most of them erected in the nineteenth century, are not even situated in the same part of the city as the original compound. Nevertheless, they are faithful reproductions and, in the absence of other buildings, give us at least some idea of what the capital looked like in early Heian times.

Buddhist sculpture of the Jōgan period showed a marked change from the realistic, often grandly imposing works of the Tempyō epoch. The court had withdrawn its direct patronage of Buddhism and, although many temples became privately affluent through the acquisition of landed estates, there was no further urge to undertake such vast artistic projects as the casting of the *daibutsu,* which had required the concerted effort of many craftsmen. Jōgan statues were generally much smaller than those of Tempyō and were most likely carved by individual sculptors, who made very little use of the materials favored during Tempyō—bronze, clay, and dry lacquer—but preferred, instead, to work chiefly in wood. One reason for the new preference for wood was the interest aroused by the sandalwood statues imported from China about this time and in vogue at court.

Many Jōgan statues were carved out of single blocks of wood, a fact that helps account for their general smallness. They were also left either entirely unpainted or with only the lips and eyes tinted in order not to seal off the natural fragrance of the wood.

An excellent example of Jōgan sculpture in wood is the statue of the healing buddha, Yakushi, at the Jingoji in Kyoto. The rigid stance and stylized clothing of the buddha may appear to signify a reversion to an earlier, less sophisticated method of sculpture. But in fact they reflect the wish, in line with esoteric tastes, to produce figures that were unearthly and mysterious. The statue's facial expression is grim and forbidding, and its body is much heavier and more gross-looking than the typical Tempyō image. The "wave" pattern of its draperies is characteristic of Jōgan sculpture and can be seen even more sharply delineated in the seated image of the historical buddha at the Murōji.

Apart from the mandalas, virtually the only paintings extant from the Jōgan epoch are representations of ferocious and hideous creatures such as Fudō, "the immovable." These creatures, some of which have multiple heads and arms, were in reality the cosmic buddha, Dainichi, in altered forms, and their job was to frighten and destroy the enemies of Buddhism. Fudō is usually shown with a flaming body halo, a sword in one hand and a rope in the other.

Esoteric iconography inspired some Jōgan artists to attempt the first plastic representations of the deities of Shinto. Several of these *kami* figures still remain, but there is little to indicate that any real impetus was given at this time to evolve a new form of Shinto art.

The court of the early ninth century was outwardly perhaps even more enamored of Chinese civilization than its predecessor at Nara a century earlier. Chinese poetry was in particular the rage among Emperor Saga (reigned 809–23) and his intimates, who held competitions in Chinese versemanship, compiled anthologies in the manner of the *Kaifūsō,* and virtually ignored the *waka.* It was also during Saga's reign that Kūkai was first received at court. A brilliant scholar, litterateur, and gifted writer in Chinese, Kūkai has been ranked along with Saga and Tachibana no Hayanari (d. 842), who headed the mission that Saichō and Kūkai accompanied to the continent in 804, as one of the three "great brushes" or calligraphers of the age. Kūkai had visited Ch'ang-an, the wondrous capital of T'ang, and had returned not only with many books and works of art but also with knowledge of the latest Chinese fashions, including the vogue for esoteric Buddhism. A contemporary observer might well have judged, from the preferences of such luminaries at court as Saga and Kūkai, that Japan of the early ninth century had indeed become a miniature model of China.

We can see in retrospect that the Japanese did not slavishly copy Chi-

nese civilization; some important institutions never took root in Japanese soil and others were considerably remolded to suit the native setting. In addition to abandoning the fundamental Confucian principle of government by merit, the Japanese also ultimately rejected the T'ang "equal-field" system of land distribution. Within a few centuries, nearly all agricultural land in the country had fallen into the hands of the aristocracy and religious institutions as private estates. Along with a parallel deterioration of the court's provincial administration, this process created conditions (as we shall see in the next chapter) that gave rise to a warrior class in the provinces in mid- and late Heian times.

The most significant political development at court in the ninth century was the rise of a single clan—the Fujiwara—which was descended from one of the chief architects of the Great Reform and came to dominate the imperial family through marriage even more completely and for a much longer time than the Soga. Insinuating themselves ever closer to the throne, the Fujiwara in 858 assumed the office of imperial regent[4] (held previously only by members of royalty, such as Prince Shōtoku) and within a century became the undisputed wielders of absolute power at court.

Fujiwara mastery over the imperial family was to a great extent made possible by the peculiarities of Heian marriage customs. Usually, although not invariably, courtiers of this age established formal residence in the homes of their wives. From the contemporary literature it appears that the typical courtier kept one or more secondary wives and mistresses and frequently was lax in visiting his principal wife, perhaps not calling upon her more than once or twice a month. Yet, the principal wife's home remained their joint residence and it was there that the children were raised. Although emperors did not actually move in with their Fujiwara wives, the offspring of such unions were reared in the mansions of the maternal relatives. Between the late ninth and late eleventh centuries, emperors without exception were the sons of Fujiwara mothers, and in view of their upbringing no doubt identified themselves as closely with the Fujiwara as with the imperial family.

Even as the Fujiwara began their rise to power, the court reached the decision to terminate official relations with China. One reason for this decision, made sometime after the last mission of 838,[5] was that the T'ang dynasty had fallen into decline and China was no longer a safe place for travel; but perhaps more fundamental was the fact that the Japanese did not feel the same need as before to look to China for guidance and inspiration. The long period of cultural borrowing, begun some two and a half centuries earlier, had at last come to an end.

The Japanese court of the late ninth century not only severed official relations with China; it also gradually withdrew from all but the most necessary dealings with the provinces of Japan itself. In contrast to its

cosmopolitanism in the Nara period, the court in the tenth century became isolated to an extraordinary degree from the rest of Japanese society. Of the various causes for this isolation, one of the most decisive was the court's system of ministerial ranking by which infinitely greater luster and prestige was bestowed upon officials in the capital than upon those in the provinces. To accept and occupy a provincial post, the courtier was obliged not only to forsake the comforts and cultural attractions of the Heian capital, but also to suffer diminished status and even risk social opprobrium. For want of opportunity in Kyoto, some courtiers had no alternative; moreover, the possibility of acquiring new wealth in the provinces was tempting. But for a member of the upper nobility, life away from the capital was almost unthinkable. Even if given an important governorship, he would be apt either to send a deputy in his place or simply direct the vice-governor, usually a local magnate, to look after the administrative affairs of the province.

The epoch of the tenth century and most of the eleventh was one of "power and glory" for the Fujiwara regents. It was also an age when the Japanese brought to maturity their classical culture. Although it owed much to its Chinese antecedents, this culture was nevertheless genuinely unique and a true product of the native genius.

Of all the arts that flourished at court during the Fujiwara epoch, the one that most embodied its creative spirit was literature and, in particular, poetry. The ninth-century craze for Chinese verse waned with the trailing off of relations with the continent, and the courtiers turned their attention once again to the *waka.* Before long, their passion for this traditional form of poetic expression was revived to the point of near insatiability and they devoted themselves endlessly to composition both in private and in the company of others at poetry contests, where teams of the right and left were called upon to compose on given themes. The ability to recognize a *waka* allusion and to extemporize at least passable lines became absolutely essential, not only in the more formal tests of poetic competence to which the courtier was put, but also in everyday social intercourse. Probably no other society in history has placed so great a premium on versification.

Inseparable from the revival of interest in the *waka,* and indeed the development of Fujiwara literature in general, was the evolution of the *kana* syllabary. Even at the height of enthusiasm for Chinese poetry at the court of Emperor Saga earlier in the ninth century, this means for writing in the vernacular was being perfected. Kūkai himself, as we have seen, was closely associated with the "invention" of *kana.*

During the time of Saga, three imperially authorized or official anthologies of Chinese poetry were compiled, and in 905 the first official anthology of *waka,* the *Kokinshū (Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems)* was produced at court. Although the earlier, unofficial *Man'yōshū* had

been a superb collection, it was the *Kokinshū* that truly set the standards for classical Japanese poetry. The *Man'yōshū* had been written by means of a complex use of Chinese ideographs to represent Japanese phonetics, and the Heian courtiers found it obscure and difficult to read. Moreover, the *Man'yōshū* set forth the sentiments of a quite different age. In the new world of the *Kokinshū,* refinement, taste, and decorum took absolute precedence over candor and vigorous emotional expression. The Heian poet, as we can observe in the following poems from the *Kokinshū,* was expected to versify at the proper time and in the proper mood:

> This perfectly still
> Spring day bathed in the soft light
> From the spread-out sky,
> Why do the cherry blossoms
> So restlessly scatter down?
>
> Although I am sure
> That he will not be coming,
> In the evening light
> When the locusts shrilly call
> I go to the door and wait.[6]

It was eminently proper to respond sensitively to the charm of a spring day and to reflect wistfully upon the brevity of life as called to mind by the scattering of the cherry blossoms; it was also most fitting for the poet to express loneliness and yearning for a lover, so long as he did not carry his feelings to the point of uncontrollable anger or anguish at being neglected.

A leading poet of the day was Ki no Tsurayuki (868?–946), one of the compilers of the *Kokinshū.* Tsurayuki also wrote the preface to this anthology and thereby produced not only the first important piece of literary criticism in Japanese history but also an excellent statement of the standards that guided the courtly taste in versification. In the opening lines to the preface, Tsurayuki expressed the deep psychological, social, and aesthetic significance that he, as a representative of the Heian courtier class of the early tenth century, attached to poetry:

> The poetry of Japan has its roots in the human heart and flourishes in the countless leaves of words. Because human beings possess interests of so many kinds, it is in poetry that they give expression to the meditations of their hearts in terms of the sights appearing before their eyes and the sounds coming to their ears. Hearing the warbler sing among the blossoms and the frog in his fresh waters—is there any living being not given to song? It is poetry which, without exertion, moves heaven and earth, stirs the feelings of gods and spirits invisible to the eye, softens the relations between men and women, calms the hearts of fierce warriors.[7]

Tsurayuki speaks of poetry in terms of "words" and "heart." The words are the Yamato language—free from the tainting of Chinese—that was established as the classical medium of expression for native poetry by the *Man'yōshū.* But the heart or feelings seen as the proper subject matter for poetry by Tsurayuki and his fellow *Kokinshū* poets are quite different from those of the *Man'yōshū,* some of whose most memorable verses deal with such harsh topics as death, poverty, and hunger. The range of feelings in the age of the *Kokinshū* was greatly narrowed and refined to a high degree. As Tsurayuki puts it, poets should be inspired to verse

> when they looked at the scattered blossoms of a spring morning; when they listened of an autumn evening to the falling of the leaves; when they sighed over the snow and waves reflected each passing year by their looking glasses; when they were startled into thoughts on the brevity of life by seeing the dew on the grass or the foam on the water; when, yesterday all proud and splendid, they have fallen from fortune into loneliness; or when, having been dearly loved, they are neglected.[8]

In all his actions the Heian courtier aspired to *miyabi*—courtly refinement—and it was this quality that became the most enduring aesthetic legacy of Japan's classical age. Even after rough provincial warriors rose to become the new rulers of the land in the late twelfth century, they instinctively responded to and sought to perpetuate the courtly tradition as epitomized in *miyabi.* The turbulent centuries of the medieval age produced many new cultural pursuits that catered to the tastes of various classes of society, including warriors, merchants, and even peasants. Yet, coloring nearly all these pursuits was *miyabi,* reflected in a fundamental preference on the part of the Japanese for the elegant, the restrained, and the subtly suggestive. There is indeed a strong temptation to assert that *miyabi*—as first codified, so to speak, in the poems of the *Kokinshū*—has constituted the most basic theme in Japanese aesthetics. As one Western authority has observed, "Nothing in the West can compare with the role which aesthetics has played in Japanese life and history since the Heian period"; and "the miyabi spirit of refined sensibility is still very much in evidence" in modern aesthetic criticism.[9]

Closely related to *miyabi* was the concept of *mono no aware,* which can be translated as a "sensitivity to things" or, perhaps, a "capacity to be moved by things." *Mono no aware,* or simply *aware,* appeared as a phrase of poetry in the *Man'yōshū* of the Nara period, but did not assume its principal aesthetic connotations until the high age of Heian culture, beginning about the time of the *Kokinshū.* In the discussion of Shinto in Chapter 1, we observed that there has run through history the idea that the Japanese are, in terms of their original nature (that is, their nature before the introduction from the outside of such systems of thought and

religion as Confucianism and Buddhism), essentially an emotional people. And in stressing the emotional side of human nature, the Japanese have always assigned high value to sincerity *(makoto)* as the ethic of the emotions. If the life of the emotions thus had an ethic in *makoto,* the evolution of *mono no aware* in the Heian period provided it also with an aesthetic. Ki no Tsurayuki, in his preface to the *Kokinshū,* was the first to describe the workings of this aesthetic. For example, when inquiring (in the opening passage of the preface, quoted above) whether anyone can resist singing—or composing poetry—upon "hearing the warbler sing among the blossoms and the frog in his fresh waters," Tsurayuki said, in effect, that people are emotional entities and will intuitively and spontaneously respond in song and verse when they perceive things and are moved. The most basic sense of *mono no aware* is the capacity to be moved by things, whether they are the beauties of nature or the feelings of people, a capacity that Tsurayuki, at least, believed would directly lead to aesthetic expression.

Because of the particular Japanese liking, already noted, for the perishable beauties of nature and because of the acute Japanese sensitivity to the passage of time, *mono no aware* has always been tinged with sadness and melancholy. Some commentators have sought to convey this sense by translating the phrase as the "pathos of things." But this is misleading, because it suggests that things can inherently possess qualities like pathos or a pathetic beauty. Rather, in the Japanese tradition, such qualities come into being only when people *perceive* them in things. In other words, the Japanese have traditionally tended to the belief that beauty is not in the object but is evoked by the subject (i.e., the perceiver).

In addition to reviving interest in Japanese poetry, the use of *kana* also made possible the evolution of a native prose literature. The origins of the mature prose of the Fujiwara epoch can only be roughly identified, although they seem to lie primarily in two early kinds of works, the so-called tale *(monogatari)* and the private diary *(nikki).* The term *"monogatari"* has been used loosely through much of Japanese history for a wide variety of writings, from purely fictional prose to quasi-historical records. In its earliest usage, however, *monogatari* meant certain supernatural or fantastic tales that derived both from oral folk legends and from Buddhist miracle stories written in Chinese. The oldest extant *monogatari* of this type is *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter (Taketori Monogatari),* dating from the late ninth or tenth century. It is the story of an old man who finds a princess in a piece of bamboo. The princess, upon growing into comely maidenhood, tantalizes various suitors by refusing to marry them unless they perform hopelessly difficult deeds. Finally, when she is embarrassingly faced with the amorous advances of the emperor himself, the princess flies away to the moon.

The second kind of incipient Heian prose writing was the private diary.

Public diaries or journals, written in Chinese, had been kept in Japan since at least Nara times; but the private diary, if we think of it as an accounting of daily events expressed in an intimate and personal mode, could not truly be undertaken until the development of *kana* enabled would-be diarists to write in the vernacular of their age. The earliest private diary that we have is the *Tosa Diary (Tosa Nikki)* of Ki no Tsurayuki. Written about 935, it recounts Tsurayuki's journey by boat to the capital from the province of Tosa, where he had just concluded a term as governor. The most distinctive feature of this work, as of all literary or artistic diaries of the Heian period, is the inclusion of a large number of poems. Many entries in the *Tosa Diary,* in fact, consist merely of a poem or two with some brief comments about the circumstances that inspired composition. For example:

> *Eleventh day:* After a little rain the skies cleared. Continuing upriver, we noticed a line of hills converging on the eastern bank. When we learned that this is the Yawata Hachiman Shrine, there was great rejoicing and we humbly abased ourselves in thanks. The bridge of Yamazaki came in sight at last, and our feelings of joy could no longer be restrained. Here, close by the Ōōji Temple, our boat came to anchor; and here we waited, while various matters were negotiated for the remainder of our journey. By the riverside, near the temple, there were many willow trees, and one of our company, admiring their reflection in the water, made the poem:
>
> A pattern of wave ripples, woven—it seems—
> On a loom of green willows reflected in the stream.[10]

One stimulus, then, to the evolution of Japanese prose seems to have been the need to elucidate the reasons for writing poetry, a need that can be traced back to certain explanatory notes appended to poems in the *Man'yōshū.* In any event, prose has from this earliest time been closely linked to poetry in the history of Japanese literature. In the diaries of the Heian period, poems are presented as the distinct compositions of one person to another and usually serve as a means for the expression of their most strongly felt emotions. On the other hand, in such later literary forms as the *nō* theatre of the medieval age and the bourgeois novels and puppet plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, metrical lines of seven and five syllables were generally employed for poetically toned renderings of the heightened, climactic passages of otherwise prose narratives.

The opening lines of the *Tosa Diary* state: "It is said that diaries are kept by men, but I shall see if a woman cannot also keep one."[11] Although it is generally agreed that Ki no Tsurayuki wrote this earliest of private diaries, he chose to use the subterfuge that it was kept by his wife. An obvious reason for this was that men regarded Chinese as the only proper and dignified medium for writing. Women, who had far less

opportunity to learn Chinese, were the ones who turned most readily to *kana* to express themselves in the vernacular, and it was they who became the greatest writers of prose literature in the Heian period.

The first truly feminine diary was the late tenth century record known as *The Gossamer Years (Kagerō Nikki)*, written by a woman identified only as the "mother of (Fujiwara no) Michitsuna." Unlike the *Tosa Diary*, which was kept on a day-to-day basis and seems to present events as a fairly consistent and balanced chronology, *The Gossamer Years* is a sporadic and uneven account spread over some twenty-one years, from 954 to 974. The entries for some days are exceedingly detailed, but there are also long periods of time during which nothing at all is reported. This loose handling of the diary form (in fact, much of this diary was probably written toward the end of or even after the period it covers), combined with the intensely personal and subjective character of the writing, makes *The Gossamer Years* very much like a kind of autobiography or even an "I-novel"; and indeed the distinction between the diary and the fictional tale was often quite vague in Heian literature.

Whereas the *Tosa Diary* is centered on a journey (a common theme in diaries and other personal accounts), *The Gossamer Years* deals with an equally popular theme, the romance. The mother of Michitsuna was married to Fujiwara no Kaneie (929–90), who eventually became imperial regent at court. Like most high-ranking Heian courtiers, Kaneie was not a faithful husband, and after an affectionate beginning with his wife (who bore him the boy Michitsuna), he began to neglect her for other women. Most of *The Gossamer Years* deals with the author's distress and fretful resentment over the fact that her husband comes to call upon her with less and less frequency. Left alone with little to break the tedium of her sequestered existence (a fate all too common among Heian court ladies), the mother of Michitsuna is driven to a neurotic outpouring of self-pity and absorption with her own grievances to the exclusion of any consideration for the feelings of others.

At the end of *The Gossamer Years* we find these forlorn remarks:

> The weather was fairly good for the rest of the year, with only a few snow flurries. . . . I thought of how quickly the years had gone by, each with the same unsatisfied longing. The old, inexhaustible sadness came back, and I went through the rites for my ancestors, but absent-mindedly.

In the very next, and last, line of the book, however, we are told that "Late on the eve of the new year there was a pounding outside . . ." and realize that Kaneie's interest in the mother of Michitsuna is not entirely exhausted.[12]

Another type of contemporary literature very similar to the private diary was the poem-tale *(uta-monogatari)*, the most celebrated of which is *The Tales of Ise (Ise Monogatari)*, compiled sometime in the early tenth

century. *The Tales of Ise* consists of 125 passages or episodes of varying length, loosely grouped together, and each containing one or more poems. Most of the poems deal with love, and particularly with the romantic adventures of a great court lover and poet of the previous century, Ariwara no Narihira (825–80). Quite likely *The Tales of Ise* was compiled by one or more persons who gathered a collection of poems, most of them by Narihira, and then placed them in narrative contexts by drawing on biographical information concerning Narihira's life. To the foreigner, *The Tales of Ise* is apt to seem like a light and even insignificant work, but it has been venerated by the Japanese through the centuries as one of the greatest masterpieces in their literature. A typical passage from *The Tales of Ise* goes like this:

> In former times there lived a young nobleman named Narihira. Upon receiving the ceremony of initiation into manhood, he set forth upon a ceremonial falconry excursion, to review his estates at the village of Kasuga, near the former capital of Nara.
>
> In the village there dwelt alone two young sisters possessed of a disturbing beauty. The young nobleman gazed at the two secretly from the shade of the enclosure around their house. It filled his heart with longing that in this rustic village he should have found so unexpectedly such lovely maidens.
>
> Removing the wide sleeve from the silk cloak he was wearing, Narihira inscribed a verse upon it and sent it to the girls. The cloak he was wearing bore a bold pattern of passionflowers:
>
> Young maiden-flowers
> Of Kasuga, you dye my cloak;
> And wildly like them grows
> This passion in my heart,
> Abundantly, without end.
>
> The maidens must have thought this eminently suited to the occasion, for it was composed in the same mood as the well-known
>
> For whom has my heart
> Like the passionflower patterns
> Of Michinoku
> Been thrown into disarray?
> All on account of you.
>
> This is the kind of facile elegance in which the men of old excelled.[13]

The crowning achievement in the development of prose in the early and middle Heian period was the completion shortly after 1000 of *The Tale of Genji (Genji Monogatari)*, a massive novel by Murasaki Shikibu (978–1016), a lady-in-waiting at court. In spite of the excellence of much other Heian literature, it is Murasaki's incomparable masterpiece that recreates the age for us, or at least the age as seen through the eyes of the privileged

Heian courtiers. The leading character of this novel, Genji, "The Shining One," was the son of an emperor by a low-ranking concubine and a paragon of all the Heian virtues: he was dazzlingly handsome, a great lover, poet, calligrapher, musician and dancer, and the possessor of impeccable taste in a society that was in a very real sense ruled by taste.

Like most of his peers, Genji, at least in his youth, had little official business to occupy him at court, where affairs were controlled by a few leading Fujiwara ministers. Instead, he devoted himself to the gentle arts and especially to the pursuit of love, an endeavor that involved him in a seemingly endless string of romantic entanglements. In Genji's circle, the typical love affair was conducted according to exacting dictates of taste. Lovers delighted each other by exchanging poems written on fans or on carefully selected and scented stationery, which they adorned with delicate sprays of flowers. A faulty handwriting, a missed allusion, or a poor matching of colors could quickly dampen a courtier's ardor. On the other hand, the scent of a delicately mixed perfume or the haunting notes of a zithern on a soft summer night could excite his greatest passion and launch him recklessly on a romantic escapade whose outcome was more than likely to have embarrassing and even disastrous results both for the lovers and for others among the intimately associated members of Heian courtier society.

In a famous scene that takes place one rainy night, when Genji and his friends informally assess the merits of womanhood, there is this exchange between To no Chujo, a young Fujiwara, and Genji:

> To no Chujo: "I have at last discovered that there exists no woman of whom one can say 'Here is perfection. This is indeed she.' There are many who have the superficial art of writing a good running hand, or if occasion requires of making a quick repartee. But there are few who will stand the ordeal of any further test. Usually their minds are entirely occupied by admiration for their own accomplishments, and their abuse of all rivals creates a most unpleasant impression. Some again are adored by over-fond parents. These have since childhood been guarded behind lattice windows and no knowledge of them is allowed to reach the outer-world, save that of their excellence in some accomplishment or art; and this may indeed sometimes arouse our interest. She is pretty and graceful and has not yet mixed at all with the world. Such a girl by closely copying some model and applying herself with great industry will often succeed in really mastering one of the minor and ephemeral arts. Her friends are careful to say nothing of her defects and to exaggerate her accomplishments, and while we cannot altogether trust their praise we cannot believe that their judgment is entirely astray. But when we take steps to test their statements we are invariably disappointed."
>
> He paused, seeming to be slightly ashamed of the cynical tone which he had adopted, and added "I know my experience is not large, but that is the conclusion I have come to so far." Then Genji, smiling: "And are there any who lack even one accomplishment?" "No doubt, but in such a case it is

unlikely that anyone would be successfully decoyed. The number of those who have nothing to recommend them and of those in whom nothing but good can be found is probably equal. I divide women into three classes. Those of high rank and birth are made such a fuss of and their weak points are so completely concealed that we are certain to be told that they are paragons. About those of the middle class everyone is allowed to express his own opinion, and we shall have much conflicting evidence to sift. As for the lower classes, they do not concern us."[14]

The Tale of Genji has long been held by Japanese critics to exemplify the aesthetic quality of *mono no aware,* and indeed *aware* appears as an adjective in the book (referring to things that are moving) no less than 1,018 times.

If *mono no aware* is the predominant mood of Heian literature, there is at least one work—*The Pillow Book (Makura no Sōshi)* of Sei Shōnagon (dates unknown)— that exudes a quality quite the opposite, that of *okashi:* "lightness" or "wit." Like her near-contemporary Lady Murasaki, Sei Shōnagon also served as a lady-in-waiting at court. Her book (the title presumably taken from the fact that she kept it close at hand—that is, near or even *in* her wooden pillow) is a miscellany of jottings, listings, anecdotes, aphorisms, and personal opinions. Sei had a keenly observant eye, especially for human foibles, which she delighted in exploiting; and indeed, with her assertiveness and biting tongue, she may be regarded as a kind of forerunner of the militant women's liberationist in her behavior toward men. She records, for example, the following account of what occurred when a courtier named Narimasa, whom she held in low esteem, attempted to visit her secretly one night:

"May I presume to come in?" he said several times in a strangely husky and excited voice. I looked up in amazement, and by the light of the lamp that had been placed behind the curtain of state I could see that Narimasa was standing outside the door, which he had now opened about half a foot. The situation amused me. As a rule he would not have dreamt of indulging in such lecherous behavior; as the Empress was staying in his house, he evidently felt he could do as he pleased. Waking up the young woman next to me I exclaimed, "Look who is here! What an unlikely sight!" They all sat up and, seeing Narimasa by the door, burst into laughter. "Who are you?" I said. "Don't try to hide!" "Oh no," he replied. "It's simply that the master of the house has something to discuss with the lady-in-waiting in charge."

"It was your gate I was speaking about," I said. "I don't remember asking you to open the sliding-door."

"Yes indeed," he answered. "It is precisely the matter of the gate that I wanted to discuss with you. May I not presume to come in for a moment?"

"Really!" said one of the young women. "How unpleasant! No, he certainly cannot come in."

"Oh, I see," said Narimasa. "There are other young ladies in the room." Closing the door behind him, he left, followed by our loud laughter.[15]

The Pillow Book is the earliest example of still another type of literature—the miscellany or "running brush" *(zuihitsu)*—that has enjoyed much popularity in Japanese history. Along with the diary and the poem-tale, the miscellany, like horizontal picture scrolls and linked verse, reflects the Japanese preference for the episodic and loosely joined, rather than the long and unified, artistic form. *The Tale of Genji,* as a great, sustained work, was exceptional. In literature the Japanese have concentrated on polishing short passages, phrases, words, and even syllables—no better proof of this exists than their consuming love for the *waka*—and have been little inclined to think in terms of plot development or the carefully constructed narrative line.

Although written in fifty-four chapters, *The Tale of Genji* is actually divided into two major parts. The first centers on the life and loves of Genji, and the second deals with the generation at court after Genji's death. The Genji chapters, despite their prevailing mood of sadness and melancholy, portray a truly ideal society, a society whose members little doubted that theirs was the best of worlds possible in this life. Genji and his companions were not much given to philosophical speculation but seem instinctively to have accepted the implications of esoteric Buddhism that ultimate truth or reality lay in the very splendor of their own existence. Genji in particular represented the perfection of the Heian courtier, and upon his death, as the opening lines of the book's second part lament, there was no one to take his place.

Among Genji's successors, we find new doubts and psychological uncertainties that alter the tone of the novel: there is almost a presentiment in the book's latter part of the momentous changes that within a century or so were to bring about the decline of courtier society and the rise of a provincial warrior class. Some historians have suggested that Heian aristocratic society, even at its peak, was unbearably stultifying to all but the privileged few—mostly members of the Fujiwara and imperial families —who could aspire to advancement at court; that, despite the idealization of court life in the earlier chapters of *The Tale of Genji,* there was discontent among many courtiers over their lot. No doubt the rumblings of the military in the provinces, which mounted steadily during the eleventh century, were also disquieting to the courtiers in spite of their outward show of aloofness toward provincial affairs.

While the term *monogatari* was applied during the Fujiwara epoch to such differing literary works as poem-tales and novels, it was also used for a new type of historical writing. The *Nihon Shoki* had been produced by the Nara court as the first of what was intended to be an ongoing series of official histories of Japan, much like the dynastic histories of China. As it turned out, six such national histories, covering up to the year 887, were actually compiled. All were written in Chinese and, with

the exception of the *Nihon Shoki,* were notably dull, consisting as they did of a dry recitation of the facts and events of court government.

One reason for abandonment of the practice of compiling national histories was the general turning away from Chinese-derived institutions and patterns of behavior that accompanied the cessation of official missions to the continent in the latter part of the ninth century. Also, in the same way that the newly acquired capacity to write in Japanese with the use of *kana* encouraged the keeping of private diaries, people at court were inspired to record the historical events of their age in a more colorful, personally interpretive fashion. Although not precisely the same in structure, the national histories had been patterned on the highly formal dynastic records of the great bureaucratic state of China. Yet Heian Japan had not become a bureaucratic state on the order of China; and the Heian courtiers, lax in matters of national administration, had become ever more introspectively absorbed with their own ceremonially oriented life in the capital. It was only natural that, in history as in literature, they should develop new mediums of composition more suitable to the expression of their sentiments concerning the public and private affairs of Kyoto courtier society.

The new form of history writing that evolved at this time is called the historical tale *(rekishi monogatari);* it was much influenced by the fictional tale, especially *The Tale of Genji.* A product of the blurring of history and literature, or fact and fiction, it can be regarded as a kind of "embellished history." The thinking that brought history and literature together in this form is revealingly suggested in a scene from the *Genji* itself. In this scene, Genji visits Tamakazura, one of the ladies living in his Kyoto residence and the one who is most given to reading romantic tales *(monogatari).* After first teasing Tamakazura about allowing herself to be deceived by stories that she knows perfectly well are not true, Genji, becoming serious, says: "Amid all the fabrication [in *monogatari*] I must admit that I do find real emotions and plausible chains of events. . . . [The *monogatari*] have set down and preserved happenings from the age of the gods to our own. *The Chronicles of Japan (Nihon Shoki)* and the rest are a mere fragment of the whole truth. It is your [*monogatari*] that fill in the details."[16] To Genji, *Nihon Shoki* and the other national histories told only part of the story of the past: the great events and happenings. The details about how people actually lived, felt, and thought had to be filled in by others in a "plausible" manner.

The first of the historical tales was *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes (Eiga Monogatari),* written in the mid-eleventh century by the court lady Akazome Emon (dates unknown), who unabashedly modeled her work, in structure and style, on the *Genji.* Whereas the six national histories were written in Chinese, *Flowering Fortunes* is in Japanese. And the fact that the author of this first historical *monogatari* was a woman is fitting, since

women had already taken the lead in writing a new kind of fiction—the fictional *monogatari*—by taking advantage of the capacity to write the Japanese language presented by the invention of *kana*.

Covering the period from about 946 until 1028, *Flowering Fortunes* is a woman's-eye view of events and affairs at the Heian court, including marriages, births, deaths, personal rivalries, and romantic liaisons. Its title refers to the flowering fortunes or flourishing of the Fujiwara, especially under Michinaga (966–1027), who is generally regarded as the greatest of the imperial regents. The awe with which Akazome Emon beholds the resplendent Michizane is well expressed in the following passage:

> Those who prosper must decline; where there is meeting, parting will follow. All is cause and effect; nothing is eternal. Fortunes that prospered yesterday may decline today. Even spring blossoms and autumn leaves are spoiled and lose their beauty when they are enshrouded by spring haze and autumn mist. And after a gust of wind scatters them, they are nothing but debris in a garden or froth on the water. It is only the flowering fortunes of this lord [Michinaga] that, now having begun to bloom, will not be hidden from sight during a thousand years of spring hazes and autumn mists. No wind disturbs their branches, which grow ever more redolent with scent—rare and splendid as *udumbara* blossoms, peerlessly fragrant as the blue lotus, fairest of waterflowers.[17]

Having lyrically described the most fundamental of all Buddhist truths, the impermanence of all things, Akazome Emon asserts that, alone among things, the flowering fortunes of Michinaga will not be governed by this truth but will continue—through Michinaga himself and his progeny—for a thousand years (forever?).

Glorification of the Fujiwara and particularly Michinaga is even more pronounced in the second of the historical tales, *The Great Mirror (Ōkagami)*, which was probably written by a courtier in the late eleventh or early twelfth century and covers the period 850–1025 (the same period as that of *Flowering Fortunes*, but with a century added at the beginning). Whereas *Flowering Fortunes* is written in chronological form, *The Great Mirror* is organized according to "annals and biographies."[18] The annals are the records of emperors and are uniformly brief, occupying only about 10 percent of the entire work. The biographies, on the other hand, are those of the prominent Fujiwara who served at court during the reigns of these emperors and account for the work's remaining 90 percent. In short, *The Great Mirror* is, first and foremost, a history of the Fujiwara leading inexorably to the family's pinnacle of grandeur and glory in the age of Michinaga. In the following passage, the author, elaborating upon the "cult of personality" of Michinaga first propounded by Akazome Emon in *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, goes so far as to liken him to two of the greatest culture heroes in early Japanese history, Prince Shō-

toku and Kūkai, the founder of Shingon Buddhism, and then to a god or a buddha:

> [Michinaga] is in a class by [himself]. He is a man who enjoys special protection from the gods of heaven and earth. Winds may rage and rains may fall day after day, but the skies will clear and the ground will dry out two or three days before he plans anything. Some people call him a reincarnation of [Prince Shōtoku]; others say he is [Kūkai], reborn to make Buddhism flourish. Even to the censorious eye of old age, he seems not an ordinary mortal but an awesome manifestation of a god or a buddha.[19]

Whereas formerly they had scarcely questioned that spiritual fulfillment could be found in this world, the courtiers by the eleventh century increasingly cherished the thought of attaining salvation in the next. Such salvationism was not new to Japan but had been introduced to it as early as the seventh century in the teachings of Pure Land Buddhism. Pure Land Buddhism was based on adoration of the transcendent buddha Amida, who an eternity earlier had vowed to save all beings, provided only that they placed their faith wholly in him. By simply reciting the *nembutsu* (an invocation in praise of Amida),[20] an individual could ensure that upon death he would be transported to the blissful "pure land" of Amida in the western realm of the universe.

Amidism was made particularly appealing to the courtiers of the late Heian period by the popular doctrine of *mappō*, "the latter days of the Buddhist law." This doctrine held that after the death of Gautama, some five centuries B.C., Buddhism would pass through three great ages: an age of the flourishing of the law, of its decline, and finally of its disappearance in the degenerate days of *mappō*. Once the age of *mappō* commenced—and by Japanese calculations that would be in the year 1052—individuals could no longer hope to achieve Buddhist enlightenment by their own efforts, as had the followers of Hinayana and even of the Mahayanist sects of Shingon and Tendai esotericism. There would be no alternative during *mappō* but to throw oneself on the saving grace of another, such as Amida, in the hope of attaining rebirth in paradise.

Eventually, it was the Pure Land sect, with its simple message of universal salvation, that provided the practical means for the spread of Buddhism to all classes of Japanese in the medieval era. But in its first phase of development in Japan, Amidism was embraced—and interpreted in characteristically aesthetic terms—by the Heian courtiers. In the *Ōjō Yōshū (Essentials of Salvation)*, for example, the Tendai priest Genshin (942–1017) urged the practice of the *nembutsu* and vividly pictured the attractions of the pure land:

> After the believer is born into this land and when he experiences the pleasures of the first opening of the lotus, his joy becomes a hundred times greater than before. It is comparable to a blind man gaining sight for the first

> time, or to entering a royal palace directly after leaving some rural region. Looking at his own body, it becomes purplish gold in color. He is gowned naturally in jeweled garments. Rings, bracelets, a crown of jewels, and other ornaments in countless profusion adorn his body. And when he looks upon the light radiating from the Buddha, he obtains pure vision, and because of his experiences in former lives, he hears the sounds of all things. And no matter what color he may see or what sound he may hear, it is a thing of marvel. Such is the ornamentation of space above that the eye becomes lost in the traces of clouds. The melody of the wheel of the wonderful Law as it turns, flows throughout this land of jeweled sound. Palaces, halls, forests, and ponds shine and glitter everywhere. Flocks of wild ducks, geese, and mandarin ducks fly about in the distance and near at hand. One may see multitudes from all the worlds being born into this land like sudden showers of rain.[21]

One of the favorite themes in Fujiwara art was the *raigō*, a pictorial representation of the coming of Amida at the time of death to lead the way to the pure land (fig. 23); and among the most famous *raigō* paintings is a triptych traditionally attributed to Genshin, who was a fine artist as well as a scholar (even though this work was obviously done by someone else a century or more after Genshin's death). Amida is shown descending to earth on a great swirl of clouds in the company of twenty-five bodhisattvas, some playing musical instruments, some clasping their hands in prayer, and still others holding forth votive offerings. The formal way in which the figure of Amida, facing directly frontward, has been inserted into the center of the picture gives it a stiffly iconographic appearance; yet the gentle and even smiling expressions of all the figures—Amida as well as the host of bodhisattvas—are strikingly different from the fierce, unearthly visages of Jōgan art. The Fujiwara epoch, in literature as well as the visual arts, was soft, approachable, and "feminine." By contrast, the earlier Jōgan epoch had been forbidding, secretive (esoteric), and "masculine."

The favor that Amidism came to enjoy among the courtiers in the eleventh century is significantly revealed in the conduct of the regent Michinaga, who in his heyday had joyfully exclaimed in verse his contentment with the world:

> The full moon makes me feel
> That the world is mine indeed;
> Like the moon I shine
> Unveiled by clouds.

Yet, as death approached, Michinaga turned his thoughts ever more to Amida and the hereafter. Following a practice that became common in Japan, he sought in his final moments to facilitate Amida's descent to lead him to the pure land by facing his bed toward the west and holding in his hand a colored string attached to Amida in a *raigō* painting. Later

Fig. 23 *Raigō,* "The Descent of Amida and the Celestial Company" *(courtesy of the Seattle Art Museum, Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection)*

artists, in their desire to emphasize the rapidity with which true believers could expect to be transported to the pure land, painted *raigō* that showed Amida and the heavenly host coming down toward the viewer in great haste (rather than in the gentle, floating manner of the work described above). The *raigō* scene was even reenacted dramatically, and there is at

Fig. 24 Byōdōin Temple *(Consulate General of Japan, New York)*

least one recorded case of a man who, on his deathbed, engaged a group of priests to visit him dressed as Amida and the twenty-five attendant bodhisattvas.

The temple where Michinaga died, the *Hōjōji,* is no longer in existence, but we are told that he had it built with the intent of reproducing on earth the beauties and delights of the pure land. Michinaga's son, the regent Yorimichi (992–1074), also sought to recreate the pure land in the Byōdōin, a temple at Uji, several miles to the south of Kyoto (fig. 24).

Fig. 25 Statue of Amida buddha by Jōchō at the Byōdōin Temple *(Consulate General of Japan, New York)*

Opened in 1052, the first year of *mappō,* the Byōdōin has the finest remaining examples of Fujiwara period architecture, including the much admired Phoenix Hall, a light, elegantly designed structure that was apparently given its name in later times because it is shaped like a phoenix (or, at least, like a bird), with wings extended in flight. Inside the hall is a sculptural representation of the *raigō,* with a central image of Amida and, attached to the upper parts of the walls, small, gracefully shaped figures of the bodhisattvas, adorned with halos and riding wisps of clouds. The Amida image, which is made of wood and has the characteristic gentleness and courtly air of Fujiwara art, is the work of Jōchō (d. 1057), the most celebrated sculptor of his age and one of the first persons in Japanese history to receive distinction and honor from the court as an artist of individuality and not merely as a craftsman (fig. 25).

Although no examples of domestic architecture remain from the Heian period, we know from written accounts and picture scrolls what sort of mansions the courtiers built for themselves during the age of Fujiwara ascendancy. The chief architectural style for aristocratic homes, known as *shinden* construction, consisted in fact of a collection of one-story structures laid out very much like the Byōdōin Temple (fig. 26).

Fig. 26 *Shinden*-style mansion of the Heian period *(drawing by Arthur Fleisher)*

Inasmuch as the courtiers preferred to live within the city limits of Kyoto, they were obliged for want of space to build their homes on fairly small plots of land, usually not more than two and a half acres or so in size. The typical *shinden* mansion consisted of a main building facing southward—the *shinden* or "living quarters" of the master of the family —and three secondary buildings to the east, west, and north. All four structures were raised about a foot above the ground and were connected by covered corridors. There were also two additional corridors leading southward to miniature fishing pavilions that bordered on a small lake with an artificial island in its center. The lake was usually fed by a stream flowing from the northeast, often under the mansion itself, and it was by the stream's banks that the courtiers enjoyed gathering for poetry parties. At such parties, a cup of rice wine was floated downstream and, as it came to each guest, he was obliged to take it from the water, drink, and recite a verse.

Like modem Japanese homes, those of the Heian courtiers had partitions, sliding doors, and shutters that could readily be removed to make smaller rooms into larger ones and to open the whole interior of a building to the out-of-doors. Also, like most homes in Japan today, the *shinden* were sparsely furnished. Although chairs were coming into general use in China about this time, they were not adopted by the Heian Japanese except for certain ceremonial purposes. A few chests, braziers, and small tables were the only objects likely to be left out in the open in *shinden* rooms and not stored away after use.

One item of furniture that was unique to courtier society was the so-called screen of state, behind which ladies ensconced themselves when receiving visitors. Conspicuously depicted in the twelfth-century picture scrolls based on *The Tale of Genji,* the screens of state were wooden frames, several feet in height, with draperies hung loosely from their crosspieces (a screen of state can be observed in the foreground of fig. 27, p. 85). They could be easily moved about, and often came to represent the final fragile barrier to the Heian gallant in his quest to consummate a romantic liaison.

4

The Advent of a New Age

THE *haniwa* FIGURINES of armor-clad warriors and their mounts and the numerous military accoutrements dating from the protohistoric tomb period are plain evidence that the fighting traditions of the Japanese go back to remote antiquity. There is, moreover, the strong likelihood that these traditions were nourished uninterruptedly in the provinces even during the centuries when an elegant and refined cultural life was evolving under continental influence in the central region of Japan.

One of the principal steps taken by the court to strengthen its control as a central government following the Great Reform of 645 was the establishment of a military system of militia units in provinces throughout the country. These units, which were under the control of the provincial governors, comprised foot soldiers conscripted from the peasantry and mounted fighters, drawn from locally powerful families, who served as officers. From the beginning, however, the peasant foot soldiers, who, under Chinese influence, used the crossbow as their principal weapon, proved to be unsatisfactory in battle. This was particularly evident during the fighting in the north against the Emishi tribesmen in the late eighth and early ninth centuries (described in Chapter 3).

In 792, two years before the move of the capital to Heian and even while expeditions, recruited from the militia units, were still being sent against the Emishi, the court abandoned conscription. Thenceforth it sought to use the locally powerful families to provide mounted fighters, when necessary, to deal with rebellions and other disturbances in the provinces. Although court administration of the provinces in general declined during the early Heian period, its provincial governments continued to be important sources of weapons and supplies for these fighters on horseback, who began to take shape as a distinct warrior class from about the late ninth or early tenth century.

The mounted fighter of ancient Japan relied primarily on two weapons, the sword and the bow, of which the latter was by far the more important. We can observe this, for example, in the description of the fighter's profession as the "way of the bow and horse," a phrase that continued to

be used to describe the "warrior way" even after the bow was supplanted, centuries later, by other weapons as the primary instruments of war.

The process by which a provincial warrior class emerged in Japan was complex and differed from region to region; yet one area in particular—the eastern provinces of the Kantō—became its true spawning ground. From earliest times the Kantō had been renowned as the source of the country's best fighters. Men of the Kantō, which, along with Mutsu province directly to the north, produced the finest horses in Japan, learned riding and the other military skills, including archery, from infancy. The Kantō was still rugged frontier country, with vast tracts of open fields to draw adventuresome settlers, and the records give accounts of feuding there over land and power. From at least the early tenth century, chieftains arose in the Kantō to form fighting bands of locally bred mounted warriors. At first, the members of these bands were almost exclusively related by blood, but with the passage of time the chieftains also incorporated outsiders, whom they embraced in feudal lord-vassal relationships. Increasingly, the bands engaged in struggles, formed leagues, and established hegemonies; and in time great leaders appeared to contend for military control over ever larger territories, up to one or more provinces.

Warfare in the Kantō and elsewhere, which by mid-Heian times had become virtually the exclusive pursuit of equestrian fighters, probably seldom involved armies of more than a few hundred and was highly ritualized. When armies clashed, warriors from both sides usually paired off and fought one against one, first with bow and arrow and then, upon moving in closely, with swords. The aim of close combat was to unseat one's foe, then leap down and kill him with a dirk. As a trophy of battle and as proof for later claims for reward, the victorious warrior typically took his foe's head.

Even though the provincial warriors never lost their awe and admiration for the culture of the imperial court, their fundamental values were the antithesis of those of the Heian courtiers. They were samurai—men who "served"—and they behaved in accordance with an unwritten code that stressed manly arrogance, fighting prowess, unswerving loyalty to one's overlord, and a truculent pride in family lineage.[1]

Paradoxical though it may sound, the greatest samurai leaders came from a background of courtier society itself. The rise of the Fujiwara to preponderant power in Kyoto stifled opportunity for others at court, including those from the less privileged branches of the Fujiwara and even members of the imperial family. Many of these individuals left Kyoto to accept appointments to offices in the provincial governments. Settling permanently in the provinces after expiration of their terms of office, they took up warrior ways, became the leaders of bands, and attracted

members of lesser samurai families as their supporters and vassals. Ultimately, two great clans descended from princely forebears—the Taira and Minamoto—emerged to the forefront of samurai society and became the principal contenders for warrior supremacy of the land.[2]

Although at first there was no clear territorial division of influence, by the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries one of the main branches of the Minamoto came to exert sway over the Kantō, having honed its martial powers in two long, grueling wars fought in the late 1100s against independent-minded satraps in Mutsu and Dewa provinces to the north.[3] Meanwhile, a branch of the Taira from Ise province steadily acquired land and influence in the central and western provinces. Control of the fertile Kantō, a region some ten times greater than the plain of the central provinces, eventually proved decisive in enabling the Minamoto to found the first warrior government in Japan at Kamakura in 1185. But proximity to the court in Kyoto gave the Ise Taira an early advantage over the Minamoto in the protracted competition and conflict that ensured between these two samurai houses from about the middle of the twelfth century.

The Taira benefited especially by an important political development at court in the late eleventh century. During the last years of the regent Yorimichi (990–1074), founder of the Byōdōin Temple at Uji, Fujiwara power in Kyoto began to wane, and the first of a series of abdicated sovereigns arose to reassert the traditional claim of the imperial family to rule in fact as well as in name. The abdicated sovereigns sought further to weaken the Fujiwara monopoly of court government by engaging as their aides and officials members of other houses, including samurai of the Ise Taira. Under the patronage of the abdicated emperors, the Ise Taira became the first noncourtiers to gain ceremonial admittance to the imperial palace. They also received extensive grants in estate lands and appointments to various provincial governorships in the western provinces of Honshu and in Kyushu.

Despite the assertiveness of the abdicated emperors, political conditions in Kyoto steadily deteriorated during the twelfth century. By midcentury, serious divisions had appeared within the Fujiwara and imperial families, and quarrelsome samurai of both the Taira and Minamoto clans were gathering in ever greater numbers in Kyoto. In the 1150s, the tranquility of the "flowery capital" was rudely shattered by two fierce clashes of arms. The first of these, in 1156, found the Taira and Minamoto intermingled on both sides, but the second, in 1159, resulted in a resounding victory of the Ise Taira over their archrivals and the inauguration of some twenty years of Taira ascendancy at court under the leadership of Kiyomori (1118–81).

The age of Ise Taira ascendancy was a transitional period in Japanese

history. Although samurai warriors, the Taira attempted to follow in the footsteps of the Fujiwara courtiers by marrying into the imperial family and assuming many of the highest ministerial positions at court. In thus devoting their attention to traditional court politics and ignoring the pressing need for new administrative controls in the provinces, the Taira directly contributed to their own downfall, which occurred in a climactic renewal of struggle with the Minamoto from 1180 to 1185.[4]

One of the chief sources of information about the rise and fall of the Ise Taira is a work entitled *The Tale of the Heike* (another name for the Taira), the finest of a genre of writing known as war tales. The war tales, all of which were anonymously written or compiled, are accounts of warriors and their battles based on actual events that have been embellished, and hence are partly history and partly fiction. The first of the tales was composed sometime in the late tenth century and deals with the rebellion of one Taira no Masakado (d. 940) in the Kantō during 939–40.[5] Tales continued to be produced up to the seventeenth century, but the period of their greatest flourishing was the early medieval age, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Some of the war tales were composed shortly after the events they describe, while others were put into writing on the basis of an earlier oral tradition. *The Tale of the Heike,* which recounts the rise of the Ise Taira and their eventual fall and annihilation in the Minamoto-Taira war of 1180–85, was probably first compiled as a book in the early thirteenth century. But subsequently the *Heike* was greatly elaborated and expanded by guilds of blind Buddhist monks who, chanting the tale's episodes to the accompaniment of a kind of lute known as the *biwa,* entertained audiences everywhere as they journeyed around the country. From the body of war tales that spans the medieval centuries, those—such as the *Heike*—that deal with the twelfth-century clashes between Taira and Minamoto have remained especially popular among the Japanese through the ages and have been the stuff from which countless plays, dramatic dances, movies, and the like have been fashioned. Perhaps the best proof of the ongoing popularity of the *Heike* in particular lies in the fact that, as we will see in the next chapter, virtually all the warrior plays of the *nō* theatre (an artistic creation of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries) are based on characters and stories from it.

The later war tales degenerated into mere recitations of the interminable battles of the middle ages, one often indistinguishable from another. But in the *Heike* and a few others we have a priceless repository of the ethos of the medieval samurai. Despite the apparent lust of the samurai for armed combat and martial renown, much romanticized in later centuries, the underlying tone of the medieval age in Japan was from the beginning somber, pessimistic, and despairing. In *The Tale of Genji* the mood shifted from satisfaction with the perfections of Heian courtier

society to uncertainty about this life and a craving for salvation in the next. Yet the very fact that the courtiers conceived of Amida's western paradise as an idealization of their own world, and tried to recreate it in architecture and landscape, reveals that they were far from prepared to discard the temporal values they had long cherished. How different are the sentiments expressed in the opening lines of the *Heike,* a work that in many ways served to announce the advent of the medieval age:

> The sound of the bell of the Gion Temple tolls the impermanence of all things, and the hue of the Sala tree's blossoms reveals the truth that those who flourish must fade. The proud ones do not last forever, but are like the dream of a spring night. Even the mighty will perish, just like dust before the wind.[6]

It is the age of *mappō,* the "latter days of the Buddhist law" (discussed in the last chapter), and the *Heike,* suffused with *mappō* sentiment, tells the story of how the Ise Taira, full of arrogance and hubris, have, under the leadership of Kiyomori, forced their way to the heights of court society, only to suffer grievous failure and destruction in their five-year war with the resurgent Minamoto. In the larger sense, however, the Taira are only the most spectacular example of decline in a time governed by the dark, inscrutable laws of *mappō.* In their years of residence in Kyoto the Taira have become more and more courtier-like; and in the *Heike* they can even be seen as surrogates for the courtiers, who are also in rapid decline and about to lose out historically as Japan's ruling class to the emerging warrior elite represented by the Minamoto.

The courtly qualities of the Ise Taira are highlighted throughout the *Heike:* a flute, for example, is found on the body of a youthful Taira, and his killer, a Minamoto adherent, observes that none among the Minamoto was likely to carry such a thing into battle; another Taira, before going to his death, beseeches a famous poet to include one or more of his poems in an anthology that the emperor has ordered the poet to compile; and still another Taira, certain that he too will die in battle, returns a famous lute, once prized by emperors, that has been entrusted to him because of his uncommon musical talent. As we read the first half of the *Heike,* we may feel that the Taira richly deserve what we know is coming to them in the Minamoto-Taira war of the work's second half; but once the war has started, our sympathies are increasingly drawn to them, largely because they are portrayed as courtier-like, elegantly bewildered, and not at all the military match of the ferocious Minamoto. One of the saddest and most courtier-like passages in the *Heike* describes the Taira flight to the western provinces after they have been driven from Kyoto in 1183. They have stopped for one night at Fukuhara on the Inland Sea before setting out, forlorn, on their westward journey:

> As dawn broke, the Taira set fire to the Fukuhara palace and, with the emperor, they all boarded the boats. Departing the capital had been more painful, but still their feelings of regret were great indeed. Smoke at evening time from seaweed burned by fisherfolk, the cries of deer on mountain peaks at dawn, waves lapping the shore, moonbeams bathing their tear-drenched sleeves, crickets chirping in the grasses—no sight met their eyes nor sounds reached their ears that failed to evoke sadness or pierce their hearts. Yesterday they were tens of thousands of horsemen aligned at Ōsaka Barrier; today, as they loosened their mooring lines on waves in the western sea, they numbered a mere seven thousand. The sky was cloudy and the sea calm as dusk approached. Lonely islands were shrouded in evening mists; the moon floated on the sea. Cleaving the waves to the distant horizon and drawn ever onward by the tides, the boats seemed to row up through the clouds in the sky. Days had passed, and they were already separated far from the mountains and rivers of the capital, which lay behind the clouds. They seemed to have gone as far as they could go. All had come to an end, except their endless tears.[7]

The Taira name has come down through the ages as synonymous with the proud and the mighty who "will perish in the end, like dust before the wind." Indeed, they have even given rise to the popular saying "Even the haughty Taira (Heike) will not last long" *(Ogoru Heike wa hisashikarazu)*. But, in truth, the Taira have been to a large extent the victims of the process of literary embellishment that the *Heike* underwent. There is no historical evidence, for example, to suggest that Kiyomori was the cruel, power-mad villain that the *Heike* makes him out to be; the Ise Taira, as a warrior clan, were not nearly as inept militarily as they are depicted in the *Heike;* and the Taira as aristocratized, courtier-warriors reflects not so much historical fact as the artistic tastes of the Muromachi period (the fourteenth century), when what became the most widely disseminated version of the *Heike* was compiled.[8]

Taira ascendancy at court in Kyoto was brief, and contributed little if anything to the improvement of rulership in Japan. But in one of their major pursuits—overseas trade and intercourse—the Taira opened the door to a new flow of influence from China that significantly affected both the direction and the tempo of cultural developments in medieval Japan.

Although official relations with the tottering T'ang dynasty had been terminated in the late ninth century, contacts with the continent were never completely severed, and throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries private traders continued to operate out of Kyushu, particularly the ancient port of Hakata. Moreover, the Heian court, even though it steadfastly refused to dispatch its own missions again to China, kept officials permanently stationed at a commandery near Hakata to oversee the import trade and to requisition choice luxury goods for sale and distribution among the Kyoto aristocrats. When the Taira, with the backing of the

abdicated emperors at court, became influential in the western provinces in the twelfth century, they naturally took a keen interest in—and eventually monopolized—the highly profitable maritime trade with China.

China of the Sung dynasty (960–1279) was a changed country from the expansionist, cosmopolitan land of T'ang times that the Japanese had so assiduously copied in their Great Reform several centuries earlier. China could no longer serve as a giant conduit for the flow of world art and culture to remote Japan. From its founding, the Sung dynasty was harassed by barbarian tribes pressing in from the north and northwest. And indeed, just as the Taira assumed a commanding position in Japan's burgeoning overseas trade in the early twelfth century, North China fell to foreign invaders. The Sung—known henceforth as the Southern Sung (1127–1279)—moved its capital from Kaifeng in the north to Hangchow south of the Yangtze delta, where it remained until overthrown by the Mongols of Khubilai Khan in 1279.

Despite political woes and territorial losses, the Sung was a time of great advancement in Chinese civilization. Some scholars, impressed by the extensive growth in cities, commerce, maritime trade, and governmental bureaucratization in the late T'ang and Sung, have even asserted that this was the age when China entered its "early modern" phase. The Sung was also a brilliant period culturally. No doubt most of the major developments of the Sung in art, religion, and philosophy would in time have been transmitted to Japan. But the fortuitous combination of desire on the part of the Sung to increase its foreign trade with Japan and the vigorous initiative taken in maritime activity by the Taira greatly speeded the process of transmission.

One of the earliest and most important results of this new wave of cultural transmission from the continent was a revival of interest in Japan in pure scholarship. The Nara court, following the Chinese model, had founded a central college in the capital and had directed that branch colleges be established in the various provinces. The ostensible purpose of this system of colleges, which by the mid-Nara period had evolved a fourfold curriculum of Confucian classics, literature, law, and mathematics, was to provide a channel of advancement in the court bureaucracy for sons of the lower (including the provincial) aristocracy. But in actual practice very little opportunity to advance was provided, and the bestowal of courtier ranks and offices continued to be made almost entirely on grounds of birth. Before long, the college system languished, and the great courtier families assumed responsibility through private academies for the education of their own children. Moreover, as the courtiers of the early Heian period became increasingly infatuated with literature (that is, belles-lettres), they almost totally neglected the other fields of academic or scholarly pursuit. Courtier society offered scant reward

to the individual who, say, patiently acquired a profound knowledge of the *Analects* of Confucius; yet it liberally heaped laurels upon and promised literary immortality to the author of superior poems.

The Sung period in China, on the other hand, was an exceptional age for scholarship, most notably perhaps in history and in the compilation of encyclopedias and catalogs of art works. This scholarly activity was greatly facilitated by the development of printing, invented by the Chinese several centuries earlier.

Japanese visitors to Sung China were much impressed by the general availability of printed books on a great variety of subjects, including history, Buddhism, Confucianism, literature, medicine, and geography, and carried them in ever greater numbers back to Japan. By the time of the Taira supremacy, collections of Chinese books had become important status symbols among upper-class Japanese. Kiyomori is said, for example, to have gone to extravagant lengths to obtain a 1,000-volume encyclopedia whose export was prohibited by the Sung. Some courtiers confided in their diaries that they had little or no personal interest in these books but nevertheless felt constrained to acquire them for the sake of appearances. Yet, the Chinese books brought to Japan about this time, in the thousands and even in the tens of thousands, not only provided the nuclei for many new libraries but motivated the Japanese to print their own books and to a great extent stimulated and made possible the varied and energetic scholarly activities of the coming medieval age.

One of the finest artistic achievements of the middle and late Heian period was the evolution of a native style of essentially secular painting that reached its apex in the narrative picture scrolls of the twelfth century. The products of this style of painting are called "Yamato [that is, Japanese] pictures" to distinguish them from works categorized as "Chinese pictures."

Painting in Japan from the seventh to the ninth centuries, like art in general, had been done almost entirely in the Chinese manner. Portraits of people, for example, showed Chinese-looking features, and even landscapes were mere imitations of noted places in China. The evolution of Yamato pictures from the ninth century on constituted a transition from this kind of copying to more original painting that dealt with Japanese people in Japanese settings.

Nearly all of the early Yamato pictures were painted either on folding screens or sliding doors. Regrettably, like the *shinden* mansions in which they were kept, none has survived. Yet there are abundant descriptions in the records of what they looked like; and in the background scenes of some of the later narrative scrolls—for example, the twelfth-century works based on *The Tale of Genji* (see fig. 27)—we can glimpse screens and doors pictorially decorated in the Yamato style.

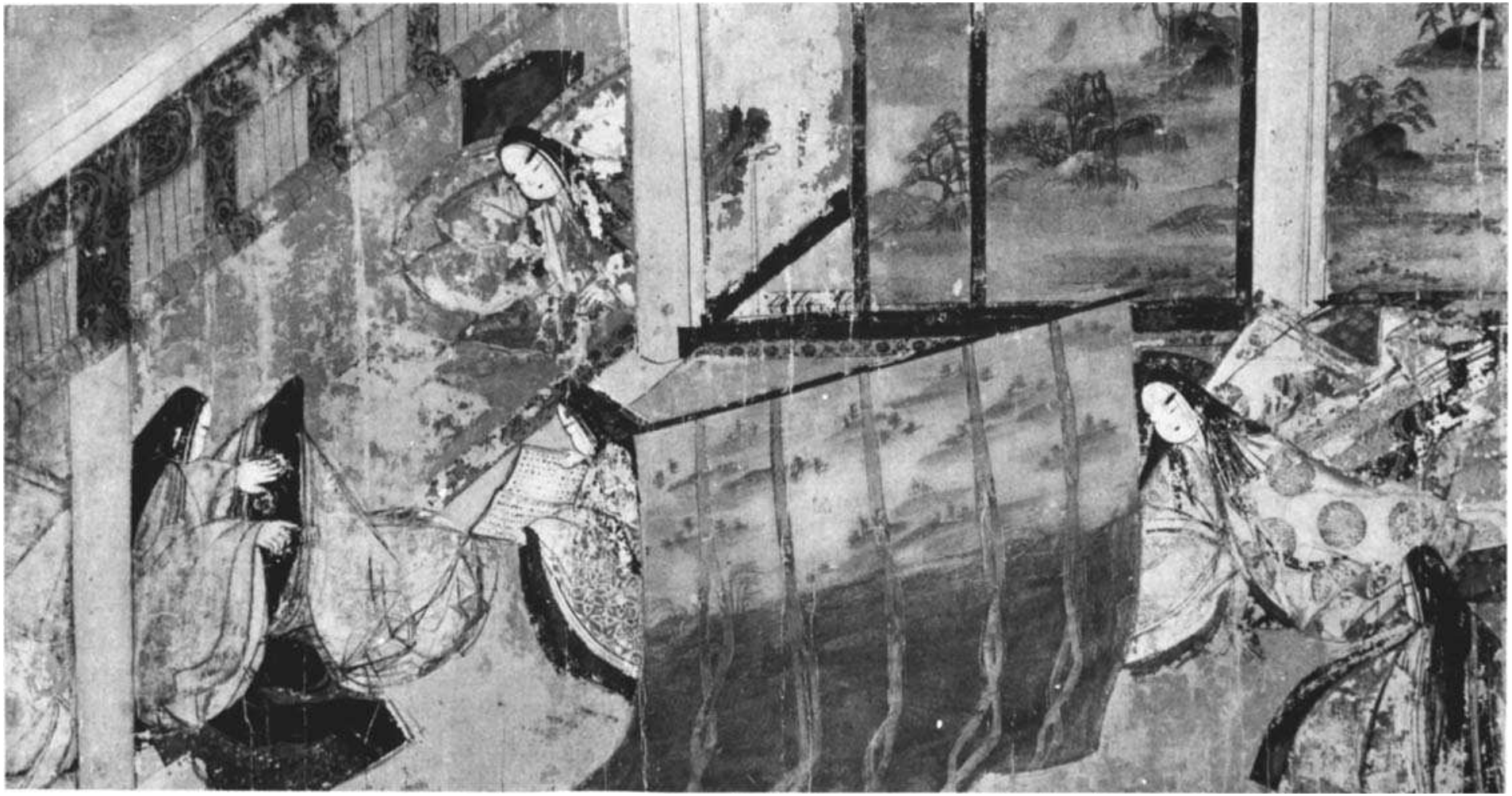

Fig. 27 Scene from the Genji Scrolls: Yamato paintings on sliding doors in background; "screen of state" in foreground *(Tokugawa Art Museum, Nagoya, Japan)*

These early Yamato pictures, which reached their peak of popularity in the Fujiwara epoch, depicted either pure landscapes or landscapes in which courtiers were shown at their leisure: viewing the moon, gathering the first blossoms of spring, or simply standing amid the tranquil beauties of nature. The two major themes were the seasons and famous places of Japan.

It is doubtful, as suggested at the end of Chapter 2, that any other people in history has ever been as absorbed as the Japanese, in their literature and art, with the seasons and the varying moods they bring. In works of prose, such as *The Tale of Genji,* there is a constant awareness of the seasons and their intimate association with the life cycle of the Heian courtier; and in *waka* poetry, we find numerous words and phrases that stereotypically identify the time of year, such as the "morning mists" of spring or the "cry of the deer" in autumn. Yamato pictures, as well, came to have many associative subjects linked with each of the seasons: for example, the morning glories, lotus ponds, and Kamo festival of summer, and winter's mountain villages, waterfowl, and the sacred *kagura* dance.

A unique feature of the Yamato pictures of famous places was that they were painted for the most part by people who had never seen these places, except possibly the ones closest to Kyoto. In other words, the Yamato artists produced provincial scenes either as they were traditionally supposed to appear or as the artists imagined them to appear. There could be no more telling proof than this of the extent to which the Heian courtiers had come to conceive of the world outside Kyoto and its environs in almost purely abstract, aesthetic terms.

With development of the *kana* syllabary and the use of *kana* for the writing of *waka,* Yamato artists began to add poems to their pictures appropriate to the particular seasons and settings they were depicting. They thus joined together three forms of art: poetry, calligraphy, and painting. And in the process they contributed a narrative or descriptive element to their works that led from the painting of individual scenes on screens and doors to the use of Yamato pictures as illustrations in books, and finally, about the turn of the twelfth century, to the development of narrative scrolls (perhaps most conveniently referred to henceforth as *emaki* to avoid confusion with the earlier types of Yamato pictures).

Although horizontal handscrolls had long been used for pictorial purposes in China, it was the Japanese who in the late Heian period came to employ them in the creation of a major art form. The oldest, and in many ways the most splendid, of the *emaki* extant from Heian times are the Genji Scrolls, probably painted sometime around the mid-twelfth century (fig. 27). There may originally have been as many as twenty of these scrolls but only four have come down to us. Strictly speaking, the Genji Scrolls are not fully narrative pictures, since they do not possess the horizontal flow of movement and the blending of scenes one into another that

became the dominant characteristic of subsequent *emaki.* Rather, the Genji Scrolls consist of separate scenes with sections of text interspersed among them.

A distinctive technical convention used in the Genji Scrolls is the removal of roofs from buildings to provide oblique views into their interiors from above. Another is the drawing of faces with stylized "straight lines for eyes and hooks for noses." This elimination of facial expression seems particularly fitting for the portrayal of members of a society that so admired fixed, ideal types. Like the authors of much of Heian literature, the artists of the Genji Scrolls sought more to create a series of moods than to depict particular individuals and particular situations (although of course we know from the novel who the people are and what they are doing).

Another fine *emaki* of the twelfth century is the Ban Dainagon Scroll, which relates a complex political intrigue of 866 in which a certain Great Councilor Ban was alleged to have caused the destruction by fire of one of the principal gateways leading into the palace compound in Kyoto. Completed about 1175, this work is of a different character from that of the Genji Scrolls. In contrast to the static, stylized beauty of the latter, it is full of action. Moreover, although set chiefly in Kyoto, the Ban Dainagon Scroll is crowded with people from both the upper and lower classes. As we run our eyes from right to left, we see animated figures enacting the continuous flow of narrative: the conspiracy that led to the burning of the palace gateway, the chance discovery that Ban was involved in it, and finally his banishment from the capital.

A particularly unusual set of early *emaki* are the Animal Scrolls traditionally attributed to a Buddhist priest named Toba (1053–1140), although stylistic analysis by scholars suggests that the scrolls were not all painted by the same person and were in fact probably done over a period of some hundred years from Toba's time until the early thirteenth century. The most artistically admirable sections of the scrolls show animals, including rabbits, monkeys, frogs, and foxes, frolicking and gamboling about (fig. 28). The animals are drawn with a marvelously sure and skillful brush stroke and are the product of a technique of playful, caricature-like artwork that can be traced back to certain charcoal sketches done on the walls of the Hōryūji Temple in the late seventh century and to pictures found in the Shōsōin storehouse of the Nara period. The Animal Scrolls are also interesting from the standpoint of social history, for they contain a number of scenes in which animals, representing people, are shown satirizing contemporary life, particularly the corrupt ways of some members of the Buddhist priesthood. One especially blasphemous scene shows a monkey, garbed like a priest, paying ceremonial homage to a giant frog of a buddha who is seated on a temporary outdoor altar (fig. 29).

Fig. 28 Scene from the Animal Scrolls *(Benrido Company)*

Fig. 29 Scene from the Animal Scrolls *(Benrido Company)*

Emaki were produced during the next few centuries on a variety of themes, including battles, the lives of famous priests, and the histories of noted temples. One of the finest of these is the Tale of Heiji Scroll, which deals with the conflict in 1159 (known as the Heiji Conflict) in which the Ise Taira under Kiyomori vanquished their Minamoto rivals and began their rise to power in Kyoto (fig. 30). The scroll is actually in three parts, the first of which is a long, panoramic view of the Burning of the Sanjō Palace, during which the Minamoto kidnaped the abdicated emperor Go-shirakawa (1127–92) and precipitated the Heiji Conflict. This part of the Heiji Scroll was obtained by the American Ernest Fenollosa (1853–1908) in the late nineteenth century and placed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, where it remains today, one of the most treasured of Japanese art works held outside Japan.

The Burning of the Sanjō Palace depicts, from right to left (all scrolls are "read" from right to left), three scenes: (1) a great horde of people, including warriors and others, rushing to the Palace; (2) Minamoto wreaking destruction and havoc in the palace, from which smoke and flames billow; and (3) Minamoto escorting the carriage of the abdicated emperor from the palace. Although I speak here of three scenes, the Burning of the Sanjō Palace is, in fact, presented as a single panorama. The scroll's anonymous artist has brought the three separate scenes together in a continuous flow by using the device, found in some scrolls, of showing different moments of time as though they were occurring simultaneously. By means of this device, a person can, for example, appear two or three times in the same panorama.

Stylistically, the Heiji Scroll—particularly its first part, the Burning of the Sanjō Palace—shows the extraordinary skill of Japanese artists of the time (it was painted in the thirteenth century) in capturing people, especially groups of people, in action. From the standpoint of military history, the Heiji Scroll is one of the earliest pictorial records we have of the samurai, their mounts, armor, weapons, and methods of fighting.

There will be occasion in the next chapter to comment on one or two more *emaki* as they appear in the development of medieval culture.

Fig. 30 "Burning of the Sanjō Palace": a scene from the Heiji Scroll depicting fighting between the Minamoto and Taira in 1159 *(Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)*