

Outline Lecture Eighteen—Heian and Medieval Japanese Sensibility

Focus Last Lecture:

- 1) The process through which Japan became a Buddhist nation and Buddhism a Japanese religion
- 2) Growing power of and meddling by Buddhist temples in Nara

Today's Focus:

- 1) Heian court turning inward politically, culturally, and religiously—Japan's period of self-imposed isolation
- 2) Erosion of centralized imperial authority

I) Challenges to Centralized Imperial Authority

- a) Political Ascendancy of the Fujiwara Clan
 - i) 794 move of capital from Nara to Heian (Kyoto) under Emperor Kammu
 - ii) Fujiwara dominance from the 9th to 11th centuries
 - (1) “Borrowed wombs”
 - (2) Michinaga Fujiwara (966-1027)
 - (3) Why not become emperors themselves?
- b) Prevalence of Independent *Shoens*
 - i) Origins of *Shoens*
 - (1) Problem with Equal-field system during the Nara period
 - ii) Growth of *Shoens*
 - (1) Advantage of economy of scale
 - (2) Administrative autonomy
 - iii) Economic Impact of *Shoens*
 - (1) Shares or stakes in a *shoen*—*shiki*
 - (a) *Honkes* and *ryokes*
 - (2) Why did the Heian court not curb this practice?

II) The Solipsistic World of the Heian Court

- a) Political Isolation
 - i) Domestically—court more and more removed from the provinces
 - ii) Overseas contact ended in 838 with last mission to China
- b) Religious Trends
 - i) Two Main Sects during Heian
 - (1) Tendai—founded by Saicho (767-822); based at Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei
 - (a) 3,000 buildings in temple complex
 - (b) With its own “standing army”—the *akuso*
 - (c) Focus on the “Lotus Sutra” and the *nembutsu*
 - (2) Shingon—founded by Kukai (774-835); based on Mt. Koya
 - (a) Emphasis on esoteric teachings and Tantric practices
 - (b) “To increase the happiness of the Japanese people”
 - (c) More popular with the Heian elite
- c) Courtly Culture of Interior Space

- i) Detachment from the outside world
 - (1) Heian sensibility defined by *Miyabi*
- ii) Lady Murasaki's *Tale of Genji*
 - (1) "Literature of the parlor"
 - (2) Aesthetics of courtship
 - (3) Influence on a distinctly Japanese aesthetic sensibility