

## JAPANESE CULTURAL HISTORY

**Introduction** Japanese culture was influenced extensively by Chinese and Korean civilization during the early years of its development. New ideas on technology, religion, language and more were well received by the ruling elites who were seeking normative structures for society. In particular, though Japan had its own religion known as Shintō, Confucianism and Buddhism found a receptive population and was widely adopted in antiquity. Ideas on statehood, law, taxation, social structures and gender were also embraced in the years before the Nara era (710-794). In spite of this, Japanese culture retained a very strong sense of identity separate from that found on the mainland. Its position as a series of islands on the edge of the vast Pacific Ocean allowed its leadership to pick and choose what elements of culture it wanted to adopt and what elements it wished to discard. Like Great Britain, the ocean protected Japanese society from the worst forms of imperialism originating on the mainland. Because of this, Japanese society shares a number of cultural markers with China and Korea, but has its own unique heritage, culture and civilization.

### **PREHISTORY—The Neolithic Age (10,000-2000 BCE)**

**Early Religion.** Organized religion had not yet emerged in neolithic period Japan, but early people were nonetheless very spiritual and sought out answers to some of life's persistent questions. Given that each clan or group existed as a fairly independent unit, customs and rituals varied from place to place and throughout time. They left evidence of many and varied symbols representing spirits associated with hunting, fertility, agriculture, stars and the moon. In particular, bear skulls are known to have been carefully placed in inland pits in areas of spiritual significance. According to Nelly Naumann, one of the foremost scholars in the discipline, large-animal hunting, represented by the most fearsome predator then known in Japan, the bear, is thought to represent this important food source. In coastal areas where fishing provided much of the protein needed for subsistence, dolphin skulls have been found buried in sacred spaces. Other objects such as clay masks have also been found. Finally, among the most pervasive found in sacred pits are objects representing the female form. These objects are associated with fertility deities, the renewal of life and the safe birth of the next generation. Often accompanying the female form are representations of phalluses. For Naumann, the moon was thought to be among the most important deities because of its association with death and rebirth in Japan.

**The Arts.** There is scant evidence of many of the art forms as we know them today. Music, story-telling, painting, drama and the like almost surely existed but have disappeared from the human record. However, one that remains is sculpture in the form of ceramics, pottery and religious artifacts. Indeed, the very long and diverse era known as the neolithic period is understood to be the same epoch because from beginning to end, cord markings appear as decoration on ceramics. Sculptors shaped objects by hand without the use of wheels. They used clay with small amounts of connective fiber to fashion representations of the female form, of masks representing the sun or stars, animals—some with human faces, and phalluses. Early attempts were rather crude and were clearly created by people with little extra time or talent. These early objects were fired in open pits at relatively low temperatures. During periods of warming, for example, approximately 2500 BCE-1500 BCE, early Japanese populations lived in larger groups which allowed for some specialization. During this period, figurines and other ceramics were carefully sculpted with great attention to detail and were lavishly decorated with pigment and inlaid with exquisite decoration. A small number of artists used the medium of stone or bone to carve figures and inlay images and some woodworking rose to the level of art, but most artists used fired clay. Motifs, though more detailed and more carefully executed later in the period, remained much the same as in past millennia.

## IRON AGE (1000 BCE-500 CE)

**Religion.** Organized religion in Japan during the iron age was still in the formative stage. It is known from the Chinese sources, in particular, the *Wei Zhi* (The History of the Wei Kingdom), that the Japanese were spiritual and sought out wisdom through divination. Iron age Japanese burned bones and then attempted to interpret them as a way of discerning spiritual direction. This assumes the presence of an interpreter, most likely a shaman or other holy man or woman. Evidence exists in the form of fired clay images of animals, frogs, the moon and the like that iron age Japanese likely followed animistic practices and were also generally superstitious. The Chinese sources indicate that when going on a long voyage, they appointed a fortune keeper, someone whose job it was to act as the spiritual presence on the trip. He was required to abstain from sexual relations, not eat meat and not even to wash for the duration of the trip. If successful, he was showered with gifts upon his return. If ill fortune befell the trip and the holy man was deemed to have not kept his vows, he could be killed. It is very likely that many Japanese, based on the connection to the Han and Wei, were aware of Confucianism and Buddhism, both of which were well-established on the mainland. However, conclusive proof that organized religion had taken hold in Japan has not yet been discovered.

**Sculpture.** Iron age Japanese produced a full range of ceramics—everything from very utilitarian clay pots to highly decorative religious artifacts to a whistle. In part, the Yayoi period (300 BCE-300 CE) is demarcated from the Jōmon period (8000-300 BCE) which preceded it, and Kofun period (250-538 CE) which followed it, by the particular style of pottery produced. Jōmon period pottery was generally very rough and crudely produced. However, Yayoi period pottery is more refined and used processes that are also found in Korea. It is likely that migrants brought this technology with them from Korea and, finding it useful, was adopted by Japanese potters. In particular, Yayoi period potters burnished porous surfaces with slip, which had the effect of smoothing the surface and making it more waterproof. Slip is a form of liquefied clay that has a slightly different composition than what is found in the body of an object and is added before firing. In addition, slip allowed for different forms of decoration and Yayoi pottery is distinguished by red and occasionally black pigment being used in decoration. There is no evidence of Yayoi potters using a wheel or other mechanical aids during production. Therefore, it is likely that potters used the cord stacking method to mold objects, indicating some continuity between Jōmon pottery and Yayoi pottery.

**Bronze and Iron.** Iron age artisans had also become adept at casting bronze and iron. This technology, which came to Japan very late in human history, was quickly adopted by early Japanese. In particular, artisans crafted iron weapons—swords, tools, armor, rudimentary jewelry and cast bells and mirrors—for use in religious ceremonies. Motifs in sculpture and decoration on pottery included female figures, celestial objects, birds, wild and domesticated animals and structures.

## POST-CLASSICAL PERIOD (500 CE-1500 CE)

**Shintō.** The indigenous religion of Japan is called Shintō. Shintō means the “way of the gods” and is polytheistic. Rather than worshipping one single, all powerful God, as is the case in the religions from the Abrahamic traditions, adherents of Shintō venerate and worship many different gods (*kami*) which are reflected in the natural world. Natural wonders, old trees, waterfalls and the like are examples of objects to be venerated. Shintō has no sacred texts, no code of conduct, little concept of the afterlife and a poorly defined liturgy. Shintō provided a cosmology for Japan and introduced the sun goddess Amaterasu, the founding deity of Japan. It would be difficult to convert to Shintō if one were not Japanese. Shintō is often described as being a way of life for the Japanese, but it is not necessarily a philosophy. One can worship at a Shintō shrine or where ever objects in nature are found. Shintō is not exclusive. In fact, many Japanese are adherents of both Shintō and Buddhism.

**Buddhism.** Buddhism arrived in Japan in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries (probably earlier—but documentary and archaeological evidence for this is lacking) and remains a vibrant part of the religious landscape of Japan today. There are many, many different sects of Buddhism in Japan, some of which have largely disappeared in places such as China and India—where Buddhism originated. The emerging Yamato rulers of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries eagerly embraced Buddhism as a way to legitimize their own rule and provided funding for the building of temples and monasteries. The earliest temple complex constructed, of the Tōdaiji sect, can be found in the ancient capital city of Nara. It was the Emperor Shōmu (701-756) who is credited with the casting of the gigantic, 49ft tall statue of the Daibutsu (great Buddha) which now rests in the great hall in Nara. During this period, Buddhism was privileged in

Japan, generously funded and protected by the Emperor. Temples were built all over Japan and Buddhism became institutionally linked to the throne. The Emperor Kanmu (737-806) also understood the importance of Buddhism in Japan and decided that the new capital city of Heian should have religious institutions of its own. He decided to become a patron of two new sects of Buddhism—Tendai and Shingon. Both of these organizations were later urged to ordain their own clergy (which further diminished the power of the Todaiji sect in Nara) and build complexes on the mountains near the city. Both of these sects are still prominent in Japan today. Buddhism is as important in the history of Japan as the Roman Catholic Church is to the history of Europe.

**Language and Literature. *Kanbun: The Literary Form of Chinese.*** The Chinese language was the single greatest influence on the development of Japanese language and literature. Before the time that Japanese civilization was beginning to coalesce in the 5th and 6th centuries, Japan had a spoken language, but no written language. As Japan's ruling elites learned more and more about the brilliance of China through their envoys abroad, they determined to adopt the written form of the Chinese language as a tool to help govern the Japanese people. After all, the Chinese language represented both a way to communicate in writing—something any government requires—and the glory of the Tang Dynasties—the world's greatest civilization at the time. The Japanese would later call this language *kanbun*—Chinese writing.

*Kanbun* became the language of officialdom and of the imperial household during the Nara period (710-784). It was one of the means through which the ancient government sought to legitimize its rule and assert its authority. By bringing writing to a people who had none, *kanbun* also represented civilization. In time, it came to occupy much the same position in Japan as Latin did in Europe. Later, Chinese characters were also modified to serve as Japanese writing (syllabary). Initially, the Japanese imperial court employed immigrant scribes to act as chroniclers and to help conduct the business of state. Naturally, the need arose over time to train more people to read and write the language. However, the rigors of learning such a difficult foreign language led to the development of many variant forms. Often, sentence structure was modified to reflect a writing style that more closely approximated Japanese grammar. Even at this early stage of language development, the various shades of *kanbun* had begun to blur. Nonetheless, knowledge of the language offered access to power. Many strove to master it. Those who did so were revered as learned, erudite men. By the next historical period, the Heian era (794-1185), *kanbun* had become the language of the elite, the cultured and the refined.

Some of the earliest examples of Japanese writing in *kanbun* can be seen in works produced in the seventh century. One of the most prominent is the *Kenpo Jūshichijō*, known in English as the “Constitution of Seventeen Articles.” Many scholars believe that the Regent Shōtoku Taishi (572-622), revered as one of the most able statesmen in all of Japanese history, wrote or supervised the writing of this document. He was impressed with all things Chinese and probably visited that country on at least one occasion. This document is one of the first works outlining the form and function of the state. Most official documents of the Nara and early Heian periods were written in *kanbun*. Among the famous works of literature written in *kanbun* were the *Kojiki*, *Nihongi* and the *Man'yōshū*. These works represent a significant portion of the extant narratives and poems from the earliest periods of Japanese culture. It should be noted, however, that these works were written in a slightly variant form of *kanbun*. Proper nouns posed the most immediate challenge because no Chinese characters existed to represent place names in Japan or the names of people. Even in its earliest forms, *kanbun* had to be adopted to suit the needs of the Japanese. Japanese literature in pre-history and antiquity therefore reflects both Japanese and Chinese sensibilities.

**Fiction.** *The Tale of Genji*, arguably the world's first novel, was written in a form of language linguists call *wabun*. *Wabun*, as the name suggests, is literally Japanese-style writing. It is distinguished by the use of *kana*—Japanese syllabary which was used to represent Japanese sounds. Nonetheless, some Chinese characters were interspersed in the narrative depending on the author and time period in which it was written. *Wabun* was the language spoken by the Japanese aristocracy of the mid-to-late Heian period. Heian aristocrats were very fond of poetry and sought to express themselves through this medium—a pastime Japanese still consider to be a mark of artistic accomplishment. However, women were not sufficiently educated in the Chinese language to use *kanbun* to write poetry and began to write using the spoken language instead. In this way, *wabun* emerged as an identifiable form by the tenth century. *Wabun* is often described as soft, flowery and richly descriptive. It reflected the privileged lifestyle of the Heian aristocracy. It was also much more accessible to larger segments of the ruling elites than *kanbun*.

*The Tale of Genji* was written in the 11<sup>th</sup> century by Murasaki Shikibu (978-1014). It is a work of narrative fiction with a “realistic” plot, when compared to other works of the same period. The work details the successful and unsuccessful romantic adventures of Prince Genji, the son of an imperial concubine. Many scholars believe that inspiration for some of the events in the work came from the life and exploits of the most politically powerful man in Japan at the time: the courtier (and advisor to the emperor) Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028). *The Tale of*

*Genji* was generally well known in Heian court circles and has come to be considered one of the most important works of long form prose ever composed.

*The Pillow Book* was composed at roughly the same time as *The Tale of Genji*. It was written by Sei Shōnagon (966-1017), who was a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Sadako (977-1001). Unlike *The Tale of Genji*, *The Pillow Book* is a work of observations, of events and personalities of the Imperial court. The author relates stories of romance—both requited and unrequited—directly but with decorum. She was not above sharing gossip, if it suited her purposes. Her insights reveal the aesthetic of the Heian court—how they played, lived, worked and even dressed. In short, her depiction of the Heian court, along with Murasaki Shikibu's *Genji* (and her diary), provides a depiction of Heian Japan which would otherwise have severely limited our knowledge of the age. Their works are all the more important because they provide a woman's perspective—something sorely lacking even in the western world in the same period.

**Zen Buddhism.** In the absence of a strong central government, the Ashikaga period (1336-1477) is remembered for cultural and religious development. Buddhism, in particular, enjoyed a renaissance. This was, in part, because Ashikaga Takauji himself embraced Buddhism as he aged and patronized the religion by funding the building of monasteries and temples. It was the Ashikaga who illuminated the connection between the warrior ethic (*bushidō*) and Zen Buddhism. Zen (Chan in China) had a long presence in Japan, but it was (and still is) a very small sect. Zen stressed an austere lifestyle, the clearing of the mind and the total abandonment of ego. These characteristics, when internalized by soldiers, yielded a disciplined, unselfish warrior, free from worldly attachments and willing to sacrifice his life in service to his lord.

**The Literary Arts in the Kamakura era (1185-1333).** Buddhist themes and plot lines dominated Japanese literature before the modern era. It was, quite simply the single most important idea permeating virtually all genres and all types of writing. This was, in part, because more clergy were literate when compared to the rest of the population and could read and write in far greater numbers than most other segments of society. The church, as an institution, also valued literacy as a way both to proselytize and to disciple their new converts. Itinerant priests traveled from village to village telling (or singing) stories—many of which were designed to be morality plays. They either had to be memorized or written down. However, religion occupied a more prominent role in some narratives than others. One example we have of literature which was very strongly influenced by Buddhism during the Kamakura era (1185-1333) is *Hōjōki* (An Account of My Hut). It was written in the year 1212 by the Buddhist monk Kamo no Chōmei (1155-1216). Chōmei was a published author and celebrated poet at both the imperial and shōgunal courts. He was a low-ranking aristocrat but still held court rank. He is known for his compassion and his willingness to recognize suffering and misery in the lives of others. It is not known why he took the tonsure and became a monk in 1204, but he took the opportunity to remove himself from society and relocate into a tiny hut. From his perch on the south side of a mountain outside Kyoto, Chōmei chronicled a number of the catastrophes he witnessed down in the city. In his poems, he relates instances of fire, famine, loss, destruction and ponders on the impermanence of life. It is the quintessential work reflecting Buddhist values.

**Tsurezuregusa (Essays in Idleness).** *Essays in Idleness* was written by the Buddhist priest Kenkō Yoshida (1283-1352) in the first years of the 1330s. The festering political schism between the senior and junior branches of the Imperial family had finally broken out into open warfare due to the machinations of the Emperor Go-Daigo (1288-1339). In the end, neither Go-Daigo nor the Hōjō regents to the Kamakura Shōgunate survived the turmoil. Instead, a new general seized power and became the next shogun: Ashikaga Takauji (1305-1358)—ushering in an entirely new period in Japanese history called the Ashikaga Era (1336-1477). Kenkō was not involved in the fighting or the scheming at court because he had taken the tonsure a few years earlier. Having been a court poet, he still participated in poetry recitation gatherings at the palace during the transition. *Essays in Idleness* reflects a sense of foreboding, that Japan was entering a degenerate age. And he was correct. Kenkō's observations, idle though they were, reflected Buddhist theology on the ephemeral nature the world.

**The Fine Arts. Tea Ceremony.** The Ashikaga period is remembered for the adoption of Tea Ceremony (*Cha-no-yu*). Tea Ceremony reflects the austere lifestyle of Zen. It is highly stylized and very formal. It is still practiced as an art in Japan and is an activity that all cultured Japanese aspire to participate in at some point in their lives. The austere aesthetic is also evident in some of the representative architecture of the time. For example, the Golden Pavilion (Kinkakuji) in Kyoto was built during the reign of Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (the third Ashikaga shōgun) and later became a Zen monastery. In the dramatic and visual arts, the Ashikaga period saw the importation from China of new forms of monochrome painting. These forms, which were quickly adapted to reflect Japanese artistic

sensibilities, were championed by artists such as Sesshū (1420-1506) who is reported to have been one of the first to have used ink splash techniques. Perhaps the most important and well known of the cultural arts introduced in the Muromachi period were Nō and Kyōgen. These forms, especially Nō, are still performed today and can be seen in most major cities in Japan on any given night.

## EARLY MODERN PERIOD (1500-1800 CE)

**Religion.** Buddhism enjoyed a renaissance during the Tokugawa era (1600-1868), but its role had changed from the Warring States Period (1477-1600). Before the reunification process began under Oda Nobunaga in 1560, Buddhist sects played a prominent role in the political milieu. Given that there was no central state and little in the way of law and order, abbots, priests and monks moved to protect their own interests and prerogatives. In order to do this, they contracted mercenaries and engaged warrior monks, both of which become a security threat in their own right. Nobunaga, however, made it one of his highest priorities to break the power of the church and to remove them from the governmental sphere. He is well known for engaging in acts of excessive brutality and viciousness against Buddhist institutions. Arson, wanton slaughter and vile acts such as the large scale burning at the stake of survivors, the total destruction of temple complexes and the like were all a part of Nobunaga's military campaigns. Buddhism thereafter returned to its more traditional role.

The Tokugawa later found Buddhism to be useful as a tool for social and cultural control. State sanction was returned to the faith. Every family had to register with the local Buddhist temple, which became a repository for recording births, deaths and marriages. It was a way for a non-governmental organization to maintain records which could be used by the state but which cost to the state very little. In a spiritual sense, adherence to the Buddhist faith was mandatory because priests were to interact with parishioners on a yearly basis. Nonetheless, state obligation facilitated perfunctory adherence to the faith, which minimized personal observance.

**Christianity.** Christianity first arrived in Japan during 16<sup>th</sup> century and was very well received. Christians of all sects, Roman Catholics and Protestants, alike appeared and began to make converts among the people and among a number of powerful *daimyō*. These western missionaries and merchants also brought innovations in metallurgy and weaponry, and were willing to sell them to the highest bidder. Oda Nobunaga was an enthusiastic adopter of western military technology. The Tokugawa, however, were very suspicious of all religions other than Buddhism and the indigenous faith, Shintō. Christianity was suspect because Christians believed all authority was derived from Christ—not a secular lord. This was made manifest in the Shimabara Rebellion in 1637 in which several *daimyō* rebelled, in part, against increasingly strict rules on religion. This was the largest conflict between the Battle of Sekigahara and the battles associated with the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Christianity was then outlawed and all missionaries were expelled. Many Japanese Christians were martyred.

**Kabuki.** The Genroku years (between 1688 and 1704) are considered by scholars to have produced some of the greatest works of art (visual, dramatic and literary) of the age. Included among the great artists was the dramatist Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1725), who is often compared to Shakespeare. Kabuki theatre was the most popular of the dramatic arts in the Tokugawa period. It is distinguished (even today) by the prohibition of women on the stage, a ban that took effect in 1629. Chikamatsu is well known for bringing Kabuki to the masses. In particular, his narratives were written to appeal to the average man. Stories about the pleasure districts of Edo (Yoshiwara) or Osaka (Shinmachi) were particular favorites, as were stories of unrequited love and suicide. Kabuki can be rather bawdy, is colorful, fast moving and sometimes brash. It is always interesting and fun to watch. Chikamatsu is very well known for tragedy, for creating a setting in which duty is set against the extremes of human feelings. It is this conflict that produces such a poignancy and intensity of feeling that Chikamatsu excelled at—and it also appealed to a very broad audience. Chikamatsu's ability to move an audience was unrivaled for his time. He occasionally ran afoul of the authorities because he had a tendency to address contemporary issues (something the authorities frowned upon) but placed them in historical settings.

**Bunraku.** Bunraku is best described as puppet theatre. It is believed to have originated in Osaka in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a city in which it thrived in the Tokugawa period and still thrives today. Chikamatsu also wrote for this genre. Indeed, some of his best known works were written for Bunraku. Bunraku was surprisingly popular and allowed Chikamatsu and other dramatists greater control of the presentation of their works (in addition to the narrative). Like modern *anime*, Bunraku frees characters from the constraints of the physical human condition and allows for more stylized, fanciful elements of a narrative to find expression. Bunraku requires two or three

artists/actors to manipulate the doll. It is accompanied by a chanted narrative, and various instruments such as the samisen and drums.

**Censorship.** A number of Chikamatsu Monzaemon's plays were censored. The most well-known example was *Love Suicides at Amijima*. However, self-censorship was practiced more often than actual censorship. Chikamatsu's political satire entitled *The Sagami Lay Monk and the Thousand Dogs* is one such example. This was a dangerous work which criticized the policies of a shōgun soon after his death. Nonetheless, the audience seemed to understand that the work was critical of an ordinance issued by the shogun Tokugawa Tsunayoshi (1646-1709) that forbade the killing of any beast. When there was actual censorship, it occurred most often when a dramatist had slightly overstepped the bound of acceptable public speech or when there was a crackdown—usually associated with a change in leadership or when it appeared that society was being inappropriately influenced by a play.

*Chūshingura (The Forty-Seven Rōnin)* is, without question, the most famous dramatic work of the entire Tokugawa period. It found resonance with the people of Japan in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and has been rewritten, reworked and revised on numerous occasions—but its popularity has endured. It first appeared as a bunraku play in 1748 and has since found expression as a kabuki play, a movie (many times) and even a television series. It is also well known in the western world. Indeed, a movie starring Keanu Reeves on the topic was released in 2014.

## The 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

**The Literary Arts.** At the time of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, there were four official forms of the written language. They were *kanbun*, *sorobun*, *wabun* and *wakankokobun*. *Kanbun* was Chinese style writing. *Sorobun* was the form used in everyday correspondence. *Wabun* was one which most closely reflected the spoken Japanese language several centuries before and *wakankokobun* was a variant Chinese style with markers to indicate how they should be read in Japanese. None was the form of Japanese actually spoken by average Japanese in the Meiji period. In this environment, authors and language specialists took the lead writing Japan's first modern novels and transforming the expression of long form prose. Indeed, many scholars argue that this form of written Japanese acted as a template for the creation of the modern Japanese language.

**Futabatei Shimei (1864-1909)** was a student in the 1880s and had been working on translations of several works from Russian into Japanese, including those written by Ivan Turgenev and Nikolai Gogol. However, he was unable to convey effectively their essence using one of the four classical forms of Japanese. Accordingly, he decided to render them into the colloquial but he could not even decide on basic sentence structure because no grammars existed. After the appearance of *The Essence of the Novel (Shōsetsu shinzui)* by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935), Futabatei initiated a friendship with the literary critic and author that lasted for many decades. Tsubouchi suggested that Futabatei construct a new style based on the performances of San'yūtei Enchō (1839-1900), a famous *yose* performer, (*yose* is best described as the Japanese version of vaudeville) who allowed his stories to be transcribed. Futabatei then wrote *The Floating Cloud (Ukigumo)* in this form. While the mystery of the *genbun'itchi* style (unity of the written and spoken style) was not yet fully solved, Futabatei had made an important first step and had produced what many scholars refer to as Japan's first modern novel.

**Yamada Bimyo (1868-1910).** Around the same time, another author working independently from Tsubouchi and Futabatei began to experiment with the colloquial style, Yamada Bimyo. Bimyo also had been influenced by the introduction of Western novels into Japan and was especially fond of reading the English language works of Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400). He admired Chaucer for producing quality works of fiction in the vernacular during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a time when Latin was the written language of the educated class. Bimyo never finished school, which perhaps contributed to his willingness to experiment to such an extent with the colloquial form. Nonetheless, Bimyo was a prolific author and vocal advocate of language reform.

**Colloquial Style.** Bimyo published several novels, but was never to attain the literary status of Futabatei. In most of his efforts, he was a shameless promoter of the colloquial style and perhaps had gone too far in the eyes of many of his colleagues. He was even one of the first to use Western-style punctuation such as the comma, period, question mark and exclamation point. While Bimyo seemed to have had a command of the mechanics of the colloquial style, he was not as polished as Futabatei when it came to character development and plot sophistication. Bimyo also wrote in a number of different styles, including *gabuntai*, which has led many scholars to question his loyalty to the *genbun'itchi* style.

**Genbun 'itchi Style ( Modern Style)** Among scholars of the Japanese language, there is still much discussion about who created the *genbun 'itchi* form—or even if there was an identifiable form called *genbun 'itchi* in the middle Meiji years. Both Futabatei and Bimyō wrote later in their lives that the style of *Ukigumo* and the style of language used after the publication of Bimyō's *A Song from an Organ Melody (Fūkin shirabe no hitofushi, 1887)* was *genbun 'itchi*. Bimyō himself credited Futabatei with the creation of the *genbun 'itchi* style. Nonetheless, after the publication of Futabatei's and Bimyō's works, over thirty authors were known to be using the *genbun 'itchi* style, including, for a time, such literary luminaries as Mori Ōgai (1862-1922).

**The Kokugaku.** In the decade or so after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, intellectuals, government officials, philosophers, journalists and the like began a period of great experimentation. They looked around the world for a philosophical and ideological framework to replace the Chinese Confucian system they believed had been superseded. Men such as Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901), Mori Arinori (1847-1889) and Nishi Amane (1829-1897) and many, many others were active in various learned societies, published numerous articles, made speeches and debated before many different groups as public intellectuals. This was known as the “Civilization and Enlightenment” movement and though relatively short lived, was very influential but precipitated a cultural backlash. By the 1880s, many Japanese had had enough of the endless embrace of foreign ideas and believed that the period of experimentation had stripped Japanese culture of its essential nature. During this same period, a group of philosophers and intellectuals began to look backward to Japan's ancient past and to the writings of Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801). Motoori studied works such as the *Kojiki* (8<sup>th</sup> century) and the *Man'yōshū* (759CE). Put succinctly, adherents of Motoori and the *kokugaku* came to believe that Japan and Japanese culture was the purest expression of East Asian culture. This is often described as a nativist ideology. For them, China had gotten it wrong and had strayed from the right and true path.

Many of the leaders of the Meiji Restoration had been heavily influenced by *kokugaku* ideology during the 1840s and 1850s and had temporarily strayed from its central tenants in the first decade or so of the Meiji period. However, as Japan moved into the 1880s, this ideology became ascendant. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was the ideology which defined virtually all of the second series of reforms. The cult of the emperor, the state support of Shintō, the Imperial Rescript of Education, the development of *kokugo* (national language) and many other initiatives all reflect this perspective. This remained the central ideology of Japan until 1945.

### Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1900-1949)

**The Literary Arts. Natsume Sōseki.** One of the most beloved of all Japanese modern authors in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is Natsume Sōseki (1867-1916). Sōseki graduated from Tokyo Imperial University and then, given his proficiency in English, attended University College in London. He returned to Japan and accepted a post at Tokyo Imperial University as a lecturer in English literature where he taught criticism and theory. Sōseki had the common touch and in this way is comparable to one of his contemporaries in the United States: Mark Twain. However, Sōseki was also financially savvy and willingly gave up a very respected position at Tokyo Imperial University to become a full-time novelist, a profession far below professor in social status. Rather than trying to earn a living selling novels, Sōseki signed on to the *Asahi Shinbun* (newspaper) and had many of his stories released in serial form. This was beneficial for the newspaper and also provided a stable income for Sōseki. Most importantly, it gave him a ready platform for his new works. His novels and essays were so anticipated that customers would queue up outside of newspaper stands in the mornings waiting for them to open so that they could buy the next installment of his stories.

**Language.** It is during the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the modern novel reached final maturity in Japan. Sōseki is, in part, credited with bringing this to fruition. He wrote in the colloquial form of Japanese so that his works would be accessible to the largest audience. However, his facility with the Japanese language was so great and his works so brilliantly executed that the critics had little effect on him.

**Kokoro.** One of his most well-known (and perhaps important) works was published in 1914 and is entitled *Kokoro*. The title “*Kokoro*” (心) is most often not translated, in part because it is difficult to find an English word which conveys the depth of its multiple meanings. “*Kokoro*” in English is literally translated “heart” but can also mean “spirit”—or can be interpreted as the “essence of things.” The title conveys the internal struggles of the protagonist “Sensei” to find the essence of life in the realm of a dying Meiji emperor, where estrangement and indifference seem to define his existence. This work is all the more important for what it tells us about the expression of sensibilities in long form prose as Japan transitioned from a period of tremendous change and upheaval, where modernity swept

aside long-held traditions of the earlier age. Sensei can be understood as emblematic of the end of an age, particularly because he committed suicide at roughly the same time as the Meiji emperor died. This, of course, was a perplexing event for other characters in the novel who did not fully understand nor appreciate Sensei's motives. Nonetheless, Sensei's decision to end his life was in part atonement for behavior he was ashamed of as a young man. In like fashion, as Japan transitioned into the post-Meiji world, Sōseki seems to suggest that there were Meiji era transgressions that needed absolution before society could move on. Sōseki died from a stomach ulcer only two years after the publication of *Kokoro*. He was only 49 years old. He left at least one novel unfinished.

**Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965).** Tanizaki's literary career began quite early in his life. His first work appeared in 1903, when he was only 17 years old. He came from a modest background and was effectively a scholarship student even in high school. (The condition of being surrounded by students who came from more affluent families, but who were less capable, may have contributed to the formation of his unique perspective on society.) However, his knowledge of the Chinese classics and of European literature—and his writing ability—set him apart from his peers. He then entered Tokyo Imperial University, where by all accounts he in no way distinguished himself. While there, he continued to sell his stories. Ultimately, he decided to abandon the academy and make a living as a full time author. This was a risky move at the time and frowned upon by his family. But his genius, work ethic and indefatigable spirit provided the motivation necessary to become a successful author.

**Unusual Themes.** Though he is among Japan's literary geniuses of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō (1886-1965) is not remembered as a sympathetic person or beloved author. His works are somewhat idiosyncratic and can exhibit a harshness in tone and plot. The narratives found in his novels, essays and plays sometimes pushed the boundaries of acceptable public discourse. Indeed, he ran afoul of the censors on a number of occasions. However, his fiction resonated with a certain segment of the population who found his semi-erotic, sensual themes to reflect the sensibilities of the time. For Tanizaki, few topics were off limits. For example, his characters treated women abominably and were, in turn, treated harshly (or with indifference) by other women. In many of his works, male characters seemed to worship the female form and sometimes went so far as to fantasize about various sexual fetishes. Tanizaki was also not a slave to social convention and was more honest and straightforward in his fiction and in his life than was expected of the time.

**Some Prefer Nettles.** Tanizaki's *Some Prefer Nettles* ranks among his masterpieces. This work was serialized in 1929 during a particularly creative period that also saw the publication of some of his other most famous works of fiction. *Some Prefer Nettles* is set in the Kansai area (the Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe area), which facilitated Tanizaki's use of bunraku (puppetry) imagery, particularly in the depiction of women in the text. It also allowed him to experiment with the Kansai dialect. The story revolves around the unhappy marriage of the characters Kaname and Misako. Kaname's tone is described as "confessional," leading many scholars to believe that Kaname is Tanizaki. We believe this to be the case because we now know that Tanizaki divorced his spouse soon after *Some Prefer Nettles* appeared. Tanizaki continued to live in the Kansai area for many years after the publication of *Some Prefer Nettles*. He survived the war and lived to receive numerous honors including the prestigious Japanese government honor, the *Order of Culture*.

### Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1950-1999)

**The Literary Arts. Mishima Yukio (1925-1970)** is most often known as just "Mishima." Even then, this is a *nom de plume* which he took as a teenager with the publication of one his first works in 1944. His given name was Hiraoka Kimitake. Mishima was something of a prodigy. He wrote short stories and essays as a boy, even though his father was not particularly pleased with him for doing so. Mishima's first love was poetry, particularly the form known as *waka*, and infused his novels, short stories, plays and essays with poetic symbolism. For Mishima, writing poetry was a lifelong pleasure. Mishima was a world-famous author and his body of work so impressive that he was nominated for the Nobel Prize in literature. He was considered by many scholars to be Japan's greatest living post-war author before he took his own life.

It is difficult to consider Mishima's life and Mishima's works apart from the events of November 25, 1970. On this day, Mishima entered the office of the Commander of the Japan Self-Defense Forces, gave a speech on his desire that the emperor be restored to power and then committed ritual suicide (*seppuku*). Though it was clear that he had planned his demise well in advance, his suicide shocked the nation. But there was no *coup d'état*. Scholars and literary specialists then set about reevaluating his writing and examining the body of his work through a different lens. Despite numerous attempts to do so, there is scant evidence that Mishima had devoted his life and



writings to the ultra-nationalist cause, though it is clear that he had drifted very far to the right at the end. Indeed, Mishima was very cosmopolitan, traveled abroad extensively, and had many, many foreign friends. Perhaps his suicide was simply the most dramatic, last act of the performance art which was his life. And he even got to write the final script, down to the death poem found after his suicide.

In many, many of Mishima's narratives, death seemed to be a constant theme, none more so than his short story *Death in Midsummer*. In this work which was set at a resort on Izu Peninsula (a popular vacation area near Tokyo), a family went swimming at a beach with a strong current. Soon thereafter, two young children were swept away and their aunt simultaneously died from a heart attack. Mishima then moved to depict the reaction of the survivors—blame, grief, guilt and the many banal details of the funeral. The characters were deeply hurt, shocked and angry at each other and even at the dead. Tomoko (the mother/spouse) became angry with her husband (Masaru) because he appeared to be grieving more over his sister (Yasue) than his own children. Somehow, Tomoko and Masaru got through it, survived to have another child and finally made a pilgrimage back to the beach two years later. Masaru complained to his wife, "Why the devil did we come here? We only remember things we don't want to. Things we had finally forgotten." For Mishima, death was not to be forgotten. It was an ever present companion, a part of life—to be faced with grace and dignity. Death was for him often the final act of either a tragic life cut short or of a life well lived. Nonetheless, in Mishima's works, death was never far away.

Mishima's stories on death and dealing with grief were, in many ways, brutally honest. *Death in Midsummer* is representative of the way Mishima portrayed the final act. But Mishima didn't shirk from the topic. Indeed, it is likely because there were so many social taboos and cultural conventions about death that Mishima chose to write about it so often. For him, literature was art, and art can be uncomfortable. For the living, there is nothing more universally uncomfortable, nothing that more clearly reveals character, nothing that makes us react in a more visceral way than death.

**Enchi Fumiko** (1905-1986). Another of Japan's great novelists is Enchi Fumiko. Like most of her colleagues, she was the child of privilege. Her father was Ueda Kazutoshi, the most influential pure linguist/literature specialist of his generation. He is considered the "father of the modern Japanese language." Even though they were reportedly not especially close, it is natural that she would develop an interest in the history of Japanese literature.

In addition to her works of fiction in long-form prose, Enchi is also known for her modern translation of *The Tale of Genji*. Unlike many of her post-war colleagues, not many of her works have been translated and she remains less well-known outside of Japan. But this does not diminish the quality of her work. Enchi gained attention with her first play in 1926. In the years after, she expanded her repertoire with the publication of many novels and short stories.

One of Enchi's few novels known widely in the English-speaking world is *Masks* (1958). It is also one of her finest. The central metaphor is, of course, a mask. The protagonist in *Masks* is a woman who, in order to interact with society, must put on a false face. This allows her to deceive the other characters into doing her bidding in a most unpleasant and unscrupulous series of events. The main character is thoroughly unlikable and unsympathetic. Nonetheless, *Masks* resonated with a certain segment of the population in Japan. In a number of Enchi's works, the characters also interact with the supernatural. *Masks* is no exception. In this way, Enchi pays homage to one of the themes found in literature of the Heian period, *The Tale of Genji*. Despite the subject matter and harshness of tone in Enchi's works, and her one-dimensional depiction of men, *Masks* has stood the test of time as one of Japan's finest post-war novels.

**Endō Shūsaku** (1923-1996). With the possible exception of Nobel Laureate Ōe Kenzaburō and Mishima, few post-war authors in Japan are as well-known in the English-speaking world as Endō Shūsaku. Endō was born in Tokyo, spent much of his childhood in Manchuria and attended Keio University during the war. Indeed, he had to abandon his studies for a time after being drafted to work for the war effort. Like many of his colleagues, he wrote in several formats. Endō was, of course, an award-winning novelist. But he was also an accomplished short story author and essayist. He regularly wrote for the *Yomiuri Shinbun* (Newspaper) until very late in his life. Endō was awarded the Japanese government's *Order of Culture* in 1995.

Endō is beloved in both Japan and the West, in part, because of the themes he most often chose to write about. As a Roman Catholic, Endo struggled with how to reconcile his faith and his national identity at a time when very few Japanese were Christians. As a result, he often wrote about Christians in Japan, sometimes setting them in the Tokugawa period when Christianity was banned, and sometimes setting them in more contemporary times. Given his status as a best-selling author (millions of copies of his novels were sold in Japan alone), it is clear that his works resonated with very large segments of the reading population. The success of his works reveal a Japan that

was struggling to understand how it had been/was affected and/or transformed in the aftermath of the war and occupation by the “Christian” West.

In Japan, Endō’s 1966 masterpiece entitled *Silence* sold over two million copies in a very brief period of time. Though his early works had found a following in the 1950s, Endō rocketed to literary stardom worldwide after its publication. *Silence* is set in the Tokugawa era, during the period of time when Christianity was illegal and its adherents executed if they did not apostatize. The protagonist is named Rodrigues, a Portuguese, Jesuit missionary who, in contravention of Japanese law, secretly entered Japan after the “Christian” Shimabara Rebellion. Rodrigues sought out Ferreira, a Jesuit missionary (and his former teacher) who had renounced his faith not because he broke under torture, but because he perceived that God did nothing to alleviate the suffering and torture of other Japanese Christians. Rodrigues was incredulous that his former teacher, whom he respected greatly, had become an apostate and wanted to find out why. Endō’s narrative follows Rodrigues’ psychological (and physical) struggles as he too faced the same dilemma. The basic theme, whether one has the courage of their convictions, is universal for any religion (or none at all) anywhere in the world. This novel was made into a feature film in 2017 by the celebrated director Martin Scorsese.

### Readings

- 1) Junko Habu, *Ancient Jomon of Japan*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004).
- 2) Edward Kidder, *Prehistoric Japanese Arts: Jōmon Pottery*, (Kodansha International, 1968).
- 3) Richard Bowring, *The Religious Traditions of Japan 500-1600*, (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 4) Paul Varley, *The Ōnin War: History of its Origins and Background. With a Selective Translation of the Chronicle of the Ōnin*, (Columbia University Press, 1967).
- 5) Mary Elizabeth Berry, *Japan in Print: Information and Nation in the Early Modern Period*, (Berkeley: University of California, Press, 2006).
- 6) Natsume Soseki, *Kokoro*, translated by Meredith McKinney, (New York: Penguin Classics, 2010).
- 7) Shūsaku Endō, *Silence*, William Johnston, trans., (Tokyo: Kodansha Press, 1982).

### Questions for Discussion

- 1) Religion seemed to play a significant role in the life of the Jōmon people. Why do you think this was such an important element in their culture? What does it tell us about the nature of humanity that so many early cultures placed such a strong value on spirituality? To what extent was religion in Jōmon Japan expressed in a similar fashion to other early cultures and to what extent was it different? Finally, what can we really know about religion in Jōmon Japan? Is a lot what we know based on extrapolation and conjecture?
- 2) The Heian period in Japan (794-1185) is known as the “golden age” of Japanese history. Why do you think historians would describe the period this way? What was good about it? Was it the economy, the military, the arts, literature, or the government? We know that the aristocratic class lived very well and enjoyed life. But how widely was Heian period prosperity enjoyed? What about the average person? Do we know how the average person lived? Is it relevant or important to ask about the plight of the peasants or lower gentry?
- 3) Historians have struggled to discern a meaningful narrative for post-war era Japan that didn’t rely on economics. And there have surely been a significant number of other events, movements and narratives that deserved attention over the past 70+ years. What might some of those events have been? What might be a good alternate narrative for the post-war years? Given that military history would be extremely difficult to approach, should historians focus on cultural or social history? Diplomatic or intellectual history? Or should historians investigate something altogether different?

## Texts

1) From *History of the Kingdom of Wei (Wei zhi, 297 CE)*, found in *Sources of Japanese Tradition*. Edited by Ryusaku Tsunoda, Theodore de Bary and Donald Keene, (Columbia University Press, 1958), pp 4-7.

The people of Wa [Japan] dwell in the middle of the ocean on the mountainous islands southeast of [the prefecture of] Daifang. They formerly comprised more than one hundred communities. During the Han dynasty, [Wa] envoys appeared at the court; today, thirty of their communities maintain intercourse with us through envoys and scribes. ...

In their meetings and in their deportment, there is no distinction between father and so or between men and women. They are fond of liquor. In their worship, men of importance simply clap their hands instead of kneeling or bowing. The people live long, some to one hundred and others to eighty or ninety years. Ordinarily, men of importance have four or five wives; the lesser ones, two or three. Women are not loose in morals or jealous. There is no theft, and litigation is infrequent. In case of violations of the law, the light offender loses his wife and children by confiscation; as for the grave offender, the members of his household and also his kinsmen are exterminated. There are class distinctions among the people, and some men are vassals of others. ...

The country formerly had a man as ruler. For some seventy or eighty years after that there were disturbances and warfare. Thereupon the people agreed upon a woman for their ruler. Her name was Pimiko. She occupied herself with magic and sorcery, bewitching the people. Though mature in age, she remained unmarried. She had a younger brother who assisted her in ruling the country. After she became the ruler, there were few who saw her. She had one thousand women as attendants, but only one man. He served her food and drink and acted as a medium of communication. She resided in a palace surrounded by towers and stockades, with armed guards in a state of constant vigilance. ...

In the sixth month of the second year of Jingchu [238 C.E.], the Queen of Wa sent the grandee Nashonmi and others to visit the prefecture [of Daifang], where they requested permission to proceed to the Emperor's court with tribute. The Governor, Liu Xia, dispatched an officer to accompany the party to the capital. In answer to the Queen of Wa, an edict of the Emperor, issued in the twelfth month of the same year, said as follows:

Herein we address Pimiko, Queen of Wa, whom we now officially call a friend of Wei. The Governor of Daifang, Liu Xia, has sent a messenger to accompany your vassal, Nashonmi, and his lieutenant, Tsushi Gori. They have arrived here with your tribute, consisting of four male slaves and six female slaves, together with two pieces of cloth with designs, each twenty feet in length. You live very far away across the sea; yet you have sent an embassy with tribute. Your loyalty and filial piety we appreciate exceedingly. We confer upon you, therefore, the title "Queen of Wa Friendly to Wei," together with the decoration of the gold seal with purple ribbon. The latter, properly encased, is to be sent to you through the Governor. We expect you, O Queen, to rule your people in peace and to endeavor to be devoted and obedient. ...

When Pimiko passed away, a great mound was raised, more than a hundred paces in diameter. Over a hundred male and female attendants followed her to the grave. Then a king was placed on the throne, but the people would not obey him. Assassination and murder followed; more than one thousand were thus slain.

A relative of Pimiko named Iyo, a girl of thirteen, was [then] made queen and order was restored. Zheng [the Chinese ambassador] issued a proclamation to the effect that Iyo was the ruler. Then Iyo sent a delegation of twenty under the grandee Yazaku, General of the Imperial Guard, to accompany Zheng home [to China]. The delegation visited the capital and presented thirty male and female slaves. It also offered to the court five thousand white gems and two pieces of carved jade, as well as twenty pieces of brocade with variegated designs.

2) From the *Nihongi, 720 CE (The Chronicles of Japan)*, translated by W. G. Aston, 1896, pp. 128-133. The Constitution of Prince Shōtoku. In the public domain.

C.E. 604, Summer, 4<sup>th</sup> Month, 3<sup>rd</sup> day. The Prince Imperial Shōtoku in person prepared laws for the first time. There were seventeen clauses, as follows:

1. Harmony should be valued and quarrels should be avoided. Everyone has his biases, and few men are far-sighted. Therefore some disobey their lords and fathers and keep up feuds with their neighbors. But when the superiors are in harmony with each other and the inferiors are friendly, then affairs are discussed quietly and the right view of matters prevails.

2. The three treasures, which are Buddha, the (Buddhist) Law and the (Buddhist) Priesthood; should be given sincere reverence, for they are the final refuge of all living things. Few men are so bad that they cannot be taught their truth.

3. Do not fail to obey the commands of your Sovereign. He is like Heaven, which is above the Earth, and the vassal is like the Earth, which bears up Heaven. When Heaven and Earth are properly in place, the four seasons follow their course and all is well in Nature. But if the Earth attempts to take the place of Heaven, Heaven would simply fall in ruin. That is why the vassal listens when the lord speaks, and the inferior obeys when the superior acts. Consequently when you receive the commands of your Sovereign, do not fail to carry them out or ruin will be the natural result.

4. The Ministers and officials of the state should make proper behavior their first principle, for if the superiors do not behave properly, the inferiors are disorderly; if inferiors behave improperly, offenses will naturally result. Therefore when lord and vassal behave with propriety, the distinctions of rank are not confused: when the people behave properly the Government will be in good order.

5. Deal impartially with the legal complaints which are submitted to you. If the man who is to decide suits at law makes gain his motive, and hears cases with a view to receiving bribes, then the suits of the rich man will be like a stone flung into water, meeting no resistance, while the complaints of the poor will be like water thrown upon a stone. In these circumstances the poor man will not know where to go, nor will he behave as he should.

6. Punish the evil and reward the good. This was the excellent rule of antiquity. Therefore do not hide the good qualities of others or fail to correct what is wrong when you see it. Flatterers and deceivers are a sharp weapon for the overthrow of the state, and a sharp sword for the destruction of the people. Men of this kind are never loyal to their lord, or to the people. All this is a source of serious civil disturbances.

7. Every man has his own work. Do not let the spheres of duty be confused. When wise men are entrusted with office, the sound of praise arises. If corrupt men hold office, disasters and tumult multiply. In all things, whether great or small, find the right man and they will be well managed. Therefore the wise sovereigns of antiquity sought the man to fill the office, and not the office to suit the man. If this is done the state will be lasting and the realm will be free from danger.

8. Ministers and officials should attend the Court early in the morning and retire late, for the whole day is hardly enough for the accomplishment of state business. If one is late in attending Court, emergencies cannot be met; if officials retire early, the work cannot be completed.

9. Good faith is the foundation of right. In everything let there be good faith, for if the lord and the vassal keep faith with one another, what cannot be accomplished? If the lord and the vassal do not keep faith with each other, everything will end in failure.

10. Let us control ourselves and not be resentful when others disagree with us, for all men have hearts and each heart has its own leanings. The right of others is our wrong, and our right is their wrong. We are not unquestionably sages, nor are they unquestionably fools. Both of us are simply ordinary men. How can anyone lay down a rule by which to distinguish right from wrong? For we are all wise sometimes and foolish at others. Therefore, though others give way to anger, let us on the contrary dread our own faults, and though we may think we alone are in the right, let us follow the majority and act like them.

11. Know the difference between merit and demerit, and deal out to each its reward and punishment. In these days, reward does not always follow merit, or punishment follow crime. You high officials who have charge of public affairs, make it your business to give clear rewards and punishments.

12. Do not let the local nobility levy taxes on the people. There cannot be two lords in a country; the people cannot have two masters. The sovereign is the sole master of the people of the whole realm, and the officials that he appoints are all his subjects. How can they presume to levy taxes on the people.

13. All people entrusted with office should attend equally to their duties. Their work may sometimes be interrupted due to illness or their being sent on missions. But whenever they are able to attend to business they should do so as if they knew what it was about and not obstruct public affairs on the grounds they are not personally familiar with them.

14. Do not be envious! For if we envy others, then they in turn will envy us. The evils of envy know no limit. If others surpass us in intelligence, we are not pleased; if they are more able, we are envious. But if we do not find wise men and sages, how shall the realm be governed?

15. To subordinate private interests to the public good—that is the path of a vassal. Now if a man is influenced by private motives, he will be resentful, and if he is influenced by resentment he will fail to act harmoniously with others. If he fails to act harmoniously with others, the public interest will suffer. Resentment interferes with order and is subversive of law.

16. Employ the people in forced labor at seasonable times. This is an ancient and excellent rule. Employ them in the winter months when they are at leisure, but not from Spring to Autumn, when they are busy with agriculture or with the mulberry trees (the leaves of which are fed to silkworms). For if they do not attend to agriculture, what will there be to eat? If they do not attend to the mulberry trees, what will there be for clothing?

17. Decisions on important matters should not be made by one person alone. They should be discussed with many people. Small matters are of less consequence and it is unnecessary to consult a number of people. It is only in the case of important affairs, when there is a suspicion that they may miscarry, that one should consult with others, so as to arrive at the right conclusion.

3) From *The Tale of Genji*, first published in 1008 CE. A poetic account of a failed nighttime assignation between Michinaga no Fujiwara, the most powerful man in Japan and the author, Murasaki Shikibu. In the public domain.

*Michinaga:*

“How sad for him who stands the whole night long  
Knocking on your cedar door  
Tap-tap-tap like the cry of the kuina bird.”

*Murasaki Shikibu's response:*

“Sadder for her who had answered the kuina's tap,  
For it was no innocent bird who stood there knocking on the door”

4) “On the Vanity of Human Desires.” From *The Miscellany of a Japanese Priest (Tsurezure Guza)*, translated by William N. Porter, (London: Humphrey Milford, 1914), pp. 34-36. In the public domain.

He who afflicts his whole life by spending it in the pursuit of riches and fame, leaving himself no leisure for quiet, is but a fool.

However great his wealth may be, he is still too poor to safeguard himself; for his money is an agent which will only buy him misfortune and call in affliction. He may “pile up his gold even to the Great

Bear," but his heirs after his death will have great anxieties, and he will soon weary of taking delight only in rejoicing the eyes of silly people. Though his carriages are big, his horses are fat, and he himself is adorned with gold and jewels, wise men will think him but a sad fool. Let him throw away his gold among the mountains and fling his jewels into the deepest pool, for there is no greater simpleton than he who is blinded by money.

Some men hope that, as their fame is not buried with them, it will remain long after they are dead. But could we say that a man had excelled because he had acquired high rank and great honor? For however, ignorant and foolish he is, if he comes of a good family or has good luck, he may rise to high rank and lead a life of luxury. The Wise Man (Mencius) and the Sage (Confucius), both very worthy, were themselves content with low rank. So that he who earnestly strives for high rank and office comes next in foolishness.

Others again aim at leaving behind them in the world the very best reputation for the capabilities and kindness. Yet on thinking it over carefully we find that this desire for fame is in reality love of praise. Those who may praise or blame, however, will not long be alive themselves, and those who may know of them by repute will soon be gone also. Whose censure, therefore, (need you fear) and whose commendation can you wish for? Moreover, praise leads only to blame. Therefore to leave a good name behind one is quite pointless, and he who aims at it comes next in foolishness.

If I may add a word of advice to those who seek persistently for knowledge and crave for learning—cleverness is productive of cunning and the worldly lusts are increased by ability. Knowledge gained by study and by listening to what is taught by others is not the true wisdom. Then what can we say is wisdom? For right and wrong are inextricably mixed together. And what can we say is goodness? A true man is above all (standards of) wisdom, virtue, ability or reputation. Who can properly appreciate him now, or hereafter? Not because he hides his virtues or pretends to be foolish, but because his whole existence is altogether beyond the limits of wisdom of folly, riches or poverty.

I have already written of the pursuit of riches and fame with an infatuated mind. Not only these but all things are profitless; not worth speaking of, not worth wishing for.