

Buddhism in Japan's Golden Age

Buddhism had traveled from its birthplace in India to China. It made its way through Korea and came to Japan. The Korean king sent Buddhist monks and scriptures to Japan. It was received with mixed feelings, some not wanting to offend Shinto gods and others embracing the new religious ideas. Even as Buddhism spread, people still supported Shinto temples, rituals, and festivals.

The Pure Land sect of Buddhism came to Japan in the 1200s. It centered on the idea of an enlightened being named Amida who remained on earth to help others become enlightened. A person could become enlightened and enter the Pure Land after death by putting complete trust in Amida and saying his name. Today, this is the largest Buddhist sect in Japan.

Zen Buddhism was called Chan Buddhism in China, and came to Japan in the 1100s. The central practice of Zen Buddhism is meditation. Since samurai kept away from life events and entertainment that could distract them, they were in constant need of control and discipline. Zen offered this in the form of meditation. Zen meditation helped drive the fear of death and danger from their minds, making them better warriors in battle.



LITERATURE AND WRITING IN JAPAN'S GOLDEN AGE

The Tale of Genji

The Tale of Genji, written by Murasaki Shikibu, tells the tale of a handsome prince named Genji. Written during at the height of the Heian period in the early eleventh century, it is sometimes called the world's first novel. Murasaki Shikibu was a lady-in-waiting who served the empress and told the tale to all the court ladies. It is considered to be a good representation of court life during the Heian period, and was a favorite of the court.



Even today's Japanese money features *The Tale of Genji* scrollwork.



A scroll from the *Tale of Genji*.

Haiku

Haiku is a form of poetry that contains 17 syllables in three lines. The first line has five syllables, the second has seven, and the last has five. Japanese poets used haiku to make quick and, often times, humorous images. Most all Japanese haiku have some reference to the seasons. Matsuo Bashō was a famous Japanese poet who wrote in haiku. Here are some of his haiku poems (note: the haiku do not follow the syllable rules in English, but when read in Japanese):

the first cold shower
even the monkey seems to want
a little coat of straw

初しぐれ 猿も小蓑を ほしげ也

old pond . . .
a frog leaps in
water's sound

古池や 蛙飛込む 水の音

Japan's Golden Age: Noh Drama

A new drama called Noh appeared in Japan in the 1300s. It consisted of male actors, as women were not allowed to participate, dressed in vibrant, decorative costumes and masks. The stage had only

few small props and actors had to use dance, chanting, and song to tell the story. A typical Noh play was a familiar tale or Shinto legend. Noh plays could last all day and usually consisted of five plays with one of the following themes: gods, warriors, beautiful women, mad people, or ghosts and devils. Between each Noh play was a humorous skit that helped lighten the mood.



JAPAN'S GOLDEN AGE OF ART AND ARCHITECTURE

Japanese artists and architects first used styles borrowed from China. Over time, the Japanese began to add their own unique ideas that would lead to original works of art and unique buildings.

Buddhist monasteries were centers for art in Japan. Sculptors decorated temples with statues of Buddha. Artists painted large paintings of temple walls.

Heian artists were first influenced by Chinese themes and techniques, but eventually began to create unique and distinctive Japanese paintings. These were a type of scroll painting known as **YAMATO-E**. The scrolls depicted or explained historical events, scenes from novels, and legends of history through pictures (and sometimes words). The viewer would unroll the scroll to view each scene.

