Chapter 21 Heian-kyo

The Heart of Japan’s Golden Age
What’s a Golden Age?

• In your own words- what is the definition for a golden age
21.1 Introduction

- The waters separating Japan helped protect the Japanese from conquest by other Asian people
  - Japan remained politically independent
  - Developed its own civilization

- The Heian period is often called Japan’s Golden Age
  - Aristocrats led a great flourishing of Japanese culture
  - They prized beauty, elegance, and correct manners
  - Over time, new forms of literature and art developed

This brilliant culture of the Heian period still influences Japan today.
21.2 A New Capital

- Capital moved from Nara:
  - He felt the Buddhist priests’ power was damaging to the government.
  - The emperor also wanted a larger, grander capital city.

- Capital ordered to be moved again:
  - Site on the Yodo River easier to protect from attacks
  - Rumors of corruption & site seemed to be unlucky
  - City- Heian-kyo “The capital of peace and Tranquility”
21.2...Heian-kyo

• Heian-kyo became the first truly Japanese city.
  • today it is called Kyoto.
• like Nara, it was laid out in a checkerboard pattern
  • like the Chinese city of Chang’an
• set in forested hills, amid streams, waterfalls, & lakes
• simplicity was considered beautiful
  • there were few objects on the wooden floors of people’s houses
  • only straw mats and cushions - the Japanese did not use chairs

• daily life was very formal, and correct manners were extremely important
  • a Heian lady sat behind a portable screen that hid her from view while she talked and took part in life around the house.
21.3 The Rise of the Fujiwara Family

- During much of the Heian period, aristocrats were the political and cultural leaders of Japan.
  - By the mid-9th century, real power in the imperial court shifted from the emperor to the aristocratic families.

- The most important of these noble families were the Fujiwara, who controlled Japan for nearly 300 years.
the Fujiwara had other ways of exercising their power

• **Example 1:** the Fujiwara married many of their young daughters into the royal families

• **Example 2:**
  – the Fujiwara acted as advisors to the emperor
  – often coaxed older emperors to retire, so that child or youth could take the throne
  – ruled as regents in the young emperor’s name

*kept the peace for 300 years, helping Japanese culture blossom*
21.4 Social Position of the Heian Court

• A person’s rank was determined almost completely by what family he or she came from.
  – being born into a high-ranking family mattered more than personal qualities or skills

• There were nine main ranks in the Heian court hierarchy.
  – ranks 1-3 = high court nobles
  – ranks 4-5 = less important officials
  – ranks 6-9 = minor officials, clerks, and experts in certain fields (law, medicine, etc.)
21.4...Heian Rank System

• The nine ranks were further divided into classes such as senior and junior, upper and lower (30 sub ranks)
  – each rank brought with it specific privileges and detailed rules about conduct
  – members of each rank had different types of houses and carriages
  – rank determined the number of servants, the number of folds in the fans, the color of the clothing, and the height of the gatepost in front of the family’s home
  – if a person was found guilty of a crime, rank determined how harsh the sentence would be
The Fans of Japan

- Men of the first, second, and third ranks used fans with 25 folds.
- Men of the fourth, and fifth ranks used fans with 23 folds.
- The fans of the lower ranks had 12 folds.
21.5 Beauty and Fashion During the Heian Period

• Heian society prized beauty, elegance, and fashion
• the ability to recognize beauty was valued over qualities like generosity and honesty
• love of beauty also showed in architecture, calligraphy, poetry, and artwork
21.5...Men vs. Women

- Men and women both groomed themselves with great care.
- Small pointed beards were considered attractive on male members of a ruler’s court.
- For women, long hair was an important beauty feature.
21.5...Fashion and Beauty

- The Japanese of this time considered white teeth to be unattractive, so both men and women blackened their teeth with a dye made from iron soaked in tea or vinegar.
- How one smelled was also very significant, so both men and women wore scents.

*SATORI is a perfume symbolizing Japanese Culture*
21.5...Japanese Women

- For women, makeup was also important. Women used white face powder to make themselves look very pale. Touches of red on her cheeks and lips. Also, women used to pluck out their eyebrows and paint on a set.

- A woman’s clothing needed to be beautiful.

- An aristocratic woman might wear as many as 12 silk under-robes at a time.
21.6 Entertainment

• Heian-kyo’s aristocrats had plenty of leisure time for sporting events, games, and contests.
  – men enjoyed watching horse races, archery contests, and sumo wrestling
  – groups of courtiers played a game called *kemari*, where they kicked a leather ball in back and forth, keeping it in the air for as long as possible; the game is played in elegant robes.
  – Women played a game called *rango*. The object was to balance as many stones as possible on one finger.
21.6... Entertainment

- Many festivals and celebrations, each with its own customs.
  - Tested athletic poetic, or artistic skill.

- Dancing was an important skill for nobles, since dance was a part of nearly every festival.
  - **Bugaku** combined dance with music and drama.
21.7 Sculpture and Painting

- Early Heian sculptors commonly made an entire work from one piece of wood.
  - later, sculptors made statues by carving separate pieces & then joining them
  - mass production

- An artist named Jocho, who worked from Fujiwara Michinaga, made perhaps the greatest masterpiece of Heian sculpture- the Amida Buddha.
21.7... Sculpture and Painting

- Created *yamato-e* (Japanese painting)
  - scenes with thin lines that were filled in with bright colors
  - lines made quickly to suggest movement
  - restful scenes drawn with more deliberate lines
21.8 Writing and Literature

• Writing was the most valued form of expression.
• Poetry was part of daily life.
• Two ways of writing syllables:
  – katakana = more formal (used by men to write anything important)
  – hiragana = simple strokes to make writing and reading easier and faster (“women’s writing”)
• Female companions to the courtiers were selected for intelligence.
  – led the flowering of Japanese literature
21.9 End of the Heian Period

• Peasants supported nobles, but their problems were ignored.

• Practice of giving tax-free estates to top nobles reduced emperors’ power
  – government could not collect enough taxes to support itself
  – government too weak to supply law enforcement
  – estate owners created own police and army instead of paying government

• Military leaders began to control Japan.
21.10 Effect of Heian Period on Japan

- Writing (*The Tale of Genji, Pillow Book*), written characters, poetry, theater, etc. are influences still felt today.