

Medieval Japan Through Art: Samurai Life in Medieval Japan

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Introduction:

Teachers are encouraged to read “Medieval Japan: An Introductory Essay,” by historian Ethan Segal, prior to conducting this lesson. The introductory essay may also be assigned to students with advanced reading abilities (grades 11-12). The essay provides context for this lesson by sketching the history of medieval Japan.

Medieval Japan saw warfare and chaos. The growth of the warrior class and the influence of Buddhism eventually gave rise to a refined culture having roots in the classical Japanese tradition.

The time period referred to as medieval Japan actually comprised three distinct periods: the Kamakura (1185-1333), Muromachi (1336-1573), and Momoyama (1568-1603). Beginning with the Kamakura through the mid-19th century, military rulers governed Japan. During the Muromachi and Momoyama, the feudal structure concentrated wealth, culture, and power in the hands of feudal lords called *daimyō*. The social structure of samurai as retainers to noble lords enabled a few powerful *daimyō* to eventually be shogun or the military ruler.

This lesson is designed to challenge the view of sword-wielding samurai of U.S. movies. Rather than focusing on one particular art form, this lesson uses a variety of images from scrolls, screens, and artifacts. Using these visual sources, students learn about the three different periods of medieval Japan. Adding to the visual record of this time period, literature selections bring the voice of the samurai into the historical account. Students use art and literature to deepen their understanding of warrior life, looking at the importance of cultural and religious traditions to the daily life of *daimyō* and samurai and expanding their knowledge of medieval Japan.

Objectives: At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be better able to:

1. Explain the rise of military government of medieval Japan.
2. Describe the life of the warrior class.
3. Interpret a primary source document.
4. Use pictorial evidence to create and support a project.
5. Demonstrate visual literacy by analyzing a work of art within its original historical, political, economic, religious, or social context.

Vocabulary:

daimyō: the most powerful feudal rulers, often called warlords

samurai: the warrior class who fought for the *daimyō*

shogun: military ruler

shugo: early military governors of provinces in Kamakura period

Kamakura period: the time span marking the start of the medieval period and the years of Japan's first warrior government, the Kamakura *bakufu* (1185-1333)

Muromachi period: the time span marking the years of Japan's second warrior government, the Muromachi *bakufu* (also called the Ashikaga *bakufu*) (1336-1573)

Momoyama period: the final years of the medieval period; also known as the Azuchi-Momoyama period (1568-1603)

Materials and Advance Preparation: The easiest way to provide access to the sources used in the lesson is to have students work directly with Handout M2 on Internet-equipped computers. A version of this handout with links is provided on the Medieval Japan home page. If it is not feasible, print out the images and post them around the room or at tables where groups can examine them. The images you will need are:

- The *Heiji Monogatari Emaki*, at <http://learn.bowdoin.edu/heijiscroll/>
- The *Battles of Ichinotani and Yashima* screen, at <http://www.asiasociety.org/arts/japanesescr/scr01.html>
- Images of current bows made to copy those of the past, at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Horse3-vi.jpg> and http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Yabusame_01.jpg
- View of a warrior fighting the Mongols, at <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/18/Mooko-Suenaga.jpg>
- Golden Pavilion, at <http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/japan/kyoto/kinkakuji.php>
- Silver Pavilion or Ginkakuji, at <http://www.orientalarchitecture.com/japan/kyoto/ginkakuji.php>
- Other Japanese rock gardens, at <http://phototravels.net/japan/photo-gallery/japanese-rock-gardens.html>
- Noh theater images, at <http://www.ntj.jac.go.jp/english.html> and <http://www.nohmask.com/index.html>
- Hideyoshi's gold tearoom, at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:FushimijoChashitsu.jpg>
- Tearoom, at http://www.asia-art.net/japanese_tea.html or http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Image:Tearoom_layout.svg
- A tea bowl, at http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_collection/index.php?controller=dtl&colid=G5749
- A bamboo tea spoon, at http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_collection/index.php?controller=dtl&colid=G4216
- A water jar, at <http://www.asiasociety.org/arts/japanmovie/object22.html>
- Himeji Castle, at <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e3501.html>
- Momoyama period armor, at http://www.tnm.jp/modules/r_collection/index.php?controller=dtl&colid=F16005

Make copies of Handout M1 for all students. Write in the focus time periods on the handout; approximately one-third of the class should focus on each period—Kamakura, Muromachi, and Momoyama. Also copy the version of Handout M2 provided in this lesson plan if you are not having students use the online version.

Time Required: 2 class periods

Procedure:

1. Introduce the activity by explaining that students will be using art as a primary source to learn about life in medieval Japan. Students will use this pictorial evidence to develop an understanding about the historical, political, and religious life of the warrior class including samurai, *daimyō*, and shogun. If necessary, define the three different groups.
2. Explain that Japan has exported many cultural products to the United States. Ask students what comes to mind when they think of contemporary influences of Japan on U.S. culture. Students might mention Hello Kitty, Pokémon, Harajuku fashions, sushi, anime and manga, J pop, electronics, and cars. Discuss briefly why students think these Japanese exports are popular in the United States.
3. Mention that not all of these exports are viewed the same way in Japan as they are here. In particular, the image of the samurai has been used in many U.S. films in a very simplified interpretation. Ask students: What movies or video games have you seen or played that give you your image of samurai? (Students might mention *Kill Bill*, *The Last Samurai*, *Samurai Warriors*, and other video games.) Ask students to brainstorm all the words and images that come to mind when they hear the word *samurai*. What are our popular notions of a samurai? (*Answers will vary; some words students may mention are brave, loyal, swords, seppuku [ritual suicide, also known as hara-kiri], honor, ready to die.*) Post the list to refer to at the end of the lesson. Explain that this activity will get them to look beyond the stereotype, as well as understand the role of samurai, *daimyō*, and shogun in medieval Japanese history.
4. Divide the class into three groups: Kamakura, Muromachi, and Momoyama. Students can research together or individually. Give each student a copy of Handout M1, which explains what students are to do with the historical information, art, and literature they read as they work through Handout M2. Make sure students understand their role as a historical expert on one of the periods in medieval Japan. They will have the entire handout and should go through the information on the other periods; it will help them understand their assigned period and how it differed from the others. However, they will only answer the questions and report on the one period assigned to them—Kamakura, Muromachi, or Momoyama. Review the instructions and ask for any clarification. Students will report out on Day 2 so everyone will learn about the different time periods.
5. If students can access Handout M2 online and link to the websites as they read, that would be the most expedient way to access the art and literature. If not, point out where the sources referenced in the handout can be found in the classroom. Allow the rest of the class period for students to read and look at the images individually or in pairs.

6. On Day 2, group students who focused on the same time period so the class can identify what periods are being discussed. Begin the reporting on each period (Kamakura, Muromachi, and Momoyama) by sampling different students' responses to the questions, comparing differences and sharing similarities. Ask students about what changed in their historical knowledge of samurai and *daimyō*. In discussing the two later periods, have students identify how life of the samurai and *daimyō* changed from previous periods. Debrief common themes and subjects. (Students should notice the increasing power and wealth of samurai, *daimyō*, the growth of Buddhism and its influence on the culture.)
7. Refer to the initial brainstormed list of associations of the word *samurai*. Ask: What do you know now that you didn't know before doing this activity? Ask students to review the different periods within medieval Japan and explain the changes of the role of samurai, *daimyō*, and shogun over the 400 years.
8. Conclude by asking students why they think Hollywood and U.S. culture simplify the samurai rather than depicting the changing role across history. Have students explain their reasoning.

Assessment:

Students' responses to Handout M1 can be used as an assessment.

Extension/Enrichment:

Japanese movies portray samurai in different ways and could be used to add perspective, acknowledging, of course, that these fiction films appeal to contemporary audiences. Some recommendations are *Duel at Ichijoji Temple*, *Musashi Miyamoto*, *Yojimbo*, *Sanjūrō*, *Seven Samurai*, *Rashōmon*, and *Kagemusha*.

A field trip to a museum with Asian history artifacts would be beneficial to see the art, armor, and religious relics from this time period.

If the teacher would like to add a literature component to the activity, students could create a *waka* about the samurai or *daimyō* to share with the class. A *waka* is a Japanese poem of 31 syllables, arranged in five lines, of 5/7/5/7/7 syllables respectively. Below are two examples. Note that in translating from Japanese, the syllable count changes:

koma tomete
sode uchiharau
kage mo nashi
sano no watari no
yuki no yugure

Halting my mount
To brush my sleeves,
I cast no shadow
At the ford of Sano,
Snow falling in the evening.

Fujiwara no Teika, SKKS VI: 671

toko no shimo
makura no kōri
kie wabinu
musubi mo okanu
hito no chigiri ni

With frostfall upon my bed,
The ice upon my pillow
Cannot melt away - I lack the strength to die
Leaving unfulfilled
The vow I made to you.

Fujiwara no Teika, SKKS XII: 1137

From *Waka for Japan*, Thomas McAuley, trans. (Sheffield, UK: School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield, 2001), <http://www.temcauley.staff.shef.ac.uk/>.

Teacher Resources:

- Friday, Karl F., *Samurai, Warfare and the State in Early Medieval Japan* (New York: Routledge, 2004).
- Sadao, Tsuneko S., and Stephanie Wada, *Discovering the Arts of Japan: A Historical Overview* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2003).
- Shimizu, Yoshiaki, ed., *Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture 1185-1868* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1988).
- Varley, H. Paul, Ivan Morris, and Nobuko Morris, *Samurai* (New York, Delacourt Press, 1970).
- Varley, H. Paul, *Warriors of Japan as Portrayed in the War Tales* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994).

Medieval Japan: An Introductory Essay

by Ethan Segal, Michigan State University

Introduction

Medieval Japan may call to mind honorable sword-wielding samurai and stealthy ninja assassins. These figures, often seen in popular movies and games about pre-modern Japan, are only loosely based on reality. In fact, many different types of people helped shape the medieval period. Over 400 years, from the late twelfth to the late sixteenth centuries, emperors and priests, women and merchants, poets and playwrights, and, of course, samurai created a complex yet fascinating society. Samurai governments administered the country in tandem with the older imperial government. Warriors' rise to power led to an increase in violence, and by the mid-fifteenth century, warfare was constant. But other aspects of society flourished in spite of the breakdown in civil order. Buddhism enjoyed the strong support of both samurai and commoners. Such new cultural traditions as the tea ceremony became popular. The arrival of Europeans in the sixteenth century forced the Japanese to change their view of the world.

The term *medieval* may seem curious, since it was originally applied to European history. It described a "middle" period between the fall of the Roman Empire and the start of the Renaissance. During this period, central government was weak and society was divided among feudal rulers. Sixteenth-century Japan was divided among warlords known as *daimyō*, and Europeans who visited Japan at that time felt it resembled medieval Europe. Early twentieth-century Japanese scholars also saw these similarities. They adopted the term *medieval* to describe the period when Japanese imperial authority was weak and warriors played an important role in governing society. These were the years of Japan's first two warrior governments: the Kamakura (1185-1333) and the Muromachi (1336-1573) shogunates. What were those warriors like? What roles did they play in Japanese history? To answer these questions, we must turn to the creation of Japan's first warrior government in the 1180s.

The Genpei War

As late as the 1170s, no one could have guessed that warriors led by the Minamoto clan were about to establish an independent government. Most warriors served as middle-level officials in the provinces, working as managers on government-owned public lands or on private estates (*shōen*). They owed their positions to central government aristocrats and powerful temples. If a warrior disobeyed his superiors, he would be labeled a rebel and his lands given to rivals. Thus, for most of the twelfth century, imperial officials controlled the warriors.

The two greatest warrior clans of the time were the Taira (also known as the Heike) and the Minamoto (a.k.a. Genji). Both served members of the imperial family and the Fujiwara family of regents. In the 1150s, the Taira were on the winning side in a pair of disputes that

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helped them rise to positions of power. The Taira leader, Kiyomori, became Grand Minister and married his daughter to a future emperor. In contrast, the Minamoto were on the losing side in both conflicts. As a result, the clan's adult male leaders were killed and the boys sent into exile.

By 1179, Kiyomori had made himself a virtual dictator. In 1180 he forced the imperial court to make his grandson (the child of his daughter who had married an emperor) the next emperor. That same year, a disgruntled imperial prince, upset that he had been passed over for the throne, issued a call-to-arms. Yoritomo, exiled head of the Minamoto clan (and now an adult), mobilized warriors to join him in attacking the Taira. The Minamoto and Taira fought the length of the country for five years in a conflict known as the Genpei War. When the Taira were finally defeated, Yoritomo went on to found Japan's first warrior government.

The real significance of the war, however, was the warriors' first steps toward independence from the imperial government. Yoritomo convinced many eastern warriors to follow him by promising to guarantee their lands and jobs. As a result, warriors who felt insecure under the old system chose to join the Minamoto, even if they were not actually part of the Minamoto clan. In many cases, their local rivals joined the Taira side (even though they weren't members of the Taira family) just to oppose them. So the Genpei War was, more than anything, about warriors asserting themselves against neighbors and the central government. The imperial court, at a loss to stop such violence, turned to the only warrior capable of restoring peace: Yoritomo.

The Kamakura Bakufu

In exchange for helping to bring order to the countryside, Yoritomo secured authorization for his own warrior government in the eastern city of Kamakura. His government is known as the Kamakura *bakufu* or shogunate. Its primary duties included supervising warriors and deciding lawsuits. Yoritomo rewarded loyal warriors by appointing them as *jitō* (military land stewards) on private estates. These *jitō* served as police and tax collectors. While *jitō* worked on individual estates, Yoritomo later began appointing other warriors as *shugo* (military governors) over entire provinces. *Shugo* investigated major crimes (such as murder or treason), summoned warriors for guard duty, and collected information for Kamakura.

Yoritomo himself held several titles, including shogun. Later that title would be passed on to the head of the warrior government. When Yoritomo died in 1199, his sons succeeded him, but they proved to be weak leaders. Real power was maintained by the family of Yoritomo's wife, Hōjō Masako. Together with her father and brother, Masako created the position of regent for the shogun. Male members of the Hōjō family served as regents from 1203 until 1333. Masako herself was never regent, but she was a very influential person with much authority in Kamakura.

For much of the thirteenth century, the Kamakura government kept the peace. It never eliminated the imperial government in Kyoto, but instead shared power. Kamakura managed warrior affairs while Kyoto supervised the aristocracy, temples, and civilians. The *bakufu* also created an advanced legal system. Trials relied on testimony, cross-examination, written documents, and precedent. Outcomes could be appealed. Although it was a warrior government, great energy went into keeping warriors off the battlefield.

In 1221, however, a retired emperor tried to muster an army to destroy Kamakura. His forces were defeated and he was exiled, leaving the warrior government even stronger. Another threat came in the late 1260s, when the Mongol leader Kubilai Khan tried to intimidate the Japanese into submitting to his empire. Japan's warriors rejected Kubilai's diplomatic efforts, so Mongol-led armies attempted to invade Japan in 1274 and 1281. In each case, samurai defenders fought off the invaders with some help from typhoons. Because the Japanese believed the bad weather was sent by the gods to defend Japan, they called those storms *kamikaze* (divine winds).

Samurai of the Kamakura Period

Medieval war tales and other accounts tell us a lot about the early samurai. Leading warriors were usually mounted archers. Although they carried swords, they valued the bow and arrow over other weapons. These samurai were quite independent. They supplied their own weapons, armor, provisions, and attendants. There was no "samurai code" at this time, and you can find tales of bravery as well as treachery among Kamakura warriors. Many fought in order to earn fame and rewards. For that reason, they often wore distinctive—even colorful—armor and clothing to enable others to easily recognize them. Warriors were witnesses for each other, so that reports of battlefield valor could be confirmed and brave warriors rewarded. For example, the personal account of Takezaki Suenaga, a samurai who fought against the Mongols, makes no mention of fighting to defend Japan. Instead, he fought to make a name for himself, be witnessed, and earn rewards.

Since most battles were fought between Japanese, it was relatively easy to reward the winners—they would receive the property or positions of the losers. But the Mongol invasions proved much more challenging. Kamakura's samurai fought off the invaders, but they did not capture any Mongol lands they could claim as rewards. Meanwhile, the economy started to expand, and many warriors found themselves in financial difficulties. Some had to use their lands as collateral to borrow money. If they failed to repay loans, they had to forfeit their property. At the same time, the Hōjō family took advantage of the invasion crisis to further solidify its own hold on government, excluding members of other warrior families from top positions. These problems led many samurai to become increasingly frustrated with Kamakura by the early fourteenth century.

New Directions in Buddhism

Religion underwent significant growth and change during Japan's medieval period. The major Buddhist temples and Shintō shrines controlled estates in the provinces. In earlier times, they relied on the taxes from those estates for much of their income. Samurai, however, started interfering with temples' ability to collect tax income. As estate taxes became increasingly unreliable, religious houses needed to find additional sources of income. Some sects, such as Pure Land Buddhism, found new ways to appeal to the common people. Others, such as Zen, gained popularity among the warriors.

Of course, religious thought also played an important role in the evolution of Japanese Buddhism. Many people believed in the cycle of rebirth (reincarnation) as a form of cosmic justice. Depending on how you had lived your previous life, your soul might be reborn into better

or worse circumstances. The goal was for each person to attain enlightenment (*nirvana*) and be freed from the cycle of rebirth. However, another influential idea was that Japan had entered *mappō*, the final days of the law. *Mappō* was a degenerate age in which the teachings of the historical Buddha were so distant that people were no longer able to fully comprehend them. Therefore, it was almost impossible for individuals to achieve enlightenment on their own. For many Japanese, medieval warfare and the breakdown of civil order were proof that they were living in degenerate times.

One response was Pure Land Buddhism. Pure Land came from the teachings of a religious reformer named Hōnen. Unlike the Buddhist establishment, Hōnen saw little value to study in the age of *mappō*. He taught his followers to place complete faith in the Buddha Amida. Amida had vowed to save others before achieving enlightenment. Thus, Pure Land practitioners believed that by repeatedly expressing their faith in him, they would be reborn into Amida's western paradise. Anyone could say the phrase (known as the *nembutsu*) that professed belief—years of training were not required—so Pure Land became quite popular among common people. Shinran, one of Hōnen's students, took this logic a step further. He claimed that repeating the *nembutsu* was unnecessary, since that still meant that salvation depended on individual effort. True faith in Amida's mercy was the only hope for mankind. Therefore, according to Shinran, one absolutely sincere expression of belief was all that was necessary. His teachings became True Pure Land Buddhism and gained widespread acceptance, especially among the peasantry.

Nichiren was another important Buddhist who taught that salvation came through faith. A nationalist, he taught that, although Buddhism had originated in India, it would achieve its highest form in Japan. He valued the Lotus Sutra above all other Buddhist scriptures. Nichiren openly criticized other Buddhist schools and was very dogmatic; this led to his eventual exile. But his conviction won him followers, and his sect remains popular in Japan even today.

Zen Buddhism also won acceptance in Japan during the medieval period. It was based on Chinese Ch'an Buddhism, and the great Japanese Zen priests Eisai and Dōgen both trained in China. The faith they brought back to Japan promoted meditation (*zazen*) and the contemplation of questions with no logical answers (*kōan*) as paths to enlightenment. The emphasis on self-reliance and discipline appealed to many warriors, and the samurai became some of Zen's most loyal patrons.

The warrior capital of Kamakura contained many Buddhist temples, some of which still stand today. A major shrine, dedicated to the Shintō war deity, was built at the heart of the city. Numerous Zen temples were constructed during the thirteenth century. Women were just as involved as men, and one famous temple, Tōkeiji, became a site of refuge for women seeking divorces. The proliferation of temples reflected sincere religious devotion, but the dedication in 1252 of a bronze Buddha figure over 40 feet high was surely also intended to rival the great Buddha at Tōdaiji Temple in Nara. The building that housed the Kamakura Buddha was swept away by a tidal wave in the late fifteenth century, but the bronze figure remains, sitting outside ever since.

Literature and the Arts

Poetry remained the most important literary form. Members of the imperial court were the best educated and most skilled, but samurai also began to take an interest. The third shogun,

Sanetomo, was considered a very skillful poet. His teacher, the courtier Fujiwara Teika, compiled one of Japan's greatest imperial poetry collections, the *Shinkokinshū*. Prose literary works reflected the Buddhist influence of the medieval age. *The Tale of the Heike* was the most popular. It described the Genpei War and the Taira clan's downfall. Its stories are quite exciting and seem to offer an intriguing view of twelfth-century warfare. But the tale cannot be read as an accurate account of the war. Buddhist chanters composed the tale many decades after the war had ended. They sang it as they played lutes to illustrate Buddhist themes of impermanence and show how the mighty will fall. Similar themes can be found in Kamo no Chōmei's philosophical essay, "An Account of My Hut." Few works by women have survived. A notable exception is the memoir of Lady Nijō, a court attendant. Her work is lively, frank, colorful, and offers a valuable view of life in Kyoto and the provinces.

Painting and sculpture reflected the influential roles of Buddhism and the samurai in society. Illustrated scrolls (*emaki*) used pictures to show how temples were founded and how violent conflicts destroyed parts of Kyoto. Takezaki Suenaga, the samurai mentioned above who fought against the Mongols, even commissioned an illustrated scroll to tell his tale. Another important art form was *raigō*, paintings that showed Amida welcoming people who had just died to his western paradise. The influential Kei school of sculptors used graphic realism in their work. Their famous guardians at Tōdaiji look quite intimidating, even hyper-masculine, with detailed bulging muscles, fierce expressions, and crystals set in the eyes to make them look real.

Kamakura's Demise and the Muromachi Bakufu

In 1331, Emperor GoDaigo tried to capitalize on warrior frustrations by plotting to destroy Kamakura. He was exiled to a distant island, but his supporters fought on. When one of Kamakura's leading generals, Ashikaga Takauji, decided to join his forces, the fate of the *bakufu* was sealed. GoDaigo's army destroyed Kamakura in 1333, and the emperor escaped from exile to lead a new government. GoDaigo was a clever, well-educated man who designed innovative new policies, such as taxing breweries and regulating the acquisition of estates. But since his goal was to restore imperial rule, he gave the most important posts in government to his sons and members of the aristocracy. This left many warriors, including Ashikaga Takauji, upset and angry. Takauji rebelled, and by 1336 his army had taken the capital and forced GoDaigo to flee.

Takauji went on to found the second major warrior government, which lasted from 1336 to 1573. It is known as the Muromachi *bakufu* (or Muromachi shogunate) because its headquarters were in the Muromachi district of Kyoto. It is also sometimes called the Ashikaga shogunate because the shoguns were members of the Ashikaga family. On the one hand, the samurai had more power than in the Kamakura period. That was in part because Emperor GoDaigo had merged military and civilian posts. There was no longer a civilian governor who might serve as a check on the *shugo*. On the other hand, Takauji's government was weaker than its predecessor. Although Takauji chose a new emperor to serve under his control, GoDaigo set up a government-in-exile known as the Southern Court that provided legitimacy to anti-*bakufu* armies. If a powerful samurai felt mistreated by the Ashikaga, he and his followers might declare themselves loyal to the Southern Court and rebel. This period of frequent fighting lasted until 1392, when the third Ashikaga Shogun, Yoshimitsu, reunified the two imperial courts.

The Muromachi *bakufu* was never as stable as Kamakura had been. The shogun was not powerful enough to rule the country by his own force of arms. Eastern Japan and the island of Kyushu were both semi-autonomous. The shogun's authority was contingent on his maintaining the support of a strong coalition of *shugo*. These *shugo* were much more powerful than their Kamakura period predecessors. Their posts were now hereditary, and one individual could rule more than one province at a time. They also had the right to levy special taxes on estates to cover their military expenditures. Three of the most powerful *shugo* families—the Hosokawa, Hatakeyama, and Shiba—alternated in serving as deputy shogun (*kanrei*), a position designed to help mediate between the shogun and his *shugo*. Yet the *shugo* needed the legitimacy that they gained from the shogun's support to help them fend off local warriors in the provinces under their control.

The Ashikaga Shoguns

Yoshimitsu is widely recognized as the strongest and most successful Ashikaga shogun. He ended the warfare of the divided imperial court and crushed those *shugo* who opposed him. He reopened diplomatic relations and official trade with China. Yoshimitsu was an accomplished poet and a great sponsor of the arts. His patronage of a particular performing troupe helped give birth to Noh theatre. He also is credited with the Golden Pavilion, one of Japan's most famous medieval buildings. Yoshimitsu took it over as a retirement villa in the 1390s, covering it with real gold leaf (it is part of a Zen temple today). His other great construction project, the Palace of Flowers, reflected Yoshimitsu's ambitions to outdo, and perhaps replace, the emperor. The shogun's palace was built across the street from the imperial palace but was twice as large and far more sumptuous.

Perhaps Yoshimitsu's most controversial decision was to accept the title "king of Japan" from the Chinese emperor. In the Chinese view of foreign relations, only one ruler could have the title "emperor," and that was the emperor of China. Other rulers had lesser titles, such as king. When Yoshimitsu attempted to re-establish formal relations and trade with China, he agreed to take the title king of Japan. Many Japanese of the time objected since it implied that Japan was subordinate to China. Yoshimitsu's motives are not entirely clear. Some suggest that he did this in order to bolster his legitimacy at home. Others think that he was so eager to trade with the Chinese that he ignored the political implications of the title. Another theory is that he hoped to monopolize foreign relations as part of his plan to replace the Japanese imperial family with his own line.

Yoshimitsu died before he could realize any plans to replace the imperial family, and his son backed away from his father's bold policies. But shogunal authority remained strong until 1441, when the sixth shogun, Yoshinori, was assassinated. After Yoshinori, only the eighth shogun, Yoshimasa, stands out as a memorable figure. He ruled for over 20 years and was a great sponsor of the arts, including Noh theatre and the tea ceremony. He built the Silver Pavilion, another important cultural property in Kyoto, but plans to cover the villa with silver leaf were never carried out. Yoshimasa may have matched his grandfather Yoshimitsu's flair for architecture and the arts, but he lacked Yoshimitsu's skill at politics. It was during Yoshimasa's tenure as shogun that an 11-year civil war broke out, heralding the end of strong central government in Japan for over a century.

Muromachi Arts and Culture

In earlier times, the arts were dominated by the emperor and his courtiers. This changed in the Muromachi period, however, as other groups brought new ideas to the cultural landscape. Many samurai, now living in Kyoto, developed a taste for the arts. Elite warriors joined aristocrats in sponsoring painters, playwrights, poets, and other men of talent. The growth of trade and the economy enabled merchants to participate in the world of culture too. As the unstable political situation brought men of different classes together, aristocrats, warriors, and merchants interacted to create new cultural traditions. Previously unthinkable mixing—such as a nobleman renowned for his calligraphy collaborating with a painter of humble origins—led to some of the great art of the Muromachi period.

Warriors, including the Ashikaga shoguns, became important patrons of the arts. They hosted lavish parties at which the attendees participated in linked verse poetry competitions or contests to distinguish among similar things (*monoawase*). Tea was also quite popular. Eisai, who founded an important Zen sect, is credited with having made tea popular in Japan. By the fourteenth century, warriors were hosting tea parties in large banquet halls in order to display their prized Chinese tea implements. Merchants responded by favoring native Japanese wares. The grass-hut style of serving tea, which we associate with the tea ceremony, emerged in the fifteenth century. It is attributed to Murata Shukō, who may have served tea for Ashikaga Yoshimasa. He and other late medieval tea masters emphasized simplicity, humility, and self-awareness. Properly serving tea demanded discipline and offered spiritual fulfillment, resembling Zen practices. People began to speak of a Way of Tea. The most famous master, Sen no Rikyū, came from a merchant family but taught tea to the great warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Rikyū served tea in a small, rustic hut. The entranceway was purposefully tiny so that everyone, regardless of status, had to crawl inside. All participants were required to prepare and serve the tea. Rikyū's student, however, saw things differently. Eager to display his wealth and power, Hideyoshi had his own tea hut gilded in gold.

Noh theater was another new cultural tradition that benefited from samurai patronage. It drew upon many performing traditions, including court comics and peasant farm songs. In the late fourteenth century, Kan'ami's troupe attracted the notice of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. Kan'ami's son, Ze'ami, became one of Noh's most important playwrights. Noh performances incorporate spoken dialogue, dancing, and music. Few props are used. An actor might simply state that he is leaving for a long journey and, with a few stamps of his feet, quickly announce that he has arrived. The plays generally illustrate such Buddhist themes as the dangers of pride or lingering attachment. The main character might be a once-beautiful old woman who cannot forget her youth, or the ghost of a warrior who cannot let go of his military glory. Other plays centered on Buddhist priests overcoming demons. Often several plays were performed over the course of a full day, with short comic pieces called *kyōgen* staged between the major Noh plays.

The Medieval Japanese Economy

The Japanese enjoyed a growing economy during the medieval period. Markets began to develop around the country. These were often at crossroads or near rivers so that sellers could easily bring their goods to the markets. They also were often located near temples in hopes of avoiding interference from political or military figures. In the Kamakura period, markets met

infrequently. For example, they might be opened only on days ending in fours (i.e., the 4th, 14th, and 24th of the month) or another number. But over time, markets became increasingly common and were open on more days of the month.

Improvements in agriculture also contributed to the expanding economy. New strains of rice better resisted drought and disease. Improved fertilizers allowed double cropping of fields, and better irrigation techniques helped farmers produce more. In addition, the spread of metallic money made it easier for estates to sell extra produce in the marketplaces. Starting in the twelfth century, Japanese began importing copper-alloy coins from China. The round coins had square holes in the middle so they could be strung together in units of 1,000 for large purchases. Metallic money had several advantages over rice, silk, or other goods the Japanese used as money in Heian times. Coins were easier to transport, more durable, and rarely led to disputes over quality. By the Muromachi period, most urban residents used coins. Even many rural estates paid their taxes in cash.

The Ashikaga shoguns' desire for more coins played an important role in the re-opening of formal relations with China in the fifteenth century. The Muromachi *bakufu*, and later several major temples and *daimyō*, sent merchant boats to China in hopes of obtaining copper coins. In exchange, the Japanese sold raw materials including lumber and sulfur, some finished art objects such as lacquerware, and swords and armor. Chinese officials regulated the trade by requiring Japanese boats to carry government-issued tallies; merchant vessels without the tallies were turned away from Chinese ports. On the whole, merchants did well during the medieval period. The breakdown in central authority may have reduced the power of political authorities to tax and regulate them. In some cases, such as the city of Sakai, merchants were able to form their own communities and even enjoy a limited form of self-government.

Women's Status in Medieval Japan

Over the course of the medieval period, women seem to have lost many rights. In ancient times, women served as rulers. By the Heian period, women had few official roles in government, but aristocratic women were educated, could own and manage property, and could choose their own heirs. Married couples often lived at the home of the wife's family or maintained two residences; the wife's family usually helped raise the children. Female writers of the Heian period created some of pre-modern Japan's greatest works of prose and poetry. But conditions gradually began to change.

In the early Kamakura period, women of samurai families held *jitō* posts. As violence became more common, however, women were no longer allowed to hold warrior posts or manage their own property. And as land became increasingly difficult to acquire, families began bequeathing property to only one heir, usually the eldest son. Married women were expected to join the family of their husbands. Lady Nijō's memoir from the early fourteenth century is one of the last important literary works by a woman of the medieval period. Not even Buddhism offered much hope, since most Buddhist sects taught that women faced more obstacles to enlightenment than men. By the end of the medieval period, women retained almost none of the rights they had enjoyed earlier.

The Ōnin War and the Age of Warring States

From 1467 to 1477, rival coalitions of powerful samurai fought in a protracted conflict known as the Ōnin War. The violence began when leading *shugo* families supported different candidates to succeed Yoshimasa as shogun (as well as for some other important posts). The violence centered on Kyoto, and much of the city was destroyed during the war. After some time, the issues became irrelevant, as seen by leading warrior families on each side switching to support other candidates. Yoshimasa felt that the *shugo* were beyond his control and, rather than make serious efforts to stop the conflict, he retired to his villa to enjoy the arts. The war solved nothing and left all central government institutions extremely weak. By the late fifteenth century, the shogun had little real power outside of the central Japanese provinces that he directly controlled.

The last century of the Muromachi period, from the Ōnin War to 1573, is known as the Age of Warring States. During this time, provincial and regional warlords known as *daimyō* dominated Japan. Some *daimyō* families had formerly been *shugo*, others had been lieutenants or deputies, and some were truly self-made men who had risen through the ranks. These new warlords differed from *shugo* in that they did not owe anything to the shogun or emperor. During the Warring States, warlords could only claim authority over lands they could actually defend. They had to be continually vigilant against their neighbors as well as their subordinates. The age is sometimes characterized as *gekokuujō*, which means the lower replacing the higher (or those of humble origins replacing their superiors). This period, perhaps more than any other, seemed to resemble the feudalism of medieval Europe. Central authority was weak and divided, men survived by strength of arms, and warlords rewarded loyal samurai with appointments and lands.

Europeans in Japan

Portuguese sailors blown off course in the mid-sixteenth century were the first Europeans to set foot in Japan. The Spanish soon followed, and eventually the Dutch and the British found their way to Japan too. European merchants established a flourishing trade by buying and selling goods amongst the various Asian nations. Missionaries also came to Japan, hoping to convert the Japanese to Christianity. They enjoyed some success in the southwestern island of Kyushu, where a few *daimyō* became Catholic and ordered those living in their domains to convert as well. The Europeans were strange curiosities to the Japanese, and paintings of them—known as *namban byōbu*—show them as Japanese artists saw them, with balloon pants, high frill collars, long noses, and people of color attending them as slaves.

Christianity did not last in Japan. Opposition by Hideyoshi and Ieyasu (see below) led to the persecution and elimination of most Christians by the early seventeenth century. But the Europeans did affect Japanese society. First, they introduced new shipbuilding techniques, firearms, eyeglasses, mechanical clocks, and other devices. Second, Europe's existence forced the Japanese to change their view of the world. Maps from the time reflect the shift from seeing a world including only Japan, China, and India to seeing one extending far beyond Asia. Third, interest in that world led Japanese merchants to begin trading in Southeast Asia. Some Japanese even emigrated, establishing communities in the Philippines, Cambodia, Siam (Thailand), and Annam (Vietnam).

From Medieval to Early Modern Japan

By the second half of the fifteenth century, regional warlords were strong enough to begin competing to unify the country. The names of many such great warlords—Date Masamune, Takeda Shingen, and others—are remembered even today in historical dramas, movies, and more. They and their rivals sought to capture the city of Kyoto, where the emperor and the shogun resided. Although neither could wield much real power, both could provide legitimacy to a warlord seeking to rule the country.

Three warlords are recognized as having succeeded in unifying the country and bringing an end to the violence of the Warring States period. They are often referred to as the “three unifiers”—Oda Nobunaga, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu. Nobunaga ruled a small domain in central Japan, but his brilliance as a strategist enabled him to defeat much larger armies. He was the first warlord to successfully use firearms to win a battle. His innovations in castle development also led to the emergence of grand Japanese castles, with stone ramparts, *donjons*, and more. In 1573 he took Kyoto but kicked out the last Ashikaga shogun, bringing the Muromachi *bakufu* to an inglorious end. Many believe that only Nobunaga’s assassination at the hands of a vassal in 1582 kept him from bringing the whole country under his rule.

Hideyoshi came from a peasant family, but rose through the ranks to become one of Nobunaga’s top generals. He avenged his lord’s death and finished the job of unifying the country. However, Hideyoshi did not succeed through force alone. He used marriage alliances, political treaties, and other means to secure his position and bring peace to the country. Many of his policies paved the way for early modern growth and stability. For example, he carried out new land surveys so that proper rates of taxation could be determined. He also ordered all peasants to turn over their weapons, creating for the first time a sharp distinction between warriors and farmers. In his later years, Hideyoshi set out to conquer China. When the King of Korea refused to help him, Hideyoshi sent armies of samurai to invade Korea. The result was the devastation of the Korean peninsula. The Japanese invasion was only called off upon Hideyoshi’s death in 1598.

Ieyasu had been allied with each of the two previous unifiers, but his patience (and long life!) clearly proved a great asset. In 1600 he maneuvered warlords loyal to Hideyoshi’s young son into a major battle that Ieyasu’s forces won, making him the most powerful *daimyō* in Japan. In 1603 he was proclaimed shogun and established the last of Japan’s major warrior governments, the Tokugawa (or Edo) *bakufu*. The unifiers’ policies, and the peace that followed in the seventeenth century, led to profound changes in Japanese society and the start of what most scholars refer to as the early modern period.

Samurai Life in Medieval Japan

The Heian period (794-1185) was followed by 700 years of warrior governments—the Kamakura, Muromachi, and Tokugawa. The civil government at the imperial court continued, but the real rulers of the country were the military *daimyō* class. You will be using art as a primary source to learn about samurai and *daimyō* life in medieval Japan (1185-1603).

Kamakura Period (1185-1333)

The Kamakura period was the beginning of warrior class rule. The imperial court still handled civil affairs, but with the defeat of the Taira family, the Minamoto under Yoritomo established its capital in the small eastern city of Kamakura. Yoritomo received the title *shogun* or “barbarian-quelling generalissimo.” Different clans competed with one another as in the Hōgen Disturbance of 1156 and the Heiji Disturbance of 1159.

The *Heiji Monogatari Emaki* is a hand scroll showing the armor and battle strategies of the early medieval period. The conflict at the Sanjō Palace was between Fujiwara Nobuyori and Minamoto Yoshitomo. As you look at the scroll, notice what people are wearing, the different roles of samurai and foot soldiers, and the different weapons. What can you learn about what is involved in this disturbance? What can you learn about the samurai and the early medieval period from viewing this scroll? What information is helpful in developing an accurate view of samurai? What preparations would be necessary to fight these kinds of battles? (Think about the organization of people, equipment, and weapons; the use of bows, arrows, and horses; use of protective armor for some but not all; and the different ways of fighting.)

During the Genpei Civil War of 1180-1185, Yoritomo fought against and defeated the Taira, beginning the Kamakura Period.

The *Battles of Ichinotani and Yashima* screens were painted in the seventeenth century but highlight the bravery, loyalty, and strategy of the Genpei War battles at Ichinotani and Yashima. Notice the use of horse and bow. What information here informs your understanding of what a samurai does?

Yoritomo chose officials called *shugo* (military governors) in each province to be responsible for military control of the provinces, to supervise the land, and to collect taxes. Obligation and dependency between shogun and military governors became the basis for the governing system until the end of the nineteenth century. As the *shugo* gained power and no longer acted only on behalf of the shogun, they evolved into the *daimyō* of the late fifteenth century. It also should be clarified that only about 10 percent of the population were of this warrior culture. Most Japanese at the time were farmers.

Daily Life: War and Play

In this early medieval period, wealth and leadership shifted away from the emperor and nobility to the warrior government. In order to govern, the *shugo* had to blend military and civilian arts. They may have conquered brutally, but *shugo* could not administer without the

prestige of culture. A common saying was, “the warrior needs to master the bow and the horse as well as the brush and the word.” *Shugo* had to write correspondence and documents to deal with legal matters and to govern. Leisure time was influenced by the arts and Zen Buddhism. *Shugo* wrote poetry, practiced calligraphy, studied Buddhist sutras. Some painted while others appreciated art. Buddhist monks, especially the Zen Buddhists, became their teachers and cultural guides. The monks’ role as advisors and friends became important to the warrior elite and influenced the cultural traditions and activities of later *daimyō*.

Along the road
Smoke from Mt Fuji
Could not be distinguished
In a sky
Of unbroken cloud.

A *waka* (Japanese poem) by Shogun Yoritomo, quoted in
Japan: The Shaping of Daimyō Culture

Military Skills and Preparation

Early medieval warriors depended on the bow and the horse. Mounted archery, called *yabusame*, was a skill samurai practiced to stay battle-ready. *Yabusame* also taught the samurai focus and discipline. The bows were large; the more men it took to string the bow, the stronger the samurai. Tales speak of heroic men who used bows that took seven men to string!

Study the pictures of current bows made to copy those of the past.

Worrisome Political Realities

In the beginning, warrior society was founded on family ties. Samurai or vassals would serve a *shugo* in return for land or reward. This idealized relationship meant a vassal would be loyal for a lifetime and even be prepared to die for his lord. This ideal could not really exist because a warrior had to earn a living, and allegiance to a losing lord meant losing your means of making a living. Choosing the right alliances and being on the winning side meant more reward and fame. Alliances sometimes changed in battles. Brothers were known to kill brothers and sons their fathers if it furthered their power. The *shugo*, and later the *daimyō*, changed their loyalties based on favorable outcomes.

Heroic Values

We learn about this early medieval time period from a genre of literature called the war tales. These stories are a mixture of fact and fiction. They were originally sung by balladeers. The *Hōgen Monogatari*, *Heiji Monogatari*, and *The Tale of the Heike* are among the stories of the battles during the Kamakura. Although they were written 200 years later, they tell heroic stories that reflect the values and ideals of the twelfth-century samurai.

“Friends and foes alike wet their sleeves with tears and said

“What a pity! Tadanori was a great general,
Pre-eminent in the arts of both sword and poetry.”

Yorimasa summoned Watanabe Chujitsu Tonau and ordered: “Strike off my head.” Tonau could not bring himself to do this while his master was still alive. He wept bitterly. “How can I do that, my lord?” he replied. “I can do so only after you have committed suicide.” “I understand,” said Yorimasa. He turned to the west, joined his palms, and chanted “Hail Amidha Buddha” ten times in a loud voice. Then he composed this poem:

Like a fossil tree
Which has borne not one blossom
Sad has been my life
Sadder still to end my days
Leaving no fruit behind me.

Having spoken these lines, he thrust the point of his sword into his belly, bowed his face to the ground as the blade pierced him through, and died. Tonau took up his master’s head and, weeping, fastened it to a stone. Then, evading the enemy, he made his way to the river and sank it in a deep place.

Excerpted from *The Tale of the Heike*

End of the Kamakura Period

In 1274, the Kamakura shogunate faced two Mongol invasions. Luckily, both were unsuccessful due to typhoons that forced the Mongols to retreat. Some believed that the Shinto gods had sent these *kamikaze* (or divine winds). The shogunate was strained by preparing to fend off the Mongols. Many warriors were called in to help. When the second invasion in 1281 was thwarted, however, there was no way to reward the warriors.

Find the view of a warrior fighting the Mongols. Takezaki Suenaga had handscrolls painted to glorify his bravery and to identify his contribution to the defense of his country. He hoped he would be richly awarded for his efforts. Notice his armor, weapons, and horse. The exploding item is an invention of the Mongols.

Financial problems weakened the Kamakura government, and it ended when the Hōjō regents could not put down an uprising led by the emperor. The breakdown of imperial authority continued, even though the emperor still had legitimacy. A power struggle erupted between the Northern Court, as represented by the rival samurai family, the Ashikaga, and the Southern Court, who followed the emperor. Two imperial courts existed during 40 years of warfare between these two factions. It ended with the Ashikaga Yoshimitsu unifying the two courts.

Muromachi Period (1336-1573)

The Muromachi district of Kyoto became the capital for the second period in medieval Japanese history. This time period, called the Muromachi or Ashikaga Period (1336-1573), was marked by unrest, disturbances, and violent changes. Warfare destroyed cities and countryside. The shogun’s power was still based on the coalition of *shugo* who helped control land and the power in the provinces. The increased power made many of these warriors wealthy, and this

period saw the development of feudal lords who were called *daimyō*. Their success depended on their military prowess and social connections.

Within their provinces, *daimyō* developed their own local rule. Samurai served a lord or shogun as long as they were rewarded well. The Ashikaga were not able to control the various provinces, so it was the *daimyō* who ruled the local population, often fighting over territory and allies. There were approximately 250 *daimyō* domains at the end of the Ashikaga Period.

Samurai House Rules

I. First of all, you should believe in the Buddha(s) and the Gods.

VII. You should do your hair early [as soon as you rise]. I need not tell you that this rule applies when you are to attend on your lord; but even when you must stay at home because you are not well or have urgent business to do, you should do your hair early, for you must not be seen in an ungroomed state by others.

XII. If you have a little leisure, read books. But hide your reading matter in your breast-fold; in general, you should not let people see you read. But whether in bed or up and about, you must always practice writing; otherwise, you will forget how to read and write characters.

XV. It is boorish and vile to have no poetic sensibility or skill, and you should study the art of poetry.

XVI. In your off-duty hours, practice riding. First you should become skilled in the essentials, and then practice the standard techniques for guiding the horse.

XXI. It is not necessary to write here about the “Arts of peace and War, including Archery and Horsemanship,” for to pursue these is a matter of course. From of old, the rule has been, “Practice the Arts of Peace on the left hand, and the Arts of War on the right.” Mastery of both is required.

Excerpted from “Hojo Soun’s Twenty-One Articles”

Role of Religion

People distressed by the violence and death of the period were attracted to Buddhism, which offered salvation after death. Buddhism had been the religion of scholars and monks but became the religion of ordinary people during the Muromachi. Pure Land Buddhism, which assured salvation to all, became more popular. The impermanence of life, the changing alliances, and the uncertainty of the times gave Zen Buddhism great appeal to the warrior culture.

The popularity of Buddhist beliefs was reflected in the literature of the time. One such example is *Essays in Idleness*, written in the fourteenth century by Yoshida Kenkō.

Were we to live on forever—were the dews of Adashino never to vanish, the smoke on Toribeyama never to fade away—then indeed would men not feel the pity of things... Truly the beauty of life is its uncertainty.

Excerpted from *Essays in Idleness*, by Yoshida Kenkō

Culture and Daily Life

The Ashikaga developed a brilliant culture in which the shogun, *daimyō*, and samurai became patrons of the arts. The military leaders were influenced by Zen Buddhism, which had a profound effect on the government, arts, and education of the warrior government. The tea ceremony, flower arranging, ink painting, contemplative gardens, and Noh theater provided peace in spite of the terrible warfare. The discipline to meditate, practice the arts, and live a life of humility and service fit the demands of a *daimyō*'s life. To be calm in the heat of battle and to achieve excellence in the arts were the requirements of the day. All this was at the heart of Zen.

The rich cultural life of *daimyō* and samurai is reflected in some of Japan's cultural treasures. The shogun built villas, which eventually became temples. Many of these temples have been restored. The villas have beautiful gardens and Buddhist temples where Zen Buddhism inspired the architecture. Yoshimitsu, the third Ashikaga shogun, built the Golden Pavilion or Kinkakuji. Study the pictures of the Golden Pavilion. Another palace called the Silver Pavilion or Ginkakuji was the home of Ashikaga Yoshimasa. Study pictures of this place and its famous Zen rock garden, as well as photos of other Japanese rock gardens. Also examine the photographs of Noh theater. What do these cultural artifacts tell you about the everyday life of the warrior class?

Military Life in Muromachi

Most people are fascinated by the violence and traditions of the warrior life of the samurai and *daimyō*. Most are aware of ritual suicide (*seppuku*, also known as *hara-kiri*, literally "cutting the stomach") but don't realize that the stomach was believed to be where the spirit or soul lived. *Seppuku* was a form of purification, a way to save one's honor and accept responsibility for an error. Everyone recognizes the traditional samurai armor and sword. The long and short swords were prized possessions believed to have spiritual powers. Depending on the soldier's wealth and status, the weapons, armor, and skills differed.

The way of the horse and bow were the most common forms of fighting for the wealthiest samurai and *daimyō*. With the invention of the stirrup, the best fighters increased speed, mobility, and range. Foot soldiers used shields, the *yari* (spear), and the *naginata* (curve-bladed spear). Warriors did not use shields on horseback because they could not shoot arrows. Body armor and the helmet deflected arrows but were not enough protection against swords. When the musket was introduced to Japan under Oda Nobunaga, it became the weapon of choice.

Honor, fame, and reward depended on who was killing whom. Name-announcing before fighting became important to insure people of equal rank and worthiness were fighting each other. Warriors also stated their age, rank, family lineage, and great achievements of themselves and their ancestors. Fighting a warrior beneath one's status offered no monetary reward or honor.

Here is an example of name announcing: We are Oba no Heida Kageyoshi and Oba no Saburo Kagechika, residents of Sagami province and the sons of Oba no Shoji Kagefusa. We are also descendants in the fourth generation of Kamakura no Gongoro Kagemasa. At the time of the storming of the Kanazawa Stockade by Lord Hachiman (Yoshiie) in the Later Three Years War, Kagemasa, who is now revered as a god, was only a youth of sixteen. When shot in the right eye with an arrow, Kagemasa, without even removing the arrow, shot an "answering arrow" and killed an enemy. Thus did he bequeath his name to posterity.

Excerpted from *Hōgen Monogatari: Tale of the Disorder in Hōgen*, translated by William Wilson

Momoyama Period (1573-1603)

The end of the Muromachi came when increasing rivalries between *daimyō* played out in the Onin War (1467-1477). Kyoto was destroyed, and the country spent the next hundred years in chaos known as the Sengoku or Warring States Period.

The Momoyama Period or Momoyama-Azuchi Period reunited Japan after these years of civil war. Over time, three generals worked to limit the powers of the *daimyō* and end the constant warfare between families and provinces.

Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582) expelled the last Ashikaga shogun and began the restoration of order after centuries of war. His castle was built at Azuchi and became the model for huge structures to protect and defend the *daimyō*. Firearms, which had arrived with the Portuguese in 1543, influenced Nobunaga's policies. He was known for brutally eliminating his rivals by any means necessary including burning temples, killing innocent civilians, and assassination.

Nobunaga's leading general, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, finalized the reunification of the country. He defeated some *daimyō*, and made alliances with others so that he became the most powerful man in the land. All recognized his preeminence. Hideyoshi made some major changes, including forcing all non-samurai to give up their weapons. He introduced a class system and limited Chinese and Dutch to trading in Nagasaki in southern Japan. The Portuguese and Spanish were banned from Japan for proselytizing.

Leading a Cultured Life

Zen Buddhism continued its influence on the culture of *daimyō* Japan in the Momoyama period. The rituals and ceremonies, the discipline and meditation, were important to cultural life and training for warfare. Momoyama art was lavish, however, not the rustic simplicity of earlier medieval style. Everything was grand, opulent, and rich. Gold leaf, gold pigment, and lacquer decorated walls and screens.

Hideyoshi was a student of Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591), the most revered Japanese tea master. Rikyū formalized the tea ceremony with rules for behavior focusing on four basic Buddhist principles of harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility. He also designed a simple building to house the ceremony based on a typical Japanese farmer's rustic hut. *Tatami* or rush mats were used for flooring. *Shoji*, sliding screens made of paper and wood, divided the rooms. The *tokonoma*, the ceremonial alcove, was carefully decorated with a seasonally appropriate hanging scroll and flower arrangement for the enjoyment and consideration of the guests.

The teahouse and equipment used in tea ceremony were prized possessions of *daimyō* and samurai. Study the map of the tea room layout. Many architectural features of the teahouse exist today in Japanese homes. Check out the pictures of a tea bowl, bamboo tea spoon, and water jar.

Even the tea ceremony was made into a luxurious event under Hideyoshi, whose gold teahouse and tea bowls were used in a tea ceremony for Kyoto's whole population. Still there was a place for Zen contemplation as reflected in a poem by Hideyoshi.

When tea is made with water drawn from the depths of mind
Whose bottom is beyond measure,
We really have what is called cha-no-yu.

A poem by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, quoted in *Zen and Japanese Culture*

The interest in the arts legitimized the *daimyō*'s and samurai's political and military rule. *Daimyō* built teahouses, perfected the formal actions of the tea ceremony, and displayed prized imported tea bowls and utensils. The *daimyō* might attend a party where he would compete in identifying incense and tea, as well as recite *waka* (Japanese poems) or *renga* (linked poems created by a group of people, each contributing two to three lines).

Daimyō continued military training. They also used their wealth to build castles for defense and to demonstrate their power and ambition. Castle towns developed to serve their needs. This created a flourishing economy of merchants and new classes.

Look at pictures of the Himeji Castle. What would it be like to live here? If you were the *daimyō*, how would living here affect your daily life? Why would a town surrounding your castle be important?

One purpose of large castles was for defense. Another defensive technology of the Momoyama period was armor. Examine the pictures of Momoyama period armor.

The end of the Muromachi is best represented in a famous poem that compares the three shogun of the Muromachi. The actions of the brutal Nobunaga are described in the first line, Hideyoshi is characterized in the second, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the next period in Japanese history known for his perseverance, is the person of the third line.

If the cuckoo does not sing, kill it.
If the cuckoo does not sing, coax it.
If the cuckoo does not sing, wait for it.

Ultimately, Tokugawa Ieyasu ended the warfare and his rule began what is considered the early modern period. The samurai and *daimyō* continued into the Tokugawa era, but their roles changed with 250 years of no war. The endless civil wars were finally over, and Japan turned to a time of increased urbanization, peace, and growth of the merchant class.

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