

Japanese art

General characteristics

The study of Japanese art has frequently been complicated by the definitions and expectations established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Japan was opened to the West. The occasion of dramatically increased interaction with other cultures seemed to require a convenient summary of Japanese aesthetic principles, and Japanese art historians and archaeologists began to construct methodologies to categorize and assess a vast body of material ranging from Neolithic pottery to wood-block prints. Formulated in part from contemporary scholarly assessments and in part from the syntheses of enthusiastic generalists, these theories on the characteristics of Japanese culture and, more specifically, Japanese art not unexpectedly bore the prejudices and tastes of the times. There was, for example, a tendency to cast the court art of the **Heian period** (794–1185) as the apex of Japanese artistic achievement. The aesthetic preference for refinement, for images subtly imbued with metaphoric meaning, reflected the sublimely nuanced court mores that permitted only oblique reference to emotion and valued suggestion over bold declaration. Existing in tandem with the canonization of the Heian court aesthetic was the notion that the aesthetic sensibilities surrounding the **tea ceremony** were quintessentially Japanese. This communal ritual, developed in the 16th century, emphasized the hyperconscious juxtaposition of found and finely crafted objects in an exercise intended to lead to subtle epiphanies of insight. It further highlighted the central role of indirection and understatement in the Japanese visual aesthetic.

One of the most important proselytizers of Japanese culture in the West was **Okakura Kakuzō**. As curator of Japanese art at the **Boston Museum of Fine Arts**, he expounded the mysteries of Asian art and culture to appreciative Boston Brahmins. As the author of such works as *The Ideals of the East* (1903), *The Awakening of Japan* (1904), and *The Book of Tea* (1906), he reached an even wider audience eager to find an antidote to the clanging steel and belching smokestacks of Western modernity. Japan—and, writ large, Asia—was understood as a potential source of spiritual renewal for the West. There was an ironic counterpoint to Okakura's lessons when a thoroughly modern Japanese navy made mincemeat of the proud Russian fleet steaming through the Tsushima Strait in the climactic moment of the **Russo-Japanese War** (1904–05). This surprisingly bellicose Japan was clearly more than tea and gossamer, and it seemed that perhaps an overly selective definition of Japanese arts and culture might have excluded useful hints of violence, passion, and deeply influential strains of heterodoxy.

At the opening of the 21st century, superficial impressions of Japan still fostered a nagging schizophrenic image combining the polar characteristics of elegant refinement and economic prowess. The pitfalls of oversimplification have been noted above, however, and a century of scholarship, both Japanese and Western, has provided ample evidence of a heritage of visual expression that is as utterly complex and varied as the wider culture that produced it. Nevertheless, within the diversity discernible patterns and inclinations can be recognized and characterized as Japanese.

Most Japanese art bears the mark of extensive interaction with or reaction to outside forces. **Buddhism**, which originated in India and developed throughout Asia, was the most persistent vehicle of influence. It provided Japan with an already well-established **iconography** and also offered perspectives on the relationship between the visual arts and spiritual development. Notable influxes of **Buddhism** from Korea occurred in the 6th and 7th centuries. The Chinese Tang

international style was the focal point of Japanese artistic development in the 8th century, while the iconographies of Chinese Esoteric Buddhism were highly influential from the 9th century. Major immigrations of Chinese Chan (Japanese: **Zen**) Buddhist monks in the 13th and 14th centuries and, to a lesser degree, in the 17th century placed indelible marks on Japanese visual culture. These periods of impact and assimilation brought not only religious iconography but also vast and largely undigested features of Chinese culture. Whole structures of cultural expression, ranging from a **writing system** to political structures, were presented to the Japanese.

Various theories have thus been posited which describe the development of Japanese culture and, in particular, visual culture as a cyclical pattern of assimilation, adaptation, and reaction. The reactive feature is sometimes used to describe periods in which the most obviously unique and indigenous characteristics of Japanese art flourish. For example, during the 10th and 11th centuries of the Heian period, when, for political reasons, extensive contact with China ceased, there was consolidation and extensive development of distinctive Japanese painting and **writing** styles. Similarly, the vast influence of Chinese **Zen** aesthetic that marked the culture of the **Muromachi period** (1338–1573)—typified by the taste for ink monochrome painting—was eclipsed at the dawn of the **Tokugawa period** (1603–1867) by boldly colourful genre and decorative painting that celebrated the blossoming native culture of the newly united nation. The notion of cyclical assimilation and then assertion of independence requires extensive nuancing, however. It should be recognized that, while there were periods in which either continental or indigenous art forms were dominant, usually the two forms coexisted.

Another pervasive characteristic of Japanese art is an understanding of the **natural world** as a source of spiritual insight and an instructive mirror of human emotion. An indigenous religious sensibility that long preceded Buddhism perceived that a spiritual realm was manifest in nature (*see Shinto*). Rock outcroppings, waterfalls, and gnarled old trees were viewed as the abodes of spirits and were understood as their personification. This belief system endowed much of nature with numinous qualities. It nurtured, in turn, a sense of proximity to and intimacy with the world of spirit as well as a trust in nature's general benevolence. The cycle of the seasons was deeply instructive and revealed, for example, that immutability and transcendent perfection were not natural norms. Everything was understood as subject to a cycle of birth, fruition, death, and decay. Imported Buddhist notions of transience were thus merged with the indigenous tendency to seek instruction from nature.

Attentive proximity to nature developed and reinforced an aesthetic that generally avoided artifice. In the production of works of art, the natural qualities of constitutive materials were given special prominence and understood as integral to whatever total meaning a work professed. When, for example, Japanese Buddhist sculpture of the 9th century moved from the stucco or **bronze** Tang models and turned for a time to natural, unpolychromed woods, already ancient iconographic forms were melded with a preexisting and multileveled respect for wood.

Union with the natural was also an element of **Japanese architecture**. Architecture seemed to conform to nature. The symmetry of Chinese-style temple plans gave way to asymmetrical layouts that followed the specific contours of hilly and mountainous topography. The borders existing between structures and the natural world were deliberately obscure.

Elements such as long verandas and multiple sliding panels offered constant vistas on nature—although the nature was often carefully arranged and fabricated rather than wild and real.

The perfectly formed work of art or architecture, unweathered and pristine, was ultimately considered distant, cold, and even grotesque. This sensibility was also apparent in tendencies of Japanese religious **iconography**. The ordered hierarchical sacred cosmology of the Buddhist world generally inherited from China bore the features of China's earthly imperial court system. While some of those features were retained in Japanese adaptation, there was also a concurrent and irrepressible trend toward creating easily approachable deities. This usually meant the elevation of ancillary deities such as Jizō Bosatsu (Sanskrit: **Kshitigarbha** bodhisattva) or Kannon Bosatsu (**Avalokiteshvara**) to levels of increased cult devotion. The inherent compassion of supreme deities was expressed through these figures and their iconography.

The interaction of the spiritual and natural world was also delightfully expressed in the many narrative **scroll paintings** produced in the medieval period. Stories of temple foundings and biographies of sainted founders were replete with episodes describing both heavenly and demonic forces roaming the earth and interacting with the populace on a human scale. There was a marked tendency toward the comfortable domestication of the supernatural. The sharp distinction between **good and evil** was gently reduced, and otherworldly beings took on characteristics of human ambiguity that granted them a level of approachability, prosaically flawing the perfect of either extreme.

Even more obviously decorative works such as the brightly polychromed overglaze enamels popular from the 17th century selected the preponderance of their **surface** imagery from the natural world. The repeated patterns found on surfaces of textiles, **ceramics**, and **lacquer ware** are usually carefully worked abstractions of natural forms such as waves or pine needles. In many cases pattern, as a kind of hint or suggestion of molecular substructure, is preferred to carefully rendered realism.

The everyday world of human endeavor has been carefully observed by Japanese artists. For example, the human **figure** in a multiplicity of mundane poses was memorably recorded by the print artist **Hokusai** (1760–1849). The quirky and humorous seldom eluded the view of the many anonymous creators of medieval **hand scrolls** or 17th-century genre **screen paintings**. Blood and gore, whether in battle or criminal mayhem, were vigorously recorded as undeniable aspects of the human. Similarly, the sensual and erotic were rendered in delightful and uncensorious ways. The reverence and curiosity about the natural extended from botany to every dimension of human activity.

In summary, the range of Japanese visual art is extensive, and some elements seem truly antithetical. An illuminated sutra manuscript of the 12th century and a macabre scene of *seppuku* (ritual disembowelment) rendered by the 19th-century print artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi can be forced into a common aesthetic only in the most artificial way. The viewer is thus advised to expect a startling range of diversity. Yet, within that diverse body of expression, certain characteristic elements seem to be recurrent: art that is aggressively assimilative, a profound respect for nature as a model, a decided preference for delight over dogmatic assertion in the description of phenomena, a tendency to give compassion and human scale to religious **iconography**, and an affection for materials as important vehicles of meaning.

Formative period

The arrival of Buddhism and its attendant iconography in Japan in the mid-6th century CE serves as a dramatic dividing line in the consideration of the history of Japanese visual expression. With the advent of Buddhism, a vast array of already matured iconography and artistic technique was assimilated with comparative speed. This moment determined the course of the development of Japanese art.

What preceded the introduction of Buddhism is a matter of complex and constantly revised archaeological record. Pre- and protohistoric sites have been noted and chronicled in Japan as early as the 8th century CE, but the evidence was usually interpreted according to prevailing mythologies and narratives of national origin. It was not until the Tokugawa, or Edo, period (1603–1867) that occasional attempts were made to provide systematic surveys and detailed drawings of archaeological sites. The new interest in collecting and categorizing data was in part due to the influence of Neo-Confucian thought and to the introduction, primarily through contacts with the Dutch, of European methodology. For the most part, however, Edo, like preceding periods, was indisposed to the relative objectivity required to interpret archaeological findings. Indeed, an important intellectual trend of the period, *kokugaku* (“national learning”), was essentially a nativist movement committed to interpreting phenomena so as to underscore Japan’s unique origins. Nevertheless, a few Japanese scholars began to allude to the possible incompatibility of the emerging archaeological record with “official” histories.

From 1877 to 1879 the American zoologist Edward Sylvester Morse undertook research in Japan. His discovery of pottery in a **shell mound**, really a prehistoric refuse heap, on the coast at Ōmori in southwestern Tokyo, served as an important catalyst in directing the attention of young Japanese scholars to the methodical investigation of Japan’s prehistoric sites.

Concurrently, Japanese universities began to introduce these studies into their curricula. It was not until the second decade of the 20th century, however, that Japanese archaeologists achieved a consensus on the need for the application of a rigorous and disciplined archaeological method. Essential to this process were carefully recorded stratigraphic excavations.

The terminology and chronology used in describing pre- and protohistoric Japan is generally agreed to be that of a Paleolithic, or **Pre-Ceramic**, stage dating from approximately 30,000 BCE (although some posit an initial date as early as 200,000 BCE); the Jōmon period (c. 10,500–3rd century BCE), variously subdivided; the Yayoi period (3rd century BCE–3rd century CE); and the Tumulus, or Kofun, period (3rd century–710 CE).

Paleolithic stage

Until about 18,000 years ago, what is now known as the Japanese archipelago was connected to the East Asian landmass at several points. Similarly, the now divided islands were also joined at some points. In the south the Ōsumi Islands off Kagoshima were joined to the Ryukyu Islands; Korea and Japan, now separated at Tsushima Strait, were connected; the northern island of Hokkaido was connected to Siberia at Sakhalin; and Hokkaido was joined to northern Honshu, the main island of the archipelago. These land passages account for the discovery of the remains of both prehistoric animals and microlithic cultures (but no pottery) of types usually associated with the continent. Continued warming trends, beginning about 20,000 years ago, eventually raised **sea levels**, thus cutting off all but the northern passage from Siberia, which had originally been too cold for but was now more hospitable to human access.

The earliest human populations on the archipelago had subsisted on hunting and foraging, but with the warming trends the bounty of large, easy-to-fell animals began to die out while the variety and density of plant life rose dramatically. The increase in the number of sites discovered dating from 15,000 to 18,000 years ago suggests that once-roaming bands of hunter-gatherers were becoming gradually more sedentary and less dependent on foraging. As further evidence, the remains of charred cooking stones, indicating prolonged periods of use, have been discovered, and manufactured projectile points, including worked obsidian, dating from this period provide evidence of the people's adaptive skill in bringing down smaller, swifter game.

Approximately 12,000 to 10,000 years ago the definitive conditions for what is termed a Mesolithic stage became apparent: a **hunting culture** employed microliths (small worked stones used, for example, in arrows) and, in addition, manufactured pottery. Just as the use of microlith weapons increased as a result of a decline in the numbers of big game, the manufacture of pottery was probably necessitated by a food supply crisis that required a means of storage and, perhaps, a method for boiling or otherwise cooking plants.

Jōmon period

Beginning in 1960, excavations of stratified layers in the Fukui Cave, Nagasaki prefecture in northwestern **Kyushu**, yielded shards of dirt-brown **pottery** with applied and incised or impressed decorative elements in linear relief and parallel ridges. The pottery was low-fired, and reassembled pieces are generally minimally decorated and have a small round-bottomed shape. Radiocarbon dating places the Fukui find to approximately 10,500 BCE, and the Fukui shards are generally thought to mark the beginning of the Jōmon period. This early transitional period seems to lack convincing evidence of plant cultivation which would, along with microlith and pottery production, allow it to meet the criteria for a Neolithic culture.

The name **Jōmon** is a translation for “cord marks,” the term **Morse** used in his book *Shell Mounds of Omori* (1879) to describe the distinctive decoration on the prehistoric pottery shards he found. Other names, such as “Ainu school pottery” and “shell mound pottery,” were also applied to pottery from this period, but after some decades—although cord marks are not the defining decorative scheme of the type—the term **jōmon** was generally accepted. The earliest stage of the period, to which the Fukui shards belong, has been given various names, including Incipient Jōmon and Subearliest Jōmon. Some scholars even call it Pre-Jōmon and argue that life during this stage showed only a slight advance from that of the Paleolithic. In 1937 **Yamanouchi Sugao** suggested the subdivisions Earliest, Early, Middle, Late, and Latest Jōmon for the remainder of the period. With refinements in chronology and the addition of some subsets, this terminology remains in use.

Site evidence and stratigraphic indications of climate and topological change have been used to construct **general theories** about the life of the populations existing from the Paleolithic through Jōmon periods. The profile which emerges is that of inhabitants gradually isolated on an island chain with a generally **temperate climate** and abundant food sources. Changes in temperature accounted for **population movements** to and from mountains and coastal areas, with attendant dietary changes and adaptation to the preparation and storage of food.

The period called Earliest, or Initial, Jōmon (c. 7500–5000 BCE) produced bullet-shaped pots used for cooking or boiling food. The tapered bases of the pots were designed to stabilize the vessels in soft soil and ash at the centre of a fire pit. Decorative schemes included markings made by pressing shells and cords or by rolling a carved stick into the clay before it hardened. The shapes and worked surface textures of these early vessels suggest their probable precursors—leather, bark, or woven reed containers reinforced with clay. The Hanawadai site in Ibaraki prefecture constitutes the first recognized Earliest Jōmon community.

Early Jōmon (5000–3500 BCE) sites suggest a pattern of increased stabilization of communities, the formation of small settlements, and the astute use of abundant natural resources. A general climatic warming trend encouraged habitation in the mountain areas of central Honshu as well as coastal areas. Remains of pit houses have been found arranged in horseshoe formations at various Early Jōmon sites. Each house consisted of a shallow pit with a tamped earthen floor and a grass roof designed so that rainwater runoff could be collected in storage jars.

Early Jōmon vessels generally continued the fundamental profile of a cone shape, narrow at the foot and gradually widening to the rim or mouth, but most had flat bottoms, a feature found only occasionally in the Earliest Jōmon period. The characteristic markings were impressed on damp clay with a twisted cord or cord-wrapped stick to produce a multiplicity of patterns. Other techniques, including shell impressions, were also used. In addition to the flared-mouth jars, shallow bowls and narrow-necked bottles were also introduced. The discovery of increasing varieties of flat-bottomed vessels appropriate for cooking, serving, and providing storage on flat earthen floors correlates with the evidence of the gradual formation of pit-house villages.

While pottery was the main form of visual expression in the Early Jōmon period, wood carving and lacquering are among the other significant forms of expression, suggesting the development of a more complex culture. Ropes, reed baskets, and wooden objects have been found at the Torihama mound site in Fukui prefecture. The oldest known examples of Japanese lacquerware—bowls and a comb—are also from this site.

The Middle Jōmon period (3500–2500 BCE) witnessed a dramatic increase both in population and in the number of settlements. Signs of incipient agriculture can be detected in this period, but this may have involved settling near wild plants and storing them effectively. Vessels began to take on heavy decorative schemes employing applied clay. The use of vessels for purposes beyond cooking and storage is also noted. Clay lamps, drum shells, and figurines strongly suggest an expanding use of the medium for religious symbolic expression. Fertility images of clay female figurines with exaggerated breasts and hips and of stone phalli have been located on stone platforms placed on the northwest side of dwellings. These platforms may represent early household altars. There is evidence that ritual relocation or removal from a site because of death or other polluting factors was occasionally practiced. During this period jars were associated with burial and were characteristically damaged so as to prohibit any other type of use.

Three distinct vessel styles were produced during the Middle Jōmon. The Katsusaka type, produced by mountain dwellers, has a burnt-reddish surface and is noted especially for extensive and flamboyant applied decorative schemes, some of which may have been related to a snake cult. The Otamadai type, produced by lowland peoples, was coloured dirt-brown with a mica additive and is somewhat more restrained in design. The Kasori E type has a salmon-orange

surface. During this period a **red ochre** paint was introduced on some vessel surfaces, as was burnishing, perhaps in an attempt to reduce the porosity of the vessels.

In the Late Jōmon (2500–1000 BCE) colder temperatures and increased rainfall forced migration from the central mountains to the eastern coastal areas of Honshu. There is evidence of even greater interest in **ritual**, probably because of the extensive decrease in population. From this time are found numerous ritual sites consisting of long stones laid out radially to form concentric circles. These stone circles, located at a distance from habitations, may have been related to burial or other ceremonies. Previously disparate tribes began to exhibit a greater cultural uniformity. Artifacts discovered in diverse coastal areas show a uniform vocabulary of expression and a consistent decorative system, suggesting more sophisticated methods of manufacturing, such as controlled firing of pottery, and increased specialization. The technique of erased cord marking, in which areas around applied cord marks were smoothed out, was increasingly used. This relates to a more **general practice** or interest in polished pottery surfaces. A unique black polished pottery type called Goryo has been found in central Kyushu. Some scholars suggest that this may in some way be imitative of Chinese black Longshan pottery (c. 2200–1700 BCE).

Evidence from the Latest, or Final, Jōmon (c. 1000–3rd century BCE) suggests that inhospitable forces, whether **contagious disease** or climate, were at work. There was a considerable decrease in population and a regional fragmentation of cultural expression. Particularly noteworthy was the formation of quite distinct cultures in the north and south. The discovery of numerous small ritual implements, including pottery, suggests that the cultures developing in the north were rigidly structured and evinced considerable interest in ritual.

More than 50 percent of the Latest Jōmon sites are in northern Honshu, where significant quantities of polished or burnished pottery and **lacquer ware** have been found. In fact, it is from this time that **lacquer working**—used for both decorative and waterproofing purposes—begins to emerge as a distinct craft. In general, the northern distinction between utilitarian and ritual ware became more pronounced, and the ritual ware became more elaborately conceived. The latter phenomenon is clearly illustrated by the unusual clay figurines with enormous goggle eyes that are characteristic of the Latest Jōmon.

In the south, mobility and informality were the emerging characteristics of social organization and artistic expression. In distinction to the northern culture, the south seemed more affected by outside influences. Indeed, the incursions of continental culture would, in a few centuries, be based in the Kyushu area.

Yayoi period

In 1884 a shell mound site in the Yayoi district of Tokyo yielded pottery finds that were initially thought to be variants of Jōmon types but were later linked to similar discoveries in Kyushu and Honshu. Scholars gradually concluded that the pottery exhibited some continental influences but was the product of a distinct culture, which has been given the name Yayoi.

Both archaeological and written evidence point to increasing interaction between the mainland and the various polities on the Japanese archipelago at this time. Indeed, the chronology of the Yayoi period (3rd century BCE–3rd century CE) roughly corresponds with the florescence of the aggressively internationalized **Chinese Han dynasty** (206 BCE–220 CE).

Chinese emissarial records from that period include informative observations about customs and the sociopolitical structure of the Japanese population. The Chinese noted that there were more than 100 distinct “kingdoms” in Japan and that they were economically interdependent but also contentious. Other records suggest that the inhabitants of the archipelago traveled to the Korean peninsula in search of iron.

The **Yayoi culture** thus marked a period of rapid differentiation from the preceding **Jōmon culture**. Jōmon, a hunting-and-gathering culture with possibly nascent forms of agriculture, experienced changes and transitions primarily in reaction to climatic and other natural stimulants. Yayoi, however, was greatly influenced by knowledge and techniques imported from China and **Korea**. The impact of continental cultures is decidedly clear in western Japan from *c.* 400 BCE, when primitive wet-rice cultivation techniques were introduced. Attendant to the emerging culture based on sedentary agriculture was the introduction of a significant architectural form, the raised thatched-roof granary. **Bronze** and iron implements and processes of metallurgy were also introduced and quickly assimilated, as the Yayoi people both copied and adapted types and styles already produced in China and Korea. Thus, while the decorative instincts of the Jōmon culture were limited primarily to the manipulation of clay, a variety of malleable materials, including bronze, iron, and glass, were increasingly available to artisans of the Yayoi period. The introduction of these various technologies, the development of a stable agricultural society, and the growth of a complex **social hierarchy** that characterized the period became the springboards for various forms of creative expression and provided increasing opportunities for the development of artistic forms.

The Yayoi period is most often defined artistically by its dramatic shift in pottery style. The new type of pottery, reflecting continental styles, was made first in western Japan. It then moved eastward and became assimilated with existing Jōmon styles. Jōmon pottery was **earthenware** formed from readily available sedimentary clay and was generally stiff. Yayoi pottery was formed from a fine-grained clay of considerable plasticity found in the delta areas associated with rice cultivation. It was smooth, reddish orange in colour, thinly potted, symmetrical, and minimally decorated. The simpler, more reserved styles and forms emulated Chinese earthenware. It was also at this time that pottery began to be produced in sets, including pieces made for the storing, cooking, and serving of food.

In addition to the characteristic pottery that gave its site name to the period, the production of **metal** objects, particularly the *dōtaku* bells, represents a significant artistic manifestation of the Yayoi period. The *dōtaku* were cast in bronze and imitative of a Chinese **musical instrument**. Visual records from the Chinese **Warring States** period (475–221 BCE) indicate that bells in various and progressively larger sizes were suspended from a horizontal beam or pole. These were struck to produce a scale of tones. More than 400 indigenously produced *dōtaku* have been discovered in Japan. These bells range from 4 to 50 inches in height. Their quality suggests a rather advanced state of technical acumen. Figural and decorative relief bands on these bells offer some, albeit highly interpretive, insights into **Yayoi culture** and suggest that **shamanism** was the dominant religious modality. The *dōtaku* appear not to have been used as musical instruments in Japan. Instead, like the bronze **mirrors** and other distinguished and precious implements transferred and adapted from Chinese and Korean forms, the *dōtaku* took on talismanic significance, and their possession implied social and religious power.

Tumulus, or Kofun, period

About 300 CE there appeared new and distinctive funerary customs whose most characteristic feature was chambered mound **tombs**. These tumuli, or kofun (“old mounds”), witnessed significant variations over the following 400 years but consistently dominated the period to which they gave their name. Some authorities have suggested that the development of these tombs was a natural evolution from a Yayoi period custom of burial on high ground overlooking crop-producing fields. While partially convincing, this theory alone does not account for the sudden florescence of mound tombs, nor does it address the fact that some aspects of the tombs are clearly adaptations of a form preexisting on the Korean peninsula. Indeed, implements and artifacts discovered within these tombs suggest a strong link to peninsular culture. Changes in tomb structure, as well as the quantity, quality, and type of **grave goods** discovered, offer considerable insight into the evolution of Japan’s sociopolitical development from a group of interdependent agricultural communities to the unified state of the early 8th century. Of course, the **material culture** of the **Kofun period** extended far beyond the production of **funerary art**. For example, it is in this time that an essential form of Japanese expression, the **Chinese writing system**, made its appearance on the archipelago—a fact known from such evidence as inscribed metal implements. This system had a profound and comparatively quick influence not only on written language but also on the development of painting in Japan. Nevertheless, tombs are the repositories of the period’s greatest visual achievements and are excellent indicators of more general cultural patterns at work. And, in that wider context, three distinct shifts in tomb style can be discerned that define the chronology of the period: Early Kofun of the 4th century, Middle Kofun covering the 5th and early 6th centuries, and Late Kofun, which lasted until the beginning of the 8th century and during which tomb burials were gradually replaced by Buddhist cremation ceremonies. The Late Kofun roughly coincides with the periods known to art historians as the **Asuka** (mid-6th century–645) and the **Hakuhō** (645–710).

Tombs of the Early Kofun period made use of and customized existing and compatible topography. When viewed from above, the tombsilhouette was either a rough circle or, more characteristically, an upper circle combined with a lower triangular form, suggesting the shape of an old-fashioned keyhole. The tombs contained a space for a wooden coffin and grave goods. This area was accessed through a **vertical shaft** near the top of the mound and was sealed off after burial was completed. The deceased were buried with materials that were either actual or symbolic indicators of **social status**. The grave goods were intended, as well, to sustain the spirit in its journey in the afterlife. They included bronze **mirrors**, items of jewelry made from jade and jasper, ceramic vessels, and iron weapons. Adorning the summit of the mound and at points on the circumference midway, at the base, and at the entrance to the tomb were variously articulated clay cylinder forms known as **haniwa** (“clay circle”).

Haniwa were an unglazed, low-fired, reddish, porous **earthen ware** made of the same material as a type of daily-use **pottery** called **haji ware**. These clay creations were shaped from coils or slabs and took the form of human figures, animals, and houses. The latter shape was usually set at the peak of the burial hillock. Many attempts have been made to interpret the function of **haniwa**. They seem to have served both as protective figures and as some type of support for the deceased in the afterlife. There is some suggestion that, similar to tomb figurines found in other cultures, they symbolized a retinue of living servants who might otherwise have been sacrificed upon the demise of their master. They are regionally distinctive and show a stylistic development from the decidedly schematic to realistic.

Another type of ceramic prominent in the Kofun period was sue ware. Distinct from haji ware, it was high-fired and in its finished form had a gray cast. Occasionally, accidental ash glazing is found on the surface. Until the 7th century, sue ware was a product reserved for the elite, who used it both for daily ware and on ceremonial occasions. Sue ware was more closely identified with Korean ceramic technology and was the precursor for a variety of medieval Japanese ceramic types. Interestingly, both haji and *sue* ware found roles in funerary art.

After the 4th century, tomb builders abandoned naturally sympathetic topography and located mounds in clusters on flat land. There are differences in mound size, even within the clusters, suggesting levels of social status. The scale of these tombs, together with construction techniques, changed considerably. The tomb generally assumed to be that of the late 4th-century emperor **Nintoku**, located near the present-day city of Ōsaka, measures nearly 1,600 feet (490 metres) in length and covers 80 acres (32 hectares). It is alternately surrounded by three moats and two greenbelts. Approximately 20,000 *haniwa* were thought to have been placed on the surface of this huge **burial mound**.

In the later part of the 5th century, the vertical shaft used to access the early pit tomb was replaced by the Korean-style horizontal corridor leading to a tomb chamber. This made multiple use of the tomb easier, and the notion of a family tomb came into existence. Also notable from the 5th century is the archaeological evidence of horse trappings and military hardware in tombs. *Haniwa* representing warriors and stylized military shields are also prominent.

Contemporaneous Chinese records refer to the Five Kings of Wo (Japanese: Wa) to describe the rulers of Japan in this period, and Chinese and Korean documentation refers to Japanese invasions of the Korean peninsula in the late 4th and early 5th centuries. There is evidence that multiple Japanese diplomatic missions to China in the 5th century requested from the Chinese rulers suzerainty over portions of the southern Korean peninsula. These diplomatic and military forays combine with the grave goods of the period to suggest a strong military cast to 5th- and 6th-century culture. However, in time these accoutrements of war and symbols of physical power are found in ancillary tombs rather than in the grave sites of known leaders. This suggests a gradual consolidation of power and the formation of a specialized **military service** within the kingdoms.

Japan's close relationship with Korean and Chinese cultures during the Kofun period effected an influx of peninsular craftsmen. This is reflected in the production of *sue* ware mentioned above and in the high quality of metalwork achieved. **Mirrors** are a particularly fine example of the development of metal craft. The typical East Asian mirror of the time is a metal disk brought to a high reflective finish on one side and elaborately decorated on the reverse. Such mirrors did not originate in Japan but seem to have been made and used there for religious and political purposes. The dominant Japanese **creation myth** describes the **sun goddess, Amaterasu Ōmikami**, being coaxed from hiding by seeing her reflection in a mirror. This may well have imparted a magico-religious quality to mirrors and caused them to be understood as authority symbols. Of particular note is the so-called **chokkomon** decorative scheme found on some of these mirrors and on other Early Kofun **metalwork**. **Chokkomon** means "patterns of straight line and arcs," and the motif has also been found chiseled on a wall in a Late Kofun tomb at the Idera tomb in Kyushu. It has been suggested that the abstract interweaving pattern may symbolize **rope** binding the dead to the tomb, an aspect of Chinese cosmology of the Han dynasty.

Late Kofun **tombs** are characterized by schemes of wall decoration within the burial chambers. Two especially important tombs have been excavated in the area just to the south of present-day Nara. The Takamatsu tomb (1972) and the Fujinoki tomb (1985) suggest high levels of artistic achievement and a sophisticated assimilation of continental culture. The Takamatsu tomb is noted for its **wall paintings** containing a design scheme representing a total Chinese cosmology. Included are especially fine female figure paintings. At Fujinoki exquisite and elaborate metalwork, including openwork gold crowns, a gilt bronze saddle bow, and gilt bronze shoes, was discovered. Design motifs show evidence of Chinese, Central Asian, and Indian sources.

Thus, the Kofun period reveals both a consolidation of **political power** and the growth of requisite artistic skill appropriate to the celebration of an emerging and unified culture. The technical and artistic foundations were effectively laid for the reception of the demanding complex artistic requirements of Buddhism.

Asuka period

The **Asuka period** was a time of transformation for Japanese society. It is named for the Asuka area at the southern end of the Nara (Yamato) Basin (a few miles to the south of the present-day city of Nara), which was the political and cultural centre of the country at the time. From there, the imperial court—which claimed lineage from the **sun goddess**—ruled over a loose confederation of rival clans, the most powerful of which were the **Soga**, **Mononobe**, and **Nakatomi**. Each of the clans was tied to the imperial line by providing wives for the emperors. They also provided increasingly specialized hereditary services to the court; for example, the Mononobe were warriors, the **Soga** tax administrators, and the Nakatomi masters of **religious ritual**.

Japan's interest in and contacts with continental cultures continued to increase in the Asuka. A wide range of political and cultural relations with the Korean kingdoms of **Koguryō**, **Silla**, and, in particular, **Paekche** provided an opportunity for comparatively systematic assimilation of vast amounts of Korean culture, Chinese culture read through a Korean prism, and the **religious beliefs** of Buddhism. The Japanese attempted to maintain a presence on the Korean peninsula through ties with the tribal league of **Kaya** (Japanese: **Mimana**). They were also allied with Paekche in fending off attempts by Silla to absorb Kaya and to advance on Paekche. More than a century of maneuvering ended with the defeat of the Japanese fleet by Silla in 663. Nevertheless, it was within that period of intensive relations with Paekche that critical foundations were constructed for a radical shift in the direction of Japanese **visual arts**.

The most significant change, of course, was the introduction of **Buddhism**. Historians debate the actual date of the arrival of Buddhist texts, implements of worship, and iconography in Japan, but according to tradition a Paekche delegation to the emperor Kimmei in 538 or 552 made the presentation of certain religious articles. Given the extent of contact with Korea, however, various “unofficial” introductions of Buddhism had probably already occurred.

It was during this period, as well, that contention among the leading Japanese clans increased. The **Soga** clan was an enthusiastic recipient of the benefits of the Korean alliance. Some scholars suggest that the Soga were arrivals from Korea not many generations previous who, lacking the ancestral connections of other clans, parlayed the Korean connection, a relationship with a more complex and sophisticated society, to achieve eventual control in Japan. The Soga clan, led by **Soga Umako**, clearly appreciated the Chinese and Korean forms of centralized government and the integration

of Buddhism as a state religion. The **Mononobe** and, in particular, the **Nakatomi** resisted and were rigorous persecutors of Buddhism. They were defeated militarily by the Soga in 587, and in 593 Prince **Shōtoku** (574–622), who was related to the Soga clan, became regent to Umako's niece the empress Suiko and consolidated the Buddhist position. Prince Shōtoku, aided by Korean scholars, was a dedicated student of Korean culture, **Confucianism**, and Buddhism. He not only established Buddhism as the state religion but also promulgated civil codes based on Confucian principles. His leadership provided the important first step in an integration of civil and religious foundations of the state. Although abuse of power precipitated the Soga clan's eclipse in the 640s, enthusiasm for Buddhism was unabated.

Buddhism was already a thousand years old when it arrived in Japan. It had transformed and been transformed by the iconography and artistic styles of the various cultures along its path of expansion from India. The central message of **Gautama Buddha** (6th–5th centuries BCE) had also experienced multiple interpretations, as evidenced by the numerous sectarian divisions in Buddhism. The artistic forms necessary to provide the proper environment for the practice of the religion were well defined, however—calligraphy, painting, sculpture, liturgical implements, and temple architecture—and these were the means by which nearly all continental modes of Buddhism were absorbed and adapted by the Japanese culture.

During this period of intensive peninsular contact, Korean artisans skilled in metalwork, sculpture, painting, ceramics, and other fields necessary to the production of Buddhist iconography immigrated to or were brought to Japan in large numbers. While the practice of most of the above-mentioned forms was the purview of professionals, the calligraphic rendering of the written word was a skill available to the educated elite of the period. Thus, in the Asuka period the foundations of both individualized and public forms of visual expression were secured.

Sculpture

While the structures of these temples did not survive, certain important sculptures did, and these images are generally associated with the name of **Kuratsukuri Tori** (also known as Tori Busshi). Tori—like his grandfather, who had emigrated from China, and his father, an ardent Buddhist—belonged to the saddlemakers' guild. Excellence in this trade required mastery of the component media of lacquer, leather, wood, and metal, each of which was, in various ways, also used in the production of sculpture.

A large, seated, gilt-bronze image of Shaka (the Japanese name for Shakyamuni **Buddha**, the historical Buddha) survives from the Asuka Temple and is dated to 606. Also extant is the gilt-bronze **Shaka Triad** of **Hōryū Temple**, which is dated by inscription to 623. The Asuka **Buddha**, heavily restored, is attributed to Tori based on the stylistic similarity of its undisturbed head to the renderings found in the Shaka Triad, which is confidently assigned to the master sculptor's hand. A more controversial work is a gilt bronze Yakushi (**Bhaishajya-guru**, the healing Buddha), which carries an inscription of 607. It is very close to the style of Tori, but many date the work to the latter part of the century. The Triad and the Yakushi are now housed in Hōryū Temple. An inscribed dedication found on the halo of the central figure of the Triad suggests that the ensemble was dedicated to the recently deceased Shōtoku and his consort. A stylistically related work is the wooden statue of the **bodhisattva** Kuze **Kannon** in the Hall of Dreams (**Yumedono**) of the Hōryū Temple. The **Tori** style seen in these works reveals an interpretive dependence on Chinese Buddhist sculpture of the **Northern Wei** dynasty (386–

534/535), such as that found in the **Longmen caves**. Symmetry, a highly stylized linear treatment of draped garments, and a reserved and gentle **facial expression** with a characteristic archaic smile are the prominent distinguishing features of this sculpture. The Japanese interpretations in bronze and wood advance the frontally focused Chinese relief sculptures by beginning to suggest more fully rounded figures.

Painting

Buddhist temples were decorated not only with sculpture but also with religious paintings, tapestries, and other objects. Most such works from the Asuka period have not survived. An exception is the Tamamushi Shrine, which consists of a miniature **kondō** affixed to a rectangular pedestal or base. This assemblage of wood, metal, and lacquer provides an excellent view of what a kondō of the period may have looked like and, perhaps more important, is decorated with the only known painting from the Asuka period. The painting program on the miniature kondō seems to depict, through images on various panels and doors, the deities normally found in sculptural form within the hall. Paintings on the panels of the base show aspects of Buddhist cosmology and scenes from **jataka** tales, those narratives that tell of exemplary incidents in the previous incarnations of the Buddha. Perhaps best known is the **jataka** of the Hungry Tigress, in which the Buddha prior to enlightenment chances upon a tigress and her cubs starving in a desolate ravine and offers his own body to them. The painting depicts a sequential narrative in one panel, showing the saint removing his robe, leaping from a cliff, and being eaten by the tigers. The painting style suggests an Indian prototype vastly influenced by the fluid linearity of Chinese Wei styles.

Hakuhō period

In the early 640s the Soga clan was afflicted with bloody internal intrigue, which offered its rivals the opportunity to usurp power. In 645 Prince Nakono Ōe (later the emperor **Tenji**) and **Nakatomi Kamatari** (later **Fujiwara Kamatari**) led a successful coup and promulgated the Taika reforms, a series of edicts that significantly strengthened the control of the central government. Through successive regimes, some violently introduced the structuring of a highly centralized government continued through the second half of the 7th century. A major feature of the centralization process was the incorporation and use of Buddhism as an instrument of unification. The period was thus noted for a rapid expansion of Buddhism as aristocrats competed in the construction of temples. Increasing funds were allotted for the expansion of Buddhist temples and acquisition of the attendant iconography required for the expression of the faith.

The seat of government moved several times after the coup, but in 694 the court returned to the Asuka area and a plan to construct a permanent capital at Fujiwara was implemented. The capital was eventually moved again in 710 to Nara. Art historians have given the name Hakuhō to the period beginning with the Taika reforms and ending with the imperial move to Nara. As noted, it overlaps with the Late **Kofun period** and is also sometimes referred to as the Late Asuka or Early **Nara period**.

Sculpture

With the exception of the Shaka Triad dedicated in 623 (*see* **Asuka period**), sculpture at Hōryū Temple was created in a period from approximately 650 until 711. Sculpture created from the middle of the century begins to reflect the influence of the Chinese Northern Qi dynasty (550–577) styles. The highly linear features of **Northern Wei sculpture** are supplanted by

works that have emerged from their origin in relief wall sculpture and stand in the round as stolid, columnar figures with slight attenuation at the waist. Noteworthy of this new style are the four guardian figures who stand sentry over the quadrants surrounding the Shaka Triad and the more delicate Kudara Kannon held in the Hōryū Temple treasure house. The drapery at the feet of these statues flares forward rather than to the sides as in earlier works, allowing for a heightened sense of volume. The sculptures are executed in indigenous wood with some traces of gold and polychromy still remaining.

At Chūgū Temple, near Hōryū and once the residence of Prince Shōtoku's mother, a wood-sculpted image of Miroku Bosatsu (Maitreya) embodies many of the characteristic features of the Hakuho period. The delicately meditative figure sits with one leg pendant, its foot supported on a lotus, and the other leg crossed. The rounded cheeks, arching eyebrows, slight disproportionate swelling of the upper torso, and soft modeling suggest innocent, almost childlike features. Other sculptural works from the second half of the 7th century show increased mastery of a wide variety of materials, including clay, and adaptive uses of lacquer. At Hōryū Temple a group of sculptures constructed of clay over wood and metal structures is arrayed in four distinct tableaux on the first level of the pagoda. Completed in 711, they are technically works falling into the Nara period. However, their virtuosity suggests that the techniques employed had been mastered in the final years of the 7th century. The heightened sense of realism, the more expressive faces, and the more rounded, three-dimensional forms, particularly as seen in the north-side tableau of the death of Shaka, suggest an assimilation of Chinese Tang dynasty (618–907) style.

The cast-bronze statues in the Yakushi Temple are among the finest examples of Japanese sculpture extant. Known as the Yakushi Triad, the work consists of the seated Yakushi Buddha flanked by the standing attendants Nikkō (Suryaprabha, bodhisattva of the Sun) and Gakkō (Candraprabha, bodhisattva of the Moon). It is unclear whether these sculptures were produced after the temple's relocation to Nara or if they were transported from the original site. Literary evidence from the 11th century suggests the latter hypothesis, however, and these striking works are consistent with the confident, fleshy, idealized figures of the early Tang period.

Painting

The finest examples of late 7th-century painting are found in the Golden Hall at Hōryū Temple. Many of these wall paintings were irreparably damaged by fire in 1949, but photos and reproductions remain. One fresco depicting an Amida (Amitabha) Triad shows graceful figures rendered with comparative naturalism and defined with consistent, unmodulated brush lines known as “wire lines” (*tessen-byō*). Like the Hōryū pagoda sculptures, the wall paintings suggest the influence of Tang style.

Thus, the second half of the 7th century was a vitally expansive and experimental period for Japanese Buddhist art. The constant relocation of court sites during this period did not seem to affect the enthusiastic production of temples and imagery or the innovative assimilation of continental models and techniques.

Nara period

During the reign of the empress Gemmei (707–715) the site of the capital was moved to the northwest sector of the Nara Basin. The new capital was called Heijō-kyō and is known today as Nara. Overcrowding, the relative isolation of

the Fujiwara capital, and what would prove to be a constant nemesis to the Japanese state, an overly powerful Buddhist establishment, were some of the main factors contributing to the move.

The Nara period (710–784), also known as the Tempyō period, marks the apex of concentrated Japanese efforts to emulate Chinese cultural and political models. Official Japanese contact with Tang China had dropped off after the defeat of the Japanese in 663 by combined Tang and Silla forces. However, Japanese court perception of the governing effectiveness of the centralized Chinese state sparked renewal of relationships with the mainland at many levels. The new capital city was modeled after the Tang capital at Chang'an (near modern Xi'an), and complex legal codifications (ritsurvō) based on the Chinese system established an idealized order of social relationships and obligations. Thus, a hierarchical society was established, in symbolic and real terms, with all power proceeding from the emperor. The integration of religion into this scheme fixed a properly understood relationship between spiritual and earthly authority. Secular authority ultimately drew its power from this relationship. The ever more precise articulation of these notions further positioned Buddhism to receive massive governmental support.

The first several decades of the 8th century were marked by power struggles, political intrigue, attempted coups, and epidemics. This generally unsettled and contentious atmosphere caused the emperor Shōmu (724–749) to press determinedly for strengthening the spiritual corrective that he perceived to be offered by Buddhism. In 741 he established the kokubunji system, building a monastery and a nunnery in each province, all under a central authority at Nara. In 743 he initiated the planning for construction of that central authority—the Tōdai Temple—and of its central image, a massive bronze statue of the Birushana (Vairocana) Buddha, known as the Great Buddha (Daibutsu). Shōmu envisioned religion as a supportive and integrated power in the rule of the state, not as a private faith or as a parallel or contending force. His merging of church and state, however, later enabled the temples to acquire wealth and privilege and allowed Buddhist priests to interfere in secular affairs, eventually leading to a degeneration of the national administration.

The Chinese taxation system, which was first adopted in Japan during the Taika reforms and further promulgated by the ritsurvō system, was based on the principle of state ownership of land and a national appropriation of the rice crop. It was, from the beginning, an inappropriate fit for the realities of Japanese agriculture. By mid-century the growth of privately owned, tax-free estates had shrunk the tax base, and this, coupled with the extraordinary demands for expansion, temple building, and icon manufacture, placed great strain on the general population. After mid-century an important minister of state, Fujiwara Nakamaro (706–764), attempted reforms and more equitable taxation. Nakamaro, whose instincts were essentially Confucian, was in conflict with the firmly established Buddhist clergy led by the powerful monk Dōkyō. As counselor to the empress Kōken (718–770), who later reigned also under the name of Empress Shōtoku, Dōkyō held extraordinary power and a secular title but was finally thwarted in his attempt to be named emperor. The concluding decades of the century were characterized by attempts to regularize government expenditure and to control the power of the Buddhist clergy. In 784 the capital was transferred north to Nagaoka, just west of present-day Kyōto. This was a prelude to the establishment of the capital at Heian-kyō, now called Kyōto, in 794.

What was meant to have been perceived as the cultural expression of a powerful government intent on adapting the very finest elements of Tang international style was actually an extreme attempt by a comparatively weak government to

conjure power through symbolic gesture. Nevertheless, the push to establish Japan as at least equal in splendour to Tang China in its celebrations of Buddhism and to mark Japan as the magnificent easternmost extension of the faith's expansion in Asia allowed for a halcyon period for the creation of Buddhist art. Virtually all aspects of Tang culture were absorbed during this period. Indeed, because Buddhism was later suppressed in China and much of Tang Buddhist iconography destroyed, extant Japanese art of the Nara period serves as the single best reminder, once removed, of what the Buddhist glories of Tang China must have been.



The main monument to the Nara period is undoubtedly the huge Tōdai Temple complex with its colossal central image of the cast-bronze Great Buddha. The construction of the Great Buddha Hall (Daibutsuden) commenced in 745, and dedication ceremonies for the nearly 50-foot- (15-metre-) high seated figure were held in 752. Only fragments of the original are extant. Most of the present sculpture dates to a reconstruction in 1692, which nevertheless gives ample sense of the scale and ambitions of Emperor Shōmu.

Two important Nara temples predate the initiation of the Tōdai Temple project. Kōfuku and Hokkedō were both constructed in the Gekyō (“Outer Capital”) area to the east of the imperial palace (this “outer” area is now where most extant Nara period sites are located), and their assorted extant iconography bears witness to the revolution in sculptural rendering that is a distinguishing feature of 8th-century Japanese art.

Sculpture

Records indicate that an assembly of 27 sculptures featuring images of the Shaka, bodhisattvas, and other attendants was completed and installed in Kōfuku Temple in 734. Of this grouping, six of an original ten disciples and all eight of the Eight Classes of Beings (designated as protectors or guardians of Buddhism) are extant. These works are superb examples of the hollow-core dry-lacquer technique (dakkatsukanshitsu) of sculpture, which was developed in China and enjoyed a sudden florescence in the Nara period. The technique required the creation of a rough clay-sculpted model on a wooden armature. This form was then covered with successive layers of lacquer-soaked hemp, each of which had to be dry before the next could be applied. Next, the back of the sculpture was cut open, the clay broken out, and, if necessary, a fresh armature inserted. Final surface refinements and details were then added using a paste mix of lacquer, sawdust, flour, and ground incense. Pigments and gold leaf were used to colour the finished form. Some sources suggest that the use of the new technique was encouraged in Japan because the casting of the Great Buddha at Tōdai Temple caused a shortage of the copper needed for bronze production. In addition, lacquer had the advantages of durability, insect resistance, and light weight. Perhaps most importantly, this additive technique of sculpting offered a more easily managed range of plastic expression.

The other major site for important Nara period works preceding the construction of Tōdai Temple is Hokkedō, also known as Sangatsudō, located at the eastern edge of the Tōdai complex. Tradition suggests that Hokkedō, the oldest building in the Tōdai complex, may have been the temple of the monk Rōben, who, working in tandem with Emperor Shōmu, was the driving force in the construction of Tōdai. At present a curious mélange of 16 sculptural works is found on the altar platform in the temple. A hollow-core lacquer sculpture of the Fukūkenjaku Kannon functions as the central image. This

work is probably the most prominent of a number of images of the deity created in the 740s at the command of Emperor Shōmu. It is flanked by two clay images of the bodhisattvas Gakkō and Nikkō (sometimes identified as the guardian deities Bonten [Brahma] and Taishakuten [Shakradevanam-Indra]). Much smaller than the central image, they date to the mid-8th century and were probably not created for the position that they now occupy. They are closely related stylistically to four clay guardian figures found in the ordination hall at Tōdai. Treatment of facial features in each of these clay works is individualized and highly refined. The Gakkō and Nikkō demonstrate a reserved energy and force while the guardian figures are bravura performances of gesture and elegant posture, but all are excellent examples of the Japanese command of Tang-style powerful, inspirited, idealized forms.

The “secret” image of Shūkongōjin (733), a guardian deity, is secluded in a cordoned space behind the Fukūkenjaku Kannon and presented for viewing only once a year. A clay sculpture with its original gold leaf and polychromy largely intact, the thunderbolt-wielding deity is approximately life-size. Modeled on Chinese statues of guardian generals, the Shūkongōjin is a formidable image of swirling power and force and is the best preserved of the Nara period clay sculptures, which like their hollow lacquer counterparts were formed on armatures.

Sculpture of the later Nara period began to employ yet another variation of the lacquer technique, that of adding lacquered cloth over a carved **wood** core (**mokushin kanshitsu**). Paste techniques similar to those used for hollow-core lacquer sculpture enhanced the image, and some elements were occasionally constructed solely of lacquer disguised as wood. To alleviate splitting caused by expansion and contraction, the wood core was usually partially hollowed. The use of lacquered wood-core techniques may reflect an attempt to reduce the expense involved in previously described sculptural methods. It also indicated an increasing penchant for employing wood, an abundant **natural resource**.

The new technique may have been brought to Japan by Chinese artists accompanying the venerable Chinese monk **Ganjin** (Chinese [Pinyin romanization]: Jianzhen). Until Ganjin’s arrival in 753 (after six attempts to make the treacherous crossing from the mainland and the loss of his sight), Japanese Buddhists lacked an official ritual site and an official clergyman capable of conducting legitimate ordinations. The missionary was thus an important figure, and, when he chose to reside outside the Tōdai Temple complex, Tōshōdai Temple (founded in 759) was constructed for him, by some accounts from a structure disassembled and moved from the imperial palace. Housed in Tōshōdai Temple are several works using the new wood-core lacquer technique, including a 210-inch- (534-cm-) high, 11-headed, 1,000-armed Senju Kannon (Sahasrabhuja), as well as a hollow-core dry-lacquer sculpture of Ganjin and a Birushana Buddha of the same medium, both dating to about 760. The Ganjin sculpture is a particularly commanding work that embodies the authority and dignity of the aged, blind patriarch.

In addition to new construction techniques, sculpture of the late Nara period also shows a stylistic shift, probably imitating a continental trend, toward more mannered depictions of **drapery** and a more stolid, fleshy form, conveying a brooding feeling. Typical is the rendering of a tight-fitting garment at the thighs of a subject, with drapery elsewhere carved in evenly spaced, concentric waves. This style, **hōmpa-shiki**, came to greater prominence in the early **Heian period**.

Painting

Painting of the period emulated Tang prototypes. Noteworthy is an image of the deity Kichijōten (Mahashri), housed in Yakushi Temple. This work on hemp depicts in full polychromy a full-cheeked beauty in the high Tang style, which was characterized by slightly elongated, pleasantly rounded figures rendered with long curvilinear brushstrokes. A horizontal narrative scroll painting, *Kako genzai inga kyō* (“Sutra of Cause and Effect”), depicts in crisp primary pigments and a naive, almost childlike style events in the life of the historical Shaka Buddha as well as various incidents in his previous incarnations. This work features painting on the upper register and explanatory text beneath. It stands at the head of a particularly fruitful tradition in Japanese painting types.

Decorative arts

Located within the Tōdai complex, to the northwest of the Great Buddha Hall, is the Shōsō-in treasure house, an imperial storage house constructed shortly after the death of Emperor Shōmu in 756. The joined-log structure, built of cypress timbers that are triangular in cross section, resembles a granary, a style of construction known as azekura-zukuri. It houses an accumulation of imperial objects as well as gifts received at the dedication of the Great Buddha and later donated by Emperor Shōmu’s consort, Empress Kōmyō. Additional articles were added to the collection in the middle of the Heian period (794–1185). The core group donated by Empress Kōmyō totaled about 600 objects, including calligraphy, paintings, religious ritual implements, samples of medicines, mirrors, lacquerware, and masks. The objects received as gifts at the dedication of the Great Buddha have origins as distant as the Mediterranean basin. Most of the objects seem to be of Japanese origin, but they reflect a range of Tang period styles, and they provide a vivid picture of Tang and Nara decorative arts.

One of the few decorative art forms not well represented in the Shōsō-in treasure house is ceramics. Nara period ceramics, like the other arts, were imitations and adaptations of Tang styles. Of note was the production of wares covered with a lead glaze of the Tang *sancai*, or three-colour, type (green, brown, and yellow), a two-colour type (green and white), and a monochrome green.

Heian period

In 784 the emperor Kammu relocated the seat of government to Nagaoka, a site to the north of Nara and slightly to the west of present-day Kyōto. This move was an attempt to escape the meddling dominance of the Buddhist clerics in Nara and thus to allow unfettered development of a centralized government. Nagaoka was marred by contention and assassination, however, rendering it an inauspicious location for the capital. Thus, in 794 a site to the east of Nagaoka on a plain sheltered on the west, north, and east by mountains and intersected by ample north-south rivers was judged appropriate by geomancers. Named Heian-kyō (“Capital of Peace and Tranquility”) and later known as Kyōto, this city was modeled on the grid pattern of the Tang Chinese capital at Chang’an. Heian-kyō remained the site of the imperial residence, if not the consistent seat of political power, until 1868.

For nearly four centuries Heian-kyō was the crucible for a remarkable florescence of Japanese art. Within a century after the move from Nara, political chaos in China caused the cessation of official embassies to the continent. Free from the overwhelming dominance of Chinese artistic models, Japanese culture, particularly literature and the visual arts, was able to

evolve along independent lines and reflect national concerns. These developments were invigorated through dedicated aristocratic patronage of both religious art and a nascent secular art.

The Heian period can be subdivided into four political periods. From the founding of Heian-kyō until the mid-10th century was a period of relative imperial control aided by counselors from the Fujiwara clan. From the mid-10th through the mid-11th century the implementation of a regency system and intermarriage with the imperial line made the Fujiwara family de facto rulers of Japan. In the mid-11th century, an unanticipated break in the line of Fujiwara-produced emperors allowed the imperial line to experiment with a cloister government. A succession of emperors abdicated, leaving ceremonial and bureaucratic duties to a usually exceedingly junior heir, while continuing to pursue political and economic power from a headquarters separate from the court. This format was relatively successful in allowing the imperial line to concentrate on its economic well-being, if not overarching national interests. Finally, armed intramural conflict over imperial succession in the mid-12th century allowed Taira Kiyomori, warlord and ostensible peacekeeper, to usurp the imperial line.

Thus, while sometimes viewed nostalgically as an unbroken series of halcyon years during which courtly aestheticism produced the “classical” body of Japanese literature and art, the Heian period was in fact a time of ongoing political contention during which imperial attempts at centralization of government were consistently checked and ultimately defeated by powerful provincial warlords. In theory, all land and its revenue-producing capability was the property of the central government. In reality, outlying land managers, aristocrats, temples, and warlords accumulated landholdings unabated throughout the Heian period, ultimately crippling the economic power of the court. In the waning years of the 12th century, internal strife over succession and a scramble for what wealth remained in imperial hands forced the court to restore order with the assistance of the warrior class. This steady decline in aristocratic fortune and power was perceived by courtiers as an impending collapse of a natural and just order.

Literature and art of the period were thus often infused with nuances of sadness, melancholy, and regret. The consolations of Buddhism stressed the impermanence of life and served to reinforce for aristocratic believers the deeper meaning of readily apparent social developments. Indeed the shifting emphases found in Buddhist iconography during the Heian period are incomprehensible unless viewed in the context of doctrinal responses to social change. Most significant among these are the establishment of two Japanese schools of Esoteric Buddhism, Tendai and Shingon, in the early 9th century, the increasing appeal of Amidism in the 10th century, and, with the understanding that Buddhism entered a final millenarian era in the mid-11th century, a florescence of various iconography produced in the hopes of gaining religious merit.

Esoteric Buddhism

The court in Heian-kyō was justifiably wary of Buddhism, at least in any powerfully institutionalized form. Attempts by the Nara court to use Buddhism as a complicit pacifier in the pursuit of state goals had run afoul; excessive expenses incurred in erecting massive temples and commissioning appropriate iconography had effectively bankrupted the state treasury; and Buddhist attempts at political intrigue had nearly resulted in a religious dictatorship. Thus, in the configuration of the new capital, only two Buddhist temples were allowed within the boundaries of the city. Tō Temple

and Sai Temple, located respectively at the east and west side of Rashomon, the southern gateway to Heian-kyō, were conceded space that was as far away as possible from the imperial palace and government offices in the north of the capital.

Dissatisfaction with the scholastic Buddhism of the Nara sects was also voiced by some clerics. An imperially approved embassy to China in 804 included the well-known monk Saichō and the lesser-known Kūkai. Saichō was already relatively close to the emperor Kammu, probably favoured because he had broken with the Nara sects and established a hermitage on Mount Hiei in the mountain range northeast of and overlooking Heian-kyō. The two monks were intent on the study and assimilation of current Chinese Buddhist thinking. Saichō studied the teachings of the Tiantai sect (Japanese: Tendai). Tiantai beliefs were an important synthesis of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, emphasizing the impermanence of all things, an ultimate reality beyond conceptualization, and a fundamental unity of things. Meditational practices were believed to lead to enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra (Japanese: *Myōhō renge kyō*) was regarded as the primary text of the sect. This early Mahayana sutra was structured into its canonical form in China in the early 5th century and thereafter adopted by Tiantai as the most appropriate expression of the sect's universalist teachings. Saichō returned to Japan in 805 and petitioned the court to establish a Tendai monastery on Mount Hiei. His request was granted, but the emperor required Saichō to include some Esoteric practices in his Tendai system.

Forms of Tantric Buddhism had been introduced into China by Indian practitioners in the early 8th century. Heavily influenced by Hindu beliefs, prayer methods, and iconography, these so-called Esoteric Buddhist beliefs were still being assimilated by Chinese Buddhists during the 9th century. Kūkai devoted himself to the mastery of these relatively new beliefs under the Chinese master Huiguo. Returning to Japan in 806, more than a year after Saichō, Kūkai was welcomed as an Esoteric master. Through the force of his personality and the attraction of his teachings, he eclipsed Saichō in popularity. Saichō, who regarded Esoteric teachings as an aspect of the more inclusive Tendai tradition, studied with Kūkai, and they remained on good terms until disputes over doctrinal issues and a student led to the rupture of the relationship. Whatever particular differences are found between Tendai and Shingon, as Kūkai's syncretic doctrine is called, the two schools are grouped under the central category of *mikkyō*, or Esoteric Buddhism. Neither belief system, as interpreted in Japan, rigorously emulated the Chinese versions; they were syntheses created by Saichō and Kūkai.

Esoteric Buddhism relied heavily on visualization in its praxis. The creation of an environment of worship was essential. The use of mandalas, expressed both in two dimensions as paintings and in three dimensions as ensembles of sculpture, invited the believer into a diagrammatic rendering of a spiritual cosmos. A central tenet of Esoteric teaching was the nonduality of the Buddha. Whatever the manifestations, the phenomenal and the transcendental are the same. The goal of spiritual practice was to unite what seemed to the uninitiated to be separate realms. Thus, one of the most important iconographic images was the ryōkai mandara (“mandala of the two worlds”), which consisted of two parts—the kongō-kai (“diamond world”) and the taizō-kai (“womb world”)—that organized the Buddhist divinities and their relationships in a prescribed gridlike configuration. The deities or spiritual entities portrayed in these paired paintings represent, in the kongō-kai, the realm of transcendent, clear enlightenment and, in the taizō-kai, the humane, compassionate aspects of

the Buddha. It was the repetitive meditative practice of journey through and visceral assimilation of this symbolic, schematic cosmos that could lead the believer to an enlightenment of unity.

In 823 Kūkai was granted imperial permission to take over the leadership of Tō Temple (also known as Kyōōgokoku Temple), at Heian-kyō's southern entrance. Images developed under his instruction probably included forerunners of the particular ryōkai mandara known as the Tō Temple mandala. Stylistically, these paintings reveal a shift from Tang painting style to a flatter, more decorative approach to image. Also in the sanctuary at Tō Temple is an important assemblage of sculpture that constitutes a three-dimensional mandala. In a tandem similar to the one effected in mandala painting, dual aspects of the single Buddha nature are portrayed. Bodhisattvas represent limitless compassion, while other assemblages portray yet another dimension of the central divinity, one that came to heightened prominence in Shingon practice, the fierce Mvō-ō (Vidyaraja), or Kings of Bright Wisdom. These manifestations, perhaps best typified by Fudō Mvō-ō (Acalanatha), are terrifying and uncompromising guides for the believer in the journey to enlightenment. To the unfamiliar eye, their appearance seems demonic, but their wrath is directed at the enemies of Buddhism. They extend to a more fantastic perceptual level the role of guardian general deities and offer a realistic assessment of the intensity of dedication needed for enlightenment.

In general, sculpture produced in the 9th and 10th centuries followed and developed from the techniques of the late Nara period. Many works were constructed using variations of the lacquered wood-core technique. The heightened mannerism and heavy, brooding quality noticeable in some late Nara works are found in abundance in the early Heian period. The great late 8th-century standing Yakushi figure housed at Jingo Temple north of Kyōto perhaps best typifies this style. Other fine examples can be found in Murō Temple, a well-known Esoteric sanctuary to the east of Nara. Stylistically, these works harken back to a type of sandalwood sculpture that enjoyed popularity in India and in China. With occasional elaborations through the use of lacquer, these powerful works were essentially carved from large, single pieces of wood, a technique called *ichiboku-zukuri*. It has been suggested that Buddhist reformers planned the contrast between the abrupt, extreme force of these sculptures and the aristocratic elegance of Nara period works. Created unabashedly of wood, they represented the elemental force of the forests that surrounded the urban centres.

Because Esoteric practitioners were initially relegated to the mountainous regions outside the capital, the layouts and architecture of their temples varied greatly from the flatland architecture of the Nara temples and, thus, from the symmetrical Chinese styles. Placement and structure were adapted to rugged terrain, creating unique solutions. Ironically, this relative individualism of style was a subtle symbolic disruption of Nara period attempts at a hierarchically dispersed power through visual means.

The highly syncretic nature of Esoteric Buddhism considered the noumenal aspects of indigenous religions as emanations or manifestations of the Buddha essence. Rather than confronting and competing with native deities and belief systems, *mikkyō* readily adapted and included their features. Magico-religious ritual, along with an emphasis on purificatory and exorcistic rites, reflected and embroidered upon certain functions of existing native popular religiosity, further enhancing the appeal of Esoteric Buddhism with Japanese aristocrats. For example, Shintō, the primary indigenous religion, which had developed from ancient animistic cults, had a very limited iconographic program. Until the Heian

period, Shintō deities (*kami*) were largely considered to be unseen, often formless spirits that inhabited or personified such natural phenomena as the sky, mountains, and waterfalls. Esoteric Buddhism, however, encouraged the inclusion of Shintō deities in a kind of subordinate tandem with Buddhist deities in a variety of visual representations. This incorporation of Shintō *kami* not only served as an acknowledgment of indigenous beliefs but also increased the thematic scope of Buddhist art, particularly landscape painting. The Shintō belief that topography and its included features of rivers, trees, and distinctive rock formations were the abodes of the spirits meant that a sacred formation of mountains could be interpreted as a topographic mandala. Rendering these forms in painting expanded the iconographer's repertoire beyond the production of anthropomorphized deities. This theory in which *kami* are viewed as temporary manifestations of the essential Buddha, allowing each Shintō deity to be identified with a Buddhist one, is known as *ashonji-suijaku*. It gained considerable acceptance by the 10th century and became well established in the **Kamakura period**.

Esoteric Buddhism offered skittish Japanese aristocrats a compatible belief system that seemed to pose no challenges to the tentatively established political order in Heian-kyō. Rituals for the protection and prosperity of the nation were devised by Kūkai. Indeed, the formal name for **Tō Temple**, Kyōōgokoku, may be translated as “Temple for the Defense of the Nation by the King of Doctrines.” Although Kūkai and **Saichō** were initially kept at a distance in remote mountain monasteries, the government granted independent ordination authority to the Tendai sect in 822, and in 823 Kūkai was appointed by the emperor to head Tō Temple at the capital's southern gate. These two developments marked the eclipse of Nara Buddhist power. Thus, important currents of continental Buddhism, an embracing universalist creed as expressed in Tendai, and the pragmatic, viscerally engaging ritual of Shingon revitalized Japanese attraction to the faith.

Amidism

Amidism spread from India to China in the 4th century and from there to Japan by the 9th century. Like many Buddhist sects, it is a devotional cult that gained immense popularity. Amida Buddha presided over the **Western Paradise**, or **Pure Land**, and his benevolence is detailed in several important sutras. Devotion to Amida (Amitabha) began in Japan within the *mikkyō* sects, and in the 10th century Amida worship began to gain momentum as a distinct form of Japanese Buddhist belief. Amida's compassion in welcoming the dying and securing a place for them in his paradise was a dimension of the belief that emerged during the Heian period and assumed prominence in the Pure Land (**Jōdo**) sect under the leadership of the monk **Hōnen** (1133–1212).

Like **Esoteric Buddhism**, Amidism encouraged an iconography that formed a total ambience of worship. The focus of faith in Amida was rebirth in the Western Paradise. Therefore, painted and sculpted representations of that celestial realm were produced as objects of consolation. **Paintings** from the Nara period of the Amida and his Western Paradise are geometrically ordered descriptions of a hierarchical world in which **Amida** is enthroned as a ruler. In mid-Heian Amidist images, the once-ancillary image of the descending Amida takes on central prominence. This image of the **Amida Buddha and attendants descending from the heavens to greet the soul of the dying believer** is called a *raigōzu* (Descent of Amida painting). The theme would later be developed during the **Kamakura period** as an immensely popular icon, but it saw its first powerful expressions during the Heian period in the late 11th century. As is typical of Amidism, the compassionate attitude of the divinity superseded expressions of awesome might. Amidism differed significantly in emphasis from Esoteric Buddhism

in that it did not require a guided initiation into mysteries. An expression of faith in the Amida Buddha through the invocation of his name in the *nembutsu* prayer was the single requirement for salvation. Iconography served mainly as a reminder of the coming consolations rather than as the tool for a meditative journey to enlightenment.

One of the most elegant monuments to Amidist faith is the **Phoenix Hall** (Hōōdō) at the **Bvōdō Temple** in **Uji**, located on the Uji River to the southeast of Kyōto. Originally used as a villa by the Fujiwara family, this summer retreat was converted to a temple by **Fujiwara Yorimichi** in 1053. The architecture of the building, including the style and configuration of its interior iconography, was intended to suggest a massive expression of *raigō* imagery, whether viewed by a worshiper within the sanctuary or by a visitor approaching the complex from a distance. Viewed frontally, the hall resembles a large bird with its wings extended as if in landing, recalling the downward flight of the Amida and bodhisattvas who welcome the faithful. Contained in the breast of this great creature is the sanctuary, where a magnificent Amida sculpture by **Jōchō**, the premier sculptor of the period, rests on a central altar. Positioned on the surrounding walls is an array of smaller wood-sculpted *apsaras* (heavenly nymphs) playing **musical instruments** and riding on stylized clouds. Traces of poorly preserved polychrome painting on the interior walls depict not only the expected *raigō* scene but also the gently rolling topography of central Japan, suggesting that the court-sponsored painting bureau had developed a strong indigenous expression which now supplanted Chinese models in religious iconography.

The **Jōchō** Amida sculpture, one of the most sublime expressions of Amidist belief, marks the ascendancy of a new style and technique in sculpting. Serene, unadorned, reserved yet powerfully comforting, this image is composed of numerous wood pieces that have been carved and hollowed, then joined together and surfaced with lacquered cloth and **gold leaf**. This joined-block construction technique (*yosegi-zukuri*) allowed for a sculpture lighter in feeling and in fact, but it generally precluded the deep and dramatic carving found in single-block construction. Thus, the exaggerated, mannered presentations of Esoteric sculpture of the previous centuries were supplanted by a noble, evenly proportioned figure, and scale and calm mien replaced drama as a means to engage the believer.

In 985 the **Tendai** monk Genshin produced the 10-part treatise *Ōjō Yōshū* (“Essentials of Salvation”), a major synthesis of Buddhist theory on the issues of suffering and reward and a pragmatic guide for believers who sought rebirth in the Western Paradise. Genshin described in compelling detail the cosmology of the six realms of existence of the Impure Land (*rokudō*) in an effort to encourage people to strive to achieve rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida. Genshin’s descriptions of hell and its tortures were particularly influential as a source for artists in meeting a demand for graphic images of hell intended for meditation and instruction of the faithful.

Although Tendai, Shingon, and Amidism can be considered rival beliefs, at the level of popular participation their sectarian distinctions were largely blurred. Furthermore, during the Heian period all Buddhist sects were cognizant of the arrival of the “latter or final days of the law” (*mappō*). The prevailing Buddhist theory of time posited three distinct periods following the entry of **Gautama Buddha** into nirvana. The first period was the time of the “true law” (*shōbō*), the second period was the time of “imitative law” (*zōbō*), and the third period was that of *mappō*, which was actually calculated to begin in the year 1052. *Mappō*, it was believed, was a time marked by social chaos and **natural disaster**, in which proper living under the law of the Buddha no longer guaranteed salvation. The formulaic prayers of Amidism

promising salvation were thus ever more popular. Other methods to ensure salvation included the commissioning of religious objects, such as sutras and icons, and the patronage of temple building. These actions incurred merit which was understood to accumulate in proportion to the number or magnificence of the objects produced. Thus, the second half of the Heian period was marked by production of a multiplicity of religious icons.

Calligraphy and painting

The break in regular communication with China from the mid-9th century commenced a long period of fruitful development in Japanese literature and its expression through the mediums of calligraphy and painting. Calligraphy of the Nara period was known for its transmission and assimilation of the major Chinese writing styles, as well as for some forays into individualized expression and adaptation of technical features of character representation. Modified versions of Chinese characters, known as man'yōgana, were employed to represent Japanese phonetic sounds, and two even more abbreviated phonetic writing systems, hiragana and katakana, were known in nascent form. The former was highly stylized and cursive, while the latter was somewhat more severe and rectilinear in form. Use of *hiragana* was relegated to women, while men continued to control the learning and use of the traditional Chinese characters. However, during the Heian period *hiragana* was recognized as an official writing method, and an integrated use of the adapted Chinese characters (kanji) and *hiragana* became a widely accepted form of written expression.

The Buddhist monk Kūkai was an important calligraphic stylist and was posthumously recognized as the patron of calligraphers. His highly expressive and mannered presentation of characters was seen and admired in official correspondence, but, more significantly, he employed the brush in a spiritual exercise of rendering important sutra texts or single, meaning-laden kanji. These explorations functioned as part of an Esoteric rite that approximated use of a personalized mandala. Kūkai forcefully established the link between word and image embodied in a calligraphy text, and his work served as an important catalyst in the Heian period, when the rendering of a *kanji* or a phonetic symbol came to be appreciated not as an illustrative gesture but as a form of expression multivalent in its epistemological potential. In ensuing decades and centuries courtiers expanded on his work and explored the potentials suggested not just in a single character but in whole, secular texts, mainly poetry.

The rapid developments in Japanese poetry during the Heian period included a concerted assessment of the national poetic tradition and the establishment of a canon of poetry through the publication of imperially sponsored anthologies. In the early 10th century the courtier poet Ki Tsurayuki and others assembled the profoundly influential Kokinshū (“Collection from Ancient and Modern Times”). As its title indicates, selected poems from pre-Heian times were assembled together with contemporary works. The poems were arranged thematically, with seasonal verse and poems on the topic of love predominant. The format for the poetry was the 31-syllable waka, or tanka, and the anthology was one of the first efforts to establish critical standards for the development of that form.

Contemporary documents discuss the relationship between poetry and painting. Poems were used as the subject of paintings, and calligraphers often wrote poems on paintings or on specially prepared square papers (*shikishi*) later affixed to a painting. Although virtually no examples of this custom survive from the Heian period, it is known through documentary sources and through revivals of the practice in subsequent centuries. Poetry was also inscribed on

elaborately decorated sheets of paper which were preserved as individual units, consolidated in albums, or arranged on horizontal scrolls. The early 12th-century *Sanjūrokunin kashū* (“Anthologies of Thirty-six Poets”) is perhaps the finest Heian example of verse executed on sumptuously prepared and illustrated papers. The preeminence of the calligraphic word in interpretive union with painting or as a thematic inspiration for painting was a hallmark of the Heian period. Changes in painting technique evident in the Heian period may well have been the result of the general and rapidly growing development of sophisticated calligraphic skills. The Tang Chinese method of employing the even iron-wire brush line to delineate forms was gradually supplanted in the 11th century by subtle introductions of modulated, calligraphic brushwork, engendering greater liveliness in form, particularly in the renderings of such grand subjects as raigō and the Buddha’s entry into nirvana.

Important secular works from the 11th century, such as *Shōtoku taishi eden* (“Illustrated Biography of Prince Shōtoku”) and the Senzui folding screens (byōbu), also reveal the development of indigenous painting styles within the original interpretive matrix of Chinese forms. Although the Chinese method of representing narrative in a landscape setting is honoured, with each narrative episode shown in a discrete topographic pocket, the topography and other telling elements take on the appearance of Japanese rather than Chinese surroundings. By the end of the Heian period, a clear distinction could be made between paintings using Chinese themes and styles and those with Japanese subjects and techniques, with the former known as Kara-e and the latter as Yamato-e.

Some of the most celebrated examples of Yamato-e are the horizontal narrative hand scrolls (emaki or *emakimono*) produced in the 12th century. This format, which had been introduced from China in the 6th or 7th century, had already been used effectively in Japan, most notably for the Nara period *Kako genzai inga kyō* (“Sutra of Cause and Effect”), but these early scrolls are thought to be imitative of Chinese works. In the Late Heian, however, *emaki* began to develop a unique Japanese character and proved to be particularly well suited to Japanese expression.

There are few extant narrative scrolls dating from the Heian period. Their quality is extraordinary, however, and probably representative of a larger number of works no longer extant. The *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*), a long court romance composed in the late 10th or early 11th century, has been culled for clues to Heian life and culture. Reference is made to the popularity of a wide thematic range of narrative painting. Typically, the format of presentation was that of alternating bodies of text and painting. The best of these works were not ploddingly literal in their visual interpretations of text. Rather they were carefully selective of their points of illustration, allowing maximum freedom to the viewer’s imagination and demonstrating a complementary rather than repetitive use of text and image.

The range of expressive technique available to artists was considerable, and adaptation of style and composition to suit the tone of a narrative was, judging from available evidence, astute. An illustrated narration of *The Tale of Genji*, *Genji monogatari emaki*, was produced in the first half of the 12th century. The tale, which relates the life and loves of Prince Genji, is undergirded with Buddhist metaphysics and is thought to offer an approximate fictional description of court life at the time of its composition. It provides a complex analysis of emotions that are always obliquely expressed because of the constraints of court etiquette. The artists thus convey mood not with facial expression or gesticulation, which would violate

the highly refined court aesthetic, but with formally posed figures rendered in opaque pigments and the skillful use of depicted architectural elements. Treatments of interior space subtly suggest the emotion masked by the human figures. Quite different from *The Tale of Genji* scroll is the 12th-century *Shigisan engi emaki* (“Legends of Shigisan Temple”). Drawing on folkloric sources, it is a tale of miracles attributed to the Shingon monk Myōren, who resided on Mount Shigi near Nara in the latter part of the 9th century. The uninhibited depiction of action and movement central to various episodes is rendered by lively and varied brushstrokes. Similarly, the first scrolls of the *Chōjū jinbutsu giga* (“Scrolls of Frolicking Animals and Humans”), products of the 12th century (later scrolls are dated to the 13th century), satirize human foibles through the depiction of anthropomorphized animals rendered in masterfully vibrant ink monochrome brushwork.

The *Ban Dainagon ekotoba* (“Story of the Courtier Ban Dainagon”) narrates the incidents surrounding the arson of a gate at the imperial palace in the mid-9th century. This work of the later 12th century is a masterful blend of technical styles. Movements of tension, suspense, thunderous action, and quiet intrigue are variously expressed by a combination of careful pictorial composition, adroit calligraphic technique suggesting action, and the use of opaque pigments to render pauses in the narrative.

The reasons for the appeal and florescence of the *emaki* genre are speculative. However, as demonstrated by the growing penchant for keeping diaries, writing travel commentaries, and reading a particular type of loosely structured narrative interspersed with verse, narration as a form of literature was increasing in popularity in Heian Japan. The growing ease with which observations were recorded was probably assisted by the development of the syllabic writing systems noted above. In the religious sphere the didactic use of popular tales in facilitating the spread of Buddhism offered an occasion for recording and infusing religious meaning into folktales. Proselytizers for Buddhism employed the format to commemorate or memorialize the origins and history of particular sects and temples and for illustrated biographies of noted religious leaders.

The illustrated, or illuminated, sutra form, a type of *emaki*, reached its zenith of expression with the completion in 1164 of the *Heike nōkyō*. This incomparable 34-scroll presentation of the *Lotus Sutra* with alternating text and painting was an offering of the military leader Taira Kivomori.

Decorative arts

The kilns at Sanage to the east of present-day Nagoya provided functional ceramic pieces for the court. These were largely forms and glazes that were imitative of Chinese three-colour and celadon potteries, which used lead in their glazes. Lacquerware emerged as an art that provided a means of producing the effect of inlay work popular mainly as an import item during the Nara period.

Kamakura period

From the middle of the 12th century the reality of true imperial court control over Japan was largely a fiction. The Taira (Heike), a provincial warrior family, assumed the role of imperial protector and became the effectual power wielder. From

that time they entered into a protracted struggle for hegemony with the Minamoto (Genji), a powerful clan from eastern Japan. The Gempei War between the families raged through much of Japan's central island from 1180 to 1185, during which such major temples as Tōdai and Kōfuku and their contents were completely destroyed. The Minamoto eventually emerged victorious, and, under the leadership of Minamoto Yoritomo, the culture and structure of national leadership shifted from the civil aristocracy to the hands of a provincial warrior class. In 1192 Yoritomo was named *sei taishōgun* (“barbarian-quelling generalissimo”) by the court, thus initiating an office of military dictator that would persist until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Yoritomo located his power centre (later termed shogunate, or *bakufu*, literally “tent government”) in Kamakura, a small seaside village on a peninsula to the south of present-day Tokyo. Control of the shogunate soon passed to the Hōjō family through Yoritomo's widow, but the government did not return to Kyōto until 1333. The years from 1185 to 1333 are thus known as the Kamakura period.

The military victory and subsequent structural changes not only established the new ruling group in a position of military and economic power but also allowed for the infusion and development of a new cultural ethos—one that paralleled but was determinedly distinct from that developed by the court in Nara and in Kyōto. Warrior values of strength, discipline, austerity, and immediacy found resonance in the practices of Zen Buddhism. This strain of Buddhism had long played a subsidiary role in Japan, but, from the 13th century, strong Japanese adherents were bolstered in number and authoritative leadership by immigrant Chinese monks who had been displaced by the Mongol conquests in China. Zen Buddhism offered the new military leadership a nonthreatening alternative to the Tendai-controlled religious establishment that dominated the Kyōto court. The iconographic needs and the inherent aesthetic predispositions of Zen Buddhism were refined through this initial relationship with the Kamakura elite and over the next several centuries became widely influential throughout Japan.

Populist religious movements, particularly those generated by Amidist beliefs during the Heian period, grew even stronger and more diverse during the Kamakura period, increasing demands for Buddhist iconography. During the 13th century fears of an invasion by the Mongols from the mainland were realized on two occasions (1274 and 1281). Both times the invaders were repulsed, but these episodes and their anticipation contributed to a pervasive anxiety that was more than occasionally exhibited in the mood and theme of religious iconography. It was a time punctuated by prayers of supplication and pleas for divine intervention. Although quite different in their fundamental precepts, the simple and direct means of access to salvation or enlightenment offered by Zen or Amidist practices were exceedingly popular.

Sculpture

Perhaps no single feature of the Kamakura period so exemplifies the unique character of the age as does the emergence of bold new sculptural styles. Indeed, the Kamakura is considered by many to be the last significant period in the history of Japanese sculpture until modern times. Although sculpture continued to be produced in later periods, it consisted largely of uninspired reworkings of old themes and old styles.

As a result of the widespread destruction wrought by the Gempei War, it was necessary to replace the extensive loss of religious sculpture. The most compelling works of the period were created in the 13th century, notably by the Kei family, led by Kōkei and his son Unkei. Inspired both by the exquisite idealism of the Nara period works and by the fashion for

realism found in Chinese Song dynasty sculpture, the best of Kamakura period sculpture conveyed intense corporeal presence. The style is frequently referred to as “Kamakura realism” but should not be confused with the notion of “realistic” in the sense of faithful rendering of the natural. While, for example, there is reference to careful anatomic understanding, this understanding is often rendered in extreme statement. The huge guardian figures created by Unkei and other Kei artists to flank the Nandai-mon (“Great South Gate”) at Tōdai Temple are the epitome of this style. With bulging eyes, limbs lined with tributaries of protruding veins, and theatrical poses, these and similar works were direct and accessible to the mass of the Buddhist faithful.

In portraying a range of divine concerns from protection to sympathetic consolation, Kamakura sculpture responded to the spiritual climate of the age. The sculpture by Unkei’s son Kōshō (died 1237) of Kūya, the rugged old mendicant who advocated the unceasing repetition of the nembutsu prayer, is depicted realistically as determined and gnarly but with the fantastic grace note of a string of small Amida figures emerging from his mouth—a literal representation of his teaching. An exquisitely refined evocation of the protective and welcoming presence of the Amida is seen in the sculpture dated to 1269 and a product of the atelier of Kōshun. With its surface completely adorned with gold-leaf pattern cuttings (kirikane), this figure proclaims celestial splendour. The intensity of the deity’s gaze, omniscient and direct, is accomplished by a Kamakura period innovation: inlaid crystal eyes backed by white paper appropriately coloured to effect iris and pupil. For Kōfuku Temple, Unkei sustained the remarkable standards of the temple’s renowned Nara period hollow-lacquer sculpture with his production of figures such as the famous disciples of the Buddha, Muchaku (Asanga) and Seshin (Vasubandhu). The portrait sculpture of Muchaku conveys firm resolve, seasoned realism, and, thanks to subtle handling of fleshiness around the eyes, a hint of humour.

The finest Kamakura period sculpture is a seamless union of meticulously crafted and assembled parts. While wood was the medium of choice, the dominant presence of a single tree, a feature characteristic of early Heian sculpture, is no longer present. The joined-block method was used with much greater frequency than in previous periods. Effects were achieved through the coordination of skills, and specialization within workshops was common. In some cases the face of a sculpture was worked separately, as if a mask, and then affixed to the sculpture. The refinement of this ability to work on individual parts allowed for remarkable detail and expressive effects, enhancing the meticulous realism characteristic of Kamakura sculpture.

Painting

Painting of the Kamakura period, both religious and secular, was marked by a sense of immediacy and vitality.

The Amidist sects spawned cults that emphasized devotion to particular intercessory figures who had initially been considered ancillary in the overall Pure Land Buddhist pantheon. For example, the Jizō Bosatsu, the bodhisattva depicted in the guise of a gentle, young monk, was venerated as a protector of women and children and as one dispatched on a special mission of compassion to suffering sentient beings enmeshed in the tribulations of their various life states. The popularity of Amidism also encouraged the creation of elaborately conceived spiritual cosmologies in paintings depicting the six realms of existence. In a variation of that theme, paintings of the Nika Byakudō (“White Path to the Western Paradise Across Two Rivers”) type show both the difficulties encountered by the believer journeying to the Western

Paradise and, at the centre, the Jizō benevolently ministering to those in need. Similarly, raigō paintings featuring depictions of the Amida and entourage descending from paradise to greet the souls of the recently deceased faithful enjoyed considerable popularity.

As was the case with sculptural representation, immediacy and accessibility were the most desired attributes of religious iconography. Religious foundations made extensive use of the narrative scroll format to honour sect anniversaries or histories and to document the biographies of founders and other major personalities. Such works as the Hōnen shōnin eden and the Ippen shōnin gyojo eden present biographies of the priests Hōnen, founder of the Pure Land sect, and Ippen, beloved charismatic who founded an Amidist subgroup, the Ji sect. In vitality of defining brushwork, rich palette, and lavish depiction of the sundry details of contemporaneous existence, these and similar works serve as essential records of the material culture of the Kamakura period; but in a more profound religious sense, they are visual evidence of the strong Japanese penchant for grounding the spiritual experience in the easily approachable guise of everyday life.

The use of iconography in Zen Buddhism was not as extensive as in other sects, but mentor and patriarch portraiture played a significant role in the ritual of the transmission of teaching authority. Here too, the penetrating effect of presence was the quality most sought in these visages. Ink monochrome painting was also employed by Zen adepts as a form of participatory spiritual exercise. In addition to representations of personages or historic moments, real or legendary, associated with Zen, Zen painters also depicted subjects not obviously religious in theme. Bird-and-flower paintings were created and queried for insights into spiritual meaning, and gradually the landscape painting offered accretions of symbolic meaning indicative of internal, spiritual journeys.

During the Kamakura period, Buddhism continued and strengthened systematic efforts to incorporate the indigenous religion, Shintō, by identifying local gods and numinous presences as manifestations of Buddhist deities. This system was called honchi-suijaku, and its principles were applied extensively. Religious paintings often depicted the figures of both Buddhist and Shintō manifestation in some mandala-like format. Likewise, Buddhist paintings, especially of the honchi-suijaku type, frequently incorporated Shintō sacred sites into their landscapes. Not precisely of this type but a sublime derivative is the icon of Nachi Falls. There, a sacred site on the Kii Peninsula south of Ise reveals the haunting presence of the great, constantly plunging force which all but overwhelms the small architecture of the Shintō shrine that honours the natural site. Thus, certain Buddhist traditional painting techniques revealed the sacredness of adopted territory.

In the realm of secular painting, as in the religious world noted above, the narrative scroll continued to develop as an essential expressive format. The popularity of war tales, appropriate to the climate inspired by the interests of the new national leadership and by the threat and reality of foreign invasion, is readily apparent in extant paintings commemorating various domestic martial episodes. Few paintings of the period capture the force, confusion, and terror of battle as effectively as does the episode of the burning of the Sanjō Palace in the Heiji monogatari emaki. Here, the artist uses highly animated, modulated strokes of defining ink, judicious, repetitive patterning, and the application of opaque colour to produce a series of carefully joined vignettes that intimately and actively tell the story.

The court, although stripped of political power, continued to be an arbiter of cultural matters. Most especially, it dominated the development of a national literature and the rendering of that literature in relation to painting and calligraphy. The

various modes of joining word and image continued to be the specialized purview of aristocratic culture. In the early 13th century important anthologies were assembled of the works of the 36 ancient poets who had been “canonized” in the Heian period, and portraits of these masters were popular painting subjects. Often, the horizontal narrative scroll format was used to present the poets as if they were engaged in poetry competitions, composing linked verse (*renga*), with representative verse juxtaposed by their images. Thus, even the comparatively subdued ambience of court culture was animated by the format so attuned to the dynamism of the period. The 36-poet genre was thereafter a resilient theme and a standard way of expressing high literary reference in painting.

Secular portraiture saw developments stimulated in part by the central role of patriarch and mentor portraits in the Zen tradition. The schematic or generalized visages of the Heian period indigenous traditions were influenced by these imported developments. Court and military portraits of the period tend to present the subject in the stiff, opaque, and decorative surrounding typical of Heian style, but faces are more realistically and individually rendered.

Muromachi period

Ashikaga Takauji, a warrior commissioned by the Kamakura shogun to put down an attempt at imperial restoration in Kyōto, astutely surveyed circumstances and, during the years 1333 to 1336, transformed his role from that of insurrection queller to usurper of shogunal power. The **Muromachi period** (1338–1573) takes its name from a district in Kyōto where the new shogunal line of the **Ashikaga family** established its residence. With Takauji’s ascendancy a split occurred in the imperial lineage. A southern court in exile formed in the Yoshino Mountains, to the south of Nara, while a court in residence, under the Ashikaga hand, ruled from Kyōto. This double regency continued until the end of the century, when a duplicitous compromise finally stripped the southern court of claims to power. This imperfectly resolved situation henceforth provided both political and romantic aesthetic evocations of legitimate power deposed. It became a rallying point for royalists and a continuing subtle undercurrent in literature and the **visual arts**, a metaphor for the contention between the brute force of arriviste pretensions and the sublime culture of legitimate rule. By extension, it harked back to the halcyon days of Heian court rule.

The Ashikaga family held relative control of national power until the mid-15th century, when other aggressive provincial warlords provoked a struggle that culminated in the **Ōnin War** (1467–77). This civil war laid ruin to much of Kyōto and was, in effect, the initial skirmish in a century of ongoing military conflict. Ashikaga men continued as figurehead rulers until 1573, when **Oda Nobunaga**, the first of three successive hegemon (**Toyotomi Hideyoshi** and **Tokugawa Ieyasu** were the other two) who brought about the consolidation of power in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, dismissed the last Ashikaga shogun.

The Muromachi period was thus a time of prolonged civil unrest, remarkable social fluidity, and creativity. During the **Kamakura period** the aristocracy accepted the bitter pill of distant shogunal rule, but the Ashikaga presence in Kyōto placed those who were perceived as boorish upstarts at the helm of cultural arbitration. The Ashikaga ascendancy took the political and cultural revolution initiated by the Minamoto clan back to the capital. This was viewed, particularly by

the once singularly powerful, as the time of gekokujō—the world turned upside down—an inverted social order when the lowly reigned over the elite. The arrival of untutored provincial warriors and their retinues in Kyōto effected theretofore unthinkable juxtapositions of social classes engaged in similar cultural pursuits. Nevertheless, despite the complaints of many aristocrats, the imposition of the new order—or disorder—had multiple beneficial effects on the practice of the visual arts.

The military rulers attempted to establish their legitimacy through their patronage of the arts. They assiduously promoted Zen Buddhism and Chinese culture in opposition to the aristocratic preference for indigenous styles. The increase in trade with Ming China and the avid cultivation of things Chinese encouraged by the Ashikaga rulers established a dominant aesthetic mode for the period, and journeys of monk-artists to and from China provided yet another avenue for stimulation of the arts.

Meanwhile, Japanese court culture, using Heian period aesthetic achievements as a canonical norm, continued to foster and develop indigenous visual forms. Both court and shogunal currents—what might be called, respectively, conservative and Sinophilic—were strengthened by interaction. While the various patronage groups were, to a degree, antagonistic, the juxtaposition generally stimulated experiment and challenged stagnant modes of visual representation.

In addition to the cultural changes wrought by sheer military power, the egalitarian structures of Zen Buddhism and other populist Buddhist movements provided the possibility of startlingly swift advancement and important patronage for talented but low-born individuals. Many found that the indeterminate social status afforded by religious ordination provided the means to move freely among different classes. It was also common to assume a religious status as a kind of social camouflage without the actual benefit of ordination. Artists of every sort found temple ateliers congenial to their talents in this time of relative meritocracy.

Zen Buddhism firmly established its role of intellectual leadership during the Muromachi period and provided a strong line of continuity with the aesthetic trends established during the Kamakura period. Growing in real power, the temples became to an even greater degree centres for the consideration, assimilation, and dissemination of continental culture. Other sects, notably Nichiren Buddhism and other populist movements born in the Kamakura period, also experienced significant revival with successful proselytizing in the warrior, merchant, and peasant classes.

Buddhism responded to the elevated cultural aspiration of its believers, clerics and laity alike, by providing occasions in which the realms of the aesthetic and religious were, in practice, joined. The development of the tea ceremony, which became increasingly important because it linked heightened religious sensibility with artistic connoisseurship, is a prime example of Buddhism's role in fostering new art forms in this period.

Regional dissemination of central cultural values was another important catalyst for development. The increasing strength of provincial leaders allowed them to assume patronage roles and to invite distinguished Kyōto artists to regions distant from the centre of culture. From the time of the Ōnin War and in the century following, this process was accelerated as Kyōto was engulfed in martial conflict.

Painting and calligraphy

The most significant developments in Japanese painting during the Muromachi years involved the assimilation of the Chinese ink monochrome tradition, known in Japanese as suiboku-ga or sumi-e. Zen Buddhism was the principal conduit for knowledge of this painting tradition, which was originally understood as an exercise potentially leading to enlightenment, either through viewing or in the practice of putting brush to paper. It was practiced both by amateurs and by professional monk-painters in temple ateliers.

About 1413 Josetsu, a monk-artist of the Ashikaga-supported Shōkoku Temple, was commissioned by Ashikaga Yoshimochi (1386–1428) to produce a painting in the “new style” (thought to be that of the Southern Song). The resulting work shows a man with a gourd standing near a stream and a catfish swimming in the water. Originally mounted as a small screen, the painting was soon transferred to the hanging scroll format, and the poetic commentaries of 30 monks were appended to the painting. This is perhaps the most famous work by the artist, who—as the master of Shūbun (fl. 15th century), who in turn instructed Sesshū—is generally considered to stand at the head of the most important lineage of Muromachi ink painters. Josetsu’s work alludes to the shogun’s dominance of the elemental and sometimes unpredictable forces of nature and society, which are represented by the wily catfish. It can be understood as an instruction in the limitations of and deluded aspirations for power. It also suggests a style of Zen pedagogy in which a visual or verbal puzzle (in this case, how does one catch a slippery catfish with a small gourd?) prompts a dialogue between master and pupil as an exercise toward enlightenment. Noteworthy here is the fact of an exceptionally skilled painter operating well within the parameters of painting as religious exercise and also revealing the essential links between political power and Zen Buddhism’s florescence.

Later, ink monochrome painters attempted themes that included Daoist and Buddhist patriarchal and mythical subjects, bird-and-flower compositions, and landscapes. It is instructive to note that in the course of the 15th century the progress of the three-generation lineage of Josetsu, Shūbun, and Sesshū can be described as a movement from physical permanence and relative security to a peripatetic existence necessitated by political instability and from conservative to more generalized or secular themes. Sesshū, who traveled to Ming China and was influenced by court painters, saw that Chinese painting was far greater in range than the ink monochrome tradition. His later works demonstrate a subtle use of colour and complex, seemingly random compositional formats, suggesting an increasing priority of brushstroke and patterning as the true subject. His long landscape scroll produced for the Mori clan in Yamaguchi is a brilliant study of boldly described forms in linear movement. He is also known for his landscapes in the haboku (“splashed-ink”) technique, a style promulgated by Chinese Chan Buddhist painters who likened the spontaneous brushwork and intuitively understood (rather than realistically depicted) forms to the spontaneous, intuitive experience of Chan enlightenment.

Ink painting was not only the province of Zen Buddhists. Painters of the Ami lineage (so called because they used the suffix -ami in their names to indicate their faith in Amida) served the Ashikaga shoguns as aesthetic advisers. They graded and organized the shogunal collections of Chinese art and, as practitioners of the ink monochrome form, tended to a more gentle, polished conservatism than the bold, rough brushwork of the Shōkoku Temple painters. This tendency is seen in a work by Shingei (Geiami) painted on the departure (c. 1480) of his pupil Kenkō Shōkei. It depicts the common subject of travelers passing beyond a turbulent pool and plunging waterfall to a temporary shelter nestled in a grotto. The

sentiment is clear, and the execution reveals a mannered, controlled hand. The standard representation of receding far distance is suggested, but, in comparison with Chinese and earlier Japanese works, the balance of the painting is now subtly disrupted and the frontal plane becomes the focus of the work. Shōkei, who was returning to his home temple atelier in Kamakura, carried the lessons of stylistic change to the east and developed an even more mannered approach to ink monochrome.

Another artist of the eastern provinces, Sesson Shūkei, eschewed any apprenticeship in Kyōto. As a mendicant with eclectic training, Sesson worked in an ink monochrome style charged with highly individualistic energy that captured the brooding uncertainties of the warring period.

The late Muromachi transition to secularization of the ink monochrome format is best expressed in the work of Kanō Motonobu. His father, Masanobu, stands at the head of a lineage that became, in following centuries, the dominant Japanese painting academy. The Kanō group was one of several important ateliers to develop important syntheses of Chinese and indigenous painting styles. Motonobu married into the Tosa family of Yamato-e painters, symbolically and literally effecting this gradual eclecticism. His sliding door panel paintings for Daitoku Temple in Kyōto depict famous episodes of Zen enlightenment. High professionalism, delicate coloration, and a skillful narrative instinct are apparent in this sweeping composition.

Although ink monochrome painting reached its height in Japan during the Muromachi period, other painting styles also flourished. Polychrome depictions of the patriarch reveal a consummate skill in execution. The eccentric visages of the disciples of the Buddha are found in a set attributed to the painter Ryōzen. They not only convey the persistent Zen fascination with spiritual force found in personality but also contain lush patterning and detail, as if a rugged eremitic type is slowly being enveloped in indigenous interests. These works, it should be said, also reflect dependence on Song Chinese interpretations.

The indigenous Yamato-e tradition also continued to develop during this period. The polished narrative painting forms found in the late Heian and Kamakura periods were still produced but were eclipsed by styles that conveyed energy at the expense of surface refinement. Their genesis paralleled the growth of narrative literature, which treated a growing number of legends and folktales. Also appearing with greater frequency was a narrative compositional technique that mixed word and image by juxtaposing text closely to the figure speaking the words, almost in cartoon style. Screen painting in a rich polychromatic style persisted in parallel to the sparser, more obviously intellectual monochromes of the Zen tradition. The best of the Muromachi Yamato-e style screens show, in material and in sensibility, influences of metalworking, lacquering, and textile crafts. These works convey the reality of pragmatic creativity, which would come to full flower at the close of the 16th century.

The trends in Japanese calligraphy continued in essentially two major channels—the court-inspired, elegantly mannered script and the bold, ruggedly expressive forms of the Zen tradition.

Ceramics

The Muromachi period taste in ceramics was, like painting, massively influenced by Chinese and Korean taste. Celadon ware was imported in large quantities. Known in Japan as Tenryūji ware, this light green monochrome ware was produced in many shapes as service ware and can be seen depicted in various narrative paintings of the period. It was imported as part of a large trading scheme managed by the Zen Tenryū Temple to support its works. Shogunal taste also favoured the sparse, darker ceramics from China, including temmoku ware, which revealed beautiful random effects in glaze colouring.

These comparatively austere Chinese ceramic types were gradually understood to have potential native equivalents in the ruggedly simple storage jars produced in Japanese kilns. Finely controlled glazes and enamel polychromy, which required the use of kaolin clay and controlled high firing, were still technically beyond Japanese capabilities; but the high regard in which the elegantly simple Chinese ware was held caused connoisseurs to elevate the status of once humble works and to commission Japanese interpretations of continental ware in Japanese kilns.

Lacquerware

Similarly, the appreciation of lacquerware was stimulated by the importation of fine Chinese works. The carved lacquer technique developed in Yuan China was emulated in a somewhat simpler manner in Japan. Lacquerware of a subdued red and black palette, said to have originated in the workshops of the Negoro Temple to the southeast of Ōsaka, was favoured in Buddhist establishments for its worn, unaffected look.

The tea ceremony

Perhaps the most calculatedly effective aesthetic development of the Muromachi period was the emergence of the cult of tea. The environment gradually required for tea gatherings grew into a kind of ritualized theatre in which objects removed from their original contexts were offered as worthy of consideration both in and of themselves and as metaphors for religious or philosophical perspectives. Zen monks imported tea plants from China, where the beverage was used for its medicinal qualities and as a stimulant in meditation. They also participated in a simple ceremony of consumption that included the use of certain prescribed utensils and implements.

From these fairly simple origins as a moment of respite and spiritual conviviality, the tea ceremony grew in complexity. Tea competitions (tocha) with the goal of discerning various blends began to be held in the Muromachi period and were espoused by Murata Shukō (c. 1422–1502), who was a disciple of the Zen master and abbot Ikkyū and is traditionally credited with founding the tea ceremony in Japan. An aesthetic adviser to the shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, Shukō prepared tea for his master at the latter's villa Ginkaku ("Silver Pavilion," now a temple) in a separate structure with a small tea room called the Dōjinsai. Shukō and those in his circle stressed the spiritual elements of the ceremony and encouraged the display of a piece of Zen calligraphy at the ceremony.

About this time the size of the tea ceremony room was standardized to four and a half tatami mats. Interestingly, this size is said to have derived from the tradition which holds that the meditation cell used by Vimalakirti (Yuima), an Indian disciple of the Buddha, was of the same proportions. Shelving, a recessed wall element or alcove (tokonoma), and other features provided places for displaying art appropriate to a season, mood, or other occasional intention. Implements such as tea cups, water jars, and kettles were carefully choreographed for the occasion.

The codification of the ceremony developed through the late Muromachi period and flowered in the succeeding Momoyama period. Similarly, the aesthetic intentions were more carefully articulated with time. In general, these goals included the cultivation of simplicity and the appreciation of rusticity. Within the careful ritual of tea preparation and sharing, the proper blend of object and participants was intended to heighten an awareness of transience and fragility. It trained the participant to be predisposed to learning from the simple and to seek new levels of meaning through the creative juxtaposition of objects, painting, and calligraphy. The practice of the tea ceremony had profound impact on the nature of fine art collecting by proposing new values for previously existing art and by encouraging the creation of works especially for use in the ceremony. In a time of radically shifting social alignments, it is noteworthy that the ambience of the tea ceremony thrived on suggested visual contrasts between the rustic and refined.

Azuchi-Momoyama period

The brief span of time during which first Oda Nobunaga and then Toyotomi Hideyoshi began the process of unifying the warring provincial leaders under a central government is referred to as the Azuchi-Momoyama, or Momoyama, period.

The dating of the period is, like the name, somewhat relative. The initial date is often given as that of Nobunaga's entry into Kyōto in 1568 or as that of the expulsion of the last Ashikaga shogun, Yoshiaki, from Kyōto in 1573. The end of the period is sometimes dated to 1600, when Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory at Sekigahara established his hegemony; to 1603, when he became shogun; or to 1615, when he destroyed the Toyotomi family. It should be noted that the rigid application of an essentially political chronology to developments in the arts can be deceptive. Many important cultural figures were active not only during the Momoyama period but in the preceding Muromachi or succeeding Edo period as well. Similarly, artistic styles did not necessarily change with each change in political system.

In any case, Nobunaga's rise is the referent event for the start of the period. He selected Azuchi, a town on the eastern shore of Lake Biwa, a few miles to the east of Kyōto, as the site of his new government. It was there that a purportedly magnificent castle (now known only through records) was constructed between 1576 and 1579 and destroyed shortly after Nobunaga's death. A product of military necessity as well as an extension of the bold and outsize personality of its resident, this innovative structure presented enormous decorative challenges and opportunities to Kanō Eitoku, the premier painter of the period.

Nobunaga's successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, was, of the three hegemon of the period, perhaps the one most enthusiastically involved with the arts. He constructed several castles, including one at Momoyama, just to the south of Kyōto. The name Momoyama has since become associated, as has Azuchi, with the lavish and bold symbolizations of political power characteristic of the period.

The fact that the two castle sites lend their names to the era seems especially appropriate artistically because the castle was the single most important crucible for experimentation in the visual arts in the Azuchi-Momoyama period. The development of the castle also points up several salient features of the age: a display of massive power held by provincial warriors not previously noted for high cultural aspirations, growing confidence in national stability, and the conscription of artists to articulate the new mood.

The development of the visual arts during this period was characterized by the vigorous patronage of two groups: the military leadership, who brought civil stability, and the merchant class, which formed the economic backbone of the revitalized urban centres. The masters of an unchallenged central government were supported by an emerging urban merchant class astutely aware of its pivotal role in maintaining the stability of the recently war-wracked nation. In addition, a much diminished aristocracy was still intent on retaining a hand in the arbitration of culture. At first, the bold scale and martial vitality of the warrior class were most influential in the arts. Later, the urban merchant class was the primary underwriter of a revival in interest and reinterpretation of Heian and Kamakura period court taste. Each group found not only genuine pleasure through their patronage of the arts but, in a time of major social realignments, legitimization and proclamation of their social status as well.

Painting

Painting was the visual art form that offered the most varied opportunities in the new age and, in fact, the most notable area of achievement. A breakdown of the comparatively rigid lines that had previously defined the various painting styles began in the Muromachi period and continued in the Momoyama. The Kanō school developed two distinctive styles: one featuring bright, opaque colours on gold or silver backgrounds, brilliantly amalgamating bright colour and bold brushwork, and the other a more freehanded, mannered, and bold interpretation of traditional ink monochrome themes. Other schools varied these two styles into distinctive lineage voices, but the Kanō group under Eitoku dominated the period through sheer talent and by amassing important commissions.

At Eitoku's death several other figures who had worked either in secondary collaboration or in competition with the Kanō atelier emerged as strong individualist painters. Kaihō Yūshō probably trained in the Kanō studio, but his independent style, most characteristically revealed in richly nuanced ink monochrome on gold or silver background, owed much to a careful study of Zen painting. Hasegawa Tōhaku arrived in Kyōto from the Noto Peninsula region to the north on the Sea of Japan (East Sea). His training was thoroughly eclectic, with experience in Buddhist polychrome themes, portraiture, and ink monochrome. Through the offices of the tea master Sen Rikyū, Tōhaku gained access to important collections of Chinese painting that had greatly influenced Muromachi aesthetics. His acknowledged masterworks are in both the full-blown but delicately nuanced polychrome style and the more subtle, contemplative ink monochrome format. The latter style is exemplified by the hauntingly depicted pine trees obscured by a mist that he painted on a pair of sixfold screens. Ultimately individualists with no long-term significant school following, Yūshō and Tōhaku nevertheless provided a brilliant sense of creative variation to the Kanō dominance.

The subject matter favoured by the military patrons was bold and aggressive, as overtly suggested in paintings of birds of prey, lions, and tigers. Slightly more subtle but equally assertive renderings of majestic rocks or trees were also popular. Some Confucian themes, reflective of the ideology that would be favoured even more forcefully under Tokugawa rule, were beginning to appear. Yet another theme endorsed by rulers and townspeople was a style of genre painting that celebrated the new prosperity and stability, both urban and agrarian. Panoramic and carefully detailed screen paintings laid out the bustling life of Kyōto emerging from the destruction of civil-war life. The observation of prosperity and pleasure-

seeking spawned a style of genre painting that developed during the Edo period into quite specialized observations of the pleasure quarters of the urban centres.

An aberrational but richly interesting thematic interlude involved the presence of Iberian merchants, diplomats, and missionaries. These Westerners were part of the vast exploration, trade, and colonization effort that reached South America, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia. From the time of the foreigners' first arrival in 1543 until their expulsion in the 1630s, there was a modest amount of cultural transmission. During this time the Japanese commissioned liturgical implements from the West and acquired some training in Western painting techniques. Perhaps most memorably, it became fashionable to depict Western themes and screen panoramas of the foreigners active in various Japanese settings—walking in the streets of Kyōto or arriving at ports in galleons. Unlike paintings with Japanese or Chinese themes, which are read from right to left, a telling curiosity of these screens is that they are read from left to right, suggesting by composition that the foreigners would depart. This exposure to the West seems to have had little long-term effect on the Japanese visual arts. (Later, however, via the Dutch trading settlement at Deshima in Nagasaki Harbour, Western copperplates, Chinese adaptations of Western artworks and techniques, and other secondary expressions made Japanese artists more aware of such techniques as shading, modeling, and single-point perspective.) The Iberian presence is one striking example of the spirit of the Momoyama period. Such great cultural variety, curiosity, and experimentation was no longer tolerated when the Tokugawa clan completed the unification and centralization of political leadership. If the Kanō school and related interpreters advanced the themes and styles of the Muromachi period to accommodate the expansive sensibilities of the new ruling class and new social phenomenon in general, yet another alignment of artistic talent offered a reexamination of the themes and expressive modes of the Heian court. The renaissance of courtly taste experimented with word and image, intermixing poetry, painting or design, lush decorative papers reminiscent of famous Heian secular and religious works, and countless narrative illustrations or allusive references to the Tales of Ise and to The Tale of Genji. It was during the late Momoyama and early Edo periods that a canonical body or stock of standardized referent classical illustrations began to coalesce.

The courtly themes were tackled by all schools but perhaps most effectively by the creative partnership of Hon'ami Kōetsu and Tawaraya Sōtatsu. Although, strictly speaking, they created most of their greatest works in the Edo period, Sōtatsu and Kōetsu developed their aesthetic sensibilities in Kyōto during the Momoyama period, and the inspiration for their later works can be found in the great creative freedom characteristic of that time.

Kōetsu was raised in a family of sword experts, a discipline that required extensive knowledge of lacquer, metal, and leather. It implied an eye acutely attuned to delicate nuance in discerning the working of a blade. Kōetsu expanded his interests and training to include calligraphy and ceramics. He functioned as an impresario, bringing together talented craftsmen and artists to work on projects. None was more central to and intertwined with his reputation than Sōtatsu, a painter of fans. Both men, especially Kōetsu, had excellent connections with the aristocracy but came from artisan or merchant families. Working in collaboration, with Kōetsu acting as calligrapher, they created paintings and decorative backgrounds recalling the rich opaque texturing of an earlier illuminated sutra style. While both men, in other contexts, demonstrated mastery of the ink monochrome form, their works in polychromy featured a trait that would be

characteristic of their followers throughout the Edo period: their images are formed through arrangements of colour patterns rather than being defined by ink outlines and embellished with colour. Ink was used more sparingly and allusively than, for example, by the Kanō painters. The effect was softening, textured, and suggestive of textile patterning. Sōtatsu's lush screen painting, said to describe the scene at Matsushima Bay on Japan's northeast Pacific coast, is a superb statement of elemental power couched in a decorative mode. Reference to the various planes of Chinese painting—near, middle, and far distance—were largely abandoned, as exposition of the surface of a material became the foremost concern.

Sōtatsu and Kōetsu worked in collaboration with the wealthy merchant Suminokura Soan, beginning in 1604, to produce images and calligraphy for a series of luxury-edition printed books featuring renderings of classical and Noh drama texts. This collaboration marked the earliest and one of the most beautiful efforts at a wider dissemination of the Japanese classics to an increasingly literate audience. The energies and talents that these men and their followers infused into the Japanese visual arts were thoroughly unique. It may be suggested, however, that their initial training in art forms other than painting brought new pragmatism and perspective to the painting world.

Ceramics

The tea ceremony and the need for its attendant wares continued to develop during the Momoyama period. The ceremony itself enjoyed greater popularity, but the political instability of the late Muromachi and early Momoyama periods drove an important group of potters from Seto, near Nagoya, to the Mino region, somewhat northeast of their former site. It was in this area that many new and expanding commissions for tea ware were executed. Under the supervision of Mino kiln masters, subvarieties were produced, notably Shino ware, which used a rich feldspathic glaze whose random surface bursts and crackles appealed greatly to tea connoisseurs.

Works commissioned by the tea master Furuta Oribe featured aberrant or irregular shapes, adding to the random effects of firing. In the Kyōto area raku ware was the characteristic type. This was typically a hand-shaped, low-fired, lead-glazed bowl form that had been immersed in cold water or straw immediately after being removed from the hot kiln in order to produce random, unique effects on the surface. In Kyushu, probably under the direction of Korean potters, a high-fired ceramic known as Karatsu ware was introduced in the early 1590s. The plain, unsophisticated shapes and designs of Karatsu ware made it especially popular for use in the tea ceremony.

The natural, serendipitous features of ceramics cherished by Muromachi period tea masters embodied aesthetic qualities central to the tea philosophy. While these qualities continued to be sought during the Momoyama period, controlled peculiarities and manufactured defects were also introduced. The polished aesthetic of the Edo period was on the horizon.

Tokugawa, or Edo, period

At the death of the Momoyama leader Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1598, his five-year-old son, Hideyori, inherited nominal rule, but true power was held by Hideyoshi's counselors, among whom Tokugawa Ieyasu was the most prominent. Ieyasu assumed the title of shogun in 1603, and the de facto seat of government was moved from Kyōto to his headquarters in Edo (now Tokyo). Ieyasu completed his rise to power when he defeated the remaining Toyotomi forces in 1615. These

events marked the beginning of more than 250 years of national unity, a period known as either Tokugawa, after the ruling clan, or Edo, after the new political centre.

The government system implemented by the Tokugawa rulers is called the bakuhan, a combination of bakufu (“tent government,” or military shogunate) and han (“domain of a daimyo”). The new order allowed for comparative discretionary rule within the several hundred domains, but the daimyo were required to pay periodic visits to Edo and to maintain a residence there in which family members or important colleagues remained, a gentle form of hostage holding and a major factor in the city’s rapid growth.

In order to legitimize their rule and to maintain stability, the shoguns espoused a Neo-Confucian ideology that reinforced the social hierarchy placing warrior, peasant, artisan, and merchant in descending order. The early economy was based on agriculture, with rice as the measured unit of wealth. The warrior, the highest-ranking member of society, was salaried on rice and soon found his net worth fluctuating as wildly as the annual harvest yields. The merchant, on the other hand, who ranked lowest because he was understood to live off the labour of others, prospered in this time of peace and dramatic urban growth, a phenomenon that gave the lie to his theoretical value in the social order. Thus, from the inception of Tokugawa rule there was an implicit tension between the realities of a strong emerging urban culture, an inefficient agrarian economy, and a promulgated ideal of social order.

The economic power of the merchant class and the expansion of the urban centers widened the audience for the arts from the traditional base of the nobility and the political elite. New cultural forms were generated, including the Kabuki theatre and the licensed brothel quarters. In a generally restrictive and controlled society, these entertainments served as a social safety valve offered by the shogunate to the merchant class (although participation in this world was egalitarian). Their popularity opened a whole new thematic source to the visual arts as the formats of wood-block print and painting were employed to depict the many facets of the pleasure quarters.

The shogunate’s adaptation of Chinese concepts extended beyond Neo-Confucianism. China was again officially embraced as a source for models not only of good government but also of intellectual and aesthetic pursuits. The Chinese amateur scholar-painter (Chinese: wenren, Japanese: bunjin) was esteemed for his learning and culture and gentle mastery of the brush in calligraphy and painting. The Japanese interpretation of this model spawned important lineages of painting and patronage.

A final Zen Buddhist migration from China in the early and mid-17th century introduced the Ōbaku Zen sect to Japan. While not on the scale of Zen influence of previous centuries, Ōbaku monks provided the Japanese with a significant window on contemporaneous Chinese culture, particularly literature, calligraphy, and painting.

Most direct contact with foreigners was limited, however, especially after a policy of national seclusion was instituted in 1639. The Dutch trading post of Deshima in Nagasaki Harbour was Japan’s primary window on the outside world, providing a steady stream of Western visual images, most often in print form and frequently once removed from Europe through a Chinese interpretation. Western themes, techniques, and certain optical technology suggested new ways of seeing to Japanese artists.

Through the 18th century the conduit at Deshima was controlled by the whims or interests of individual administrations. Tokugawa Yoshimune, for example, allowed a considerable influx of foreign books. This was a stimulus to the great intellectual and artistic ferment of that century. In the 19th century, however, relations with the outside world ceased to be a controlled exercise in curiosity. Although Japan's limited natural resources offered no major temptation to colonizers, Western nations increased pressure on Japan to open its ports. The transition in sea travel from sail to steam put new demands on Western trading and naval fleets. Japan's strategic location, with its potential as a port for refueling and trade, was ever more evident. During the 1850s, treaties agreed to by a weakened shogunate raised the ire of many. In the south and west the domains of Chōshū and Satsuma, which held long-festering resentment of the Tokugawa reign, led rebellions during the 1860s. They overpowered the shogunal forces and “restored” the emperor in 1868, ending Tokugawa rule.

The feelings of nationalism that contributed to the imperial restoration had begun to develop in the 18th century, when a school of nativist ideology and learning arose. Partly in response to the shogunate's emulation of Chinese culture, this mode of thinking posited the uniqueness and inherent superiority of Japanese culture. It encouraged detailed research of classical Japanese literature, formed a philosophical base for a systematization of Shintō, and promoted direct national allegiance to the emperor rather than the shogun—especially when the shogunate seemed to fail in its duty to repel the encroaching Western powers. In the visual arts this “national learning” (kokugaku) was expressed by an increase in an existing interest in courtly and classical themes.

Painting

The development of painting during the Edo period drew energy from innovations and changes precipitated during the Momoyama period. Thematic interests, including Confucian subjects and a continuing fascination with Japanese classical themes, were already apparent in the years preceding national consolidation. Genre themes celebrating urban life became more focused during the Edo period as depictions of the activities in the pleasure quarters. The Neo-Confucian culture of the Edo period and its related influence in visual arts harked back to Muromachi period fascination with things Chinese. Experiments in realism, significantly influenced by exposure to Western models, produced major new painting lineages. Particularly distinctive of the period was the increase in the number of important individualist artists and of artists whose eclectic training could meet the demands of varied patronage.

The Kanō school of painters expanded and functioned as a kind of “official” Japanese painting academy. Many painters who would later begin their own stylistic lineages or function as independent and eclectic artists received their initial training in some Kanō atelier. Kanō Sanraku, whose bold patterning came closest among the early Kanō painters to touching the tastes stimulated by Tawaraya Sōtatsu and Hon'ami Kōetsu with their courtly revival style, provided a link to the generative energies that launched the school to its initial position of prominence. Kanō Tan'yū solidified the dominant position of the Kanō school and significantly directed the thematic interests of the atelier. In a sense, the Kanō artists became the official visual propagandists of the Tokugawa government. Many of their works stressed Confucian themes of filial piety, justice, and correctly ordered society. Tanyū was not only the leading painter of the school but was also extremely influential as a connoisseur and theorist. Tanyū's notebooks containing his comments and sketches of

observed paintings are a major historical source. His graceful ink and light colour rendering of Jizō Bosatsu reveals brush mastery and a thoroughly familiar, playful consideration of a Buddhist image. The youthful features of the deity are conveyed as at once fleshy and ethereal. The image is decidedly different from the gentle but stately renditions of the Kamakura period.

Two painting lineages explored the revival of interest in courtly taste: one was a consolidation of a group descending from Sōtatsu, and the other, the Tosa school, claimed descent from the imperial painting studios of the Heian times. The interpretations offered by the collaboration of Kōetsu and Sōtatsu in the late Momoyama period developed into a distinctive style called rinpa, an acronym linking the second syllable of the name of Ōgata Kōrin, the leading proponent of the style in the Edo period, and ha (pa), meaning “school” or “group.” Sōtatsu himself was active into the 1640s, and his pupils carried on his distinctive rendering of patterned images of classical themes. Like Sōtatsu, Kōrin emerged from the Kyōto trades as the scion of a family of textile designers. His paintings are notable for an intensification of the flat design quality and abstract colour patterns explored by Sōtatsu and for a use of lavish materials. His homage to the Yatsu-hashī episode from the Tales of Ise is seen in a pair of screens featuring an iris marsh traversed by eight footbridges that is described in the story. Kōrin attempted this subject, with and without reference to the bridges, on several occasions and in other media, including lacquerwork. Classical literature had imbued popular culture to the extent that this single visual reference would be easily recognized by viewers of the period, permitting Kōrin to evoke a familiar mood or emotion without having to depict a specific plot incident. Other notable exponents of the rinpa style in the later years of the Edo period were Sakai Hōitsu and Suzuki Kiitsu (1796–1858).

The Tosa school, a hereditary school of court painters, experienced a period of revival thanks to the exceptional talents and political acuity of Tosa Mitsuoki. Mitsuoki’s patronage connections to the imperial household, still residing in Kyōto, provided him with an appreciative aristocratic audience for his refined narrative evocations of Heian themes and styles. A pair of screens depicting spring-flowering cherry and autumn maple strike a melancholy chord. Attached to branches of the trees are decorated slips of paper bearing classical poems inscribed by the unseen participants in traditional court outings to celebrate the seasons. The allusion to past literary glory and to a poetry party recently dispersed suggests the mood of the court now resigned to ceremonial roles under the Tokugawa dictatorship. The Tosa atelier was active throughout the Edo period. An offshoot of the school, the Sumiyoshi painters Jokei (1599–1670) and his son Gukei (1631–1705), produced distinctive and sprightly renderings of classical subjects. In the first half of the 19th century, a group of painters, including Reizei Tamechika, explored ancient painting sources and offered a revival of Yamato-e style. Some, but not all, of the painters in this circle were politically active supporters of the imperial or royalist cause.

In addition to the Kanō, rinpa, and Tosa styles of painting, which all originated in earlier periods, several new types of painting developed during the Edo period. These can be loosely classified into two categories: the individualist, or eccentric, style and the bunjin-ga, or literati painting. The individualist painters were influenced by nontraditional sources such as Western painting and scientific studies of nature, and they frequently employed unexpected themes or techniques to create unique works reflecting their often unconventional personalities.

A lineage that formed under the genius of Maruyama Ōkyo might be summarily described as lyrical realism. Yet his penchant for nature studies, whether of flora and fauna or human anatomy, and his subtle incorporation of perspective and shading techniques learned from Western examples perhaps better qualify him to be noted as the first of the great eclectic painters. In addition to nurturing a talented group of students who continued his identifiable style into several succeeding generations, Ōkyo's studio also raised the incorrigible Nagasawa Rosetsu, an individualist noted for instilling a haunting preternatural quality to his works, whether landscape, human, or animal studies. Yet another of Ōkyo's associates was Matsumura Goshun. Goshun's career again suggests the increasingly fluid and creative disposition of Edo period ateliers. Originally a follower of the literati painter and poet Yosa Buson, Goshun, confounded by his master's death and other personal setbacks, joined with Ōkyo. Goshun's quick and witty brushwork adjusted to the softer, more polished Ōkyo style but retained an overall individuality. He and his students are known as the Shijō school, for the street on which Goshun's studio was located, or, in recognition of Ōkyo's influence, as the Maruyama-Shijō school. Other notable individualists of the 18th century included Soga Shōhaku, an essentially itinerant painter who was an eccentric interpreter of Chinese themes in figure and landscape conveyed in a frequently dark and foreboding mood. Itō Jakuchū, son of a prosperous Kyōto vegetable merchant, was an independent master of both ink and polychrome forms. His paintings in either mode often convey the rich, densely patterned texture of produce arrayed in a market.

The other new style of painting, bunjin-ga, is also called nan-ga ("southern painting") because it developed from the so-called Chinese Southern school of painting. The Chinese connoisseur and painter Dong Qichang (1555–1636), in expounding his theory of the history of Chinese painting, posited a dichotomy between Northern conservative, professional painting and the Southern heterodox, expressive, and free styles. The argument, which was highly polemical and overgeneralized, nevertheless promoted the ideal of the learned scholar-gentleman who had no pecuniary or political interests and was unintimidated by the overly polished and spiritless examples of professional painting. The idiosyncratic Southern style of painting was proposed as one of the accomplishments of the literatus amateur. This notion of the true Confucian scholar ideal had exponents in 17th-century Japan who found the Neo-Confucianism promulgated by the shogunal authorities to be suspect and politically skewed. The Japanese understanding of the literati aesthetic was significantly influenced, however, by the final wave of Zen Buddhist monks who fled to Japan after the Manchu takeover of China in 1644. Monks of the Ōbaku Zen sect did not arrive on the scale of previous Zen immigrations to Japan, but they did bring a consistent point of contact and numerous examples of contemporary Chinese art (albeit of varying quality) for interested Japanese literati aspirants and artists to study.

While the amateur ideal was pursued by many Japanese bunjin, the most remarkable of the ink monochrome or ink and light colour works were created by artists who, although generally attempting to conform to a bunjin lifestyle, were actually professionals in that they supported themselves by producing and selling their painting, poetry, and calligraphy. Especially notable artists from this tradition include the 18th-century masters Ike Taiga and Buson. Some of Taiga's most compelling works treat landscape themes and the melding of certain aspects of Western realism with the personal expressiveness characteristic of the Chinese bunjin ideal. Buson is remembered as both a distinguished poet and a painter. Frequently combining haiku and tersely brushed images, Buson offered the viewer jarring, highly allusive, and

complementary readings of a complex emotional matrix. Uragami Gyokudō achieved movements of near abstraction with shimmering, kinetic, personalized readings of nature. Tani Bunchō produced paintings of great power in the Chinese mode but in a somewhat more polished and representational style. He was a marked individualist and served the shogun by applying his talents to topographical drawings used for national defense purposes. Bunchō's student Watanabe Kazan was an official representing his daimyo in Edo. Through his interest in intellectual and artistic reform, he perhaps came the closest to exemplifying classic literati ideals. His accomplishments in portraiture are especially significant and reveal his keen study of Western techniques. In a conflict with the shogunate over issues ultimately relating to Japan's posture toward the international community, Kazan was imprisoned and then took his own life.

Wood-block prints

A movement that paralleled and occasionally intersected with the aforementioned developments in painting was that of the production of ukiyo-e, or "pictures of the floating world," which depicted the buoyant, fleeting pleasures of the common people. This specialized area of visual representation was born in the late 16th and early 17th centuries as part of a widespread interest in representing aspects of burgeoning urban life. Depictions of the brothel quarters and Kabuki theatre dominated the subject matter of ukiyo-e until the early 19th century, when landscape and bird-and-flower subjects became popular. These subjects were represented in both painting and wood-block print form. Wood-block printing had been a comparatively inexpensive method of reproducing image and text monopolized by the Buddhist establishment for purposes of proselytization since the 8th century. For more than 800 years no other single societal trend or movement had demonstrated a need for this relatively simple technology. Thus, in the first half of the 17th century, painters were the principal interpreters of the demimonde. The print format was used primarily for production of erotica and inexpensive illustrated novellas, reflecting the generally low regard in which print art was held. This perhaps resulted from the idea that the artist, when creating a painting, was essentially the producer and master of his own work. However, when engaged in wood-block print production, the artist was more accurately classified as the designer, who had been commissioned and was often directly supervised by the publisher, usually the impresario of a studio or other commercial enterprise.

The simplest prints were made from ink monochrome drawings, on which the artist sometimes noted suggestions for colour. The design was transferred by a skilled carver to a cherry or boxwood block and carved in relief. A printer made impressions on paper from the inked block, and the individual prints could then be hand-coloured if desired. Printing in multiple colours required more blocks and a precise printing method so that registration would match exactly from block to block. Additional flourishes such as the use of mica, precious metals, and embossing further complicated the task. Thus, while the themes and images of the floating world varied little whether in painting or print, the production method for prints involved many more anonymous and critical talents than those of the artist-designer whose name was usually printed on the single sheet, and the mass-produced prints were considered relatively disposable despite the high level of artistry that was frequently achieved. Nevertheless, with the exponential increase in literacy in the early Edo period and with the vast new patronage for images of the floating world—a clientele and subject matter not previously serviced by

any of the traditional ateliers—mass production was necessary, and new schools and new techniques responded to the market.

In the last quarter of the 17th century, bold ink monochrome prints with limited hand-colouring began to appear. The *Insistent Lover* by Sugimura Jihei provides an excellent example of the lush and complex mood achievable with the medium. Within a seemingly uncomplicated composition Jihei represents a tipsy brothel guest lunging for a courtesan while an attendant averts her eyes. This scene, likely played out hundreds of times each evening in the urban licensed quarters, skillfully suggests the multileveled social games, including feigned shock and artful humouring of the insistent guest, that prevailed in the floating world. This print too, with an almost naive representational quality, is an example of the generally straightforward, exuberant mood of the times in regard to the necessary indulgences.

From the late 17th until the mid-18th century, except for some stylistic changes and the addition of a few printed rather than hand-applied colours, print production remained basically unchanged. The technical capacity to produce full-colour, or polychrome, prints (nishiki-e, “brocade pictures”) was known but so labour-intensive as to be uneconomical until the 1760s, when Suzuki Harunobu, whose patrons were within the shogun’s circle, was commissioned to produce a so-called calendar print. Calendar manufacture was a government monopoly, but privately produced works were common. Seeking to avert any censorship, the private calendars were disguised within innocent-looking pictures. Harunobu’s young woman rescuing a garment from the line as a shower bursts is an example of the technique. The ideograms for the year 1765 are part of the hanging kimono’s pattern. More importantly, the work is a full-colour print. Even though it was commissioned for limited distribution, it excited general audiences to the possibilities of expanding the repertoire and appearance of wood-block prints. Harunobu’s productions, through the end of the decade, elegantly suggested the new possibilities. His work so raised the level of consumer expectation that publishers began to enter full-colour production on the assumption that consumption levels would outweigh production costs. Not all prints were produced with the subtlety and care of Harunobu’s, but the turn in taste toward full-colour prints, of whatever quality, was irreversible.

The last quarter of the 18th century was the heyday of the classic ukiyo-e themes: the fashionable beauty and the actor. Katsukawa Shunshō and his pupils dominated the actor print genre. His innovative images clearly portrayed actors not as interchangeable bodies with masks but as distinctive personalities whose postures and colourfully made-up faces were easily recognizable to the viewer. Masters at portraying feminine beauty included Torii Kiyonaga and Kitagawa Utamaro. Both idealized the female form, observing it in virtually all its poses, casual and formal. Utamaro’s bust portraits, while hardly meeting a Western definition of portraiture, were remarkable in the emotional moods they conveyed. A mysterious artist active under the name of Tōshūsai Sharaku produced stunning actor images from 1794 to 1795, but little else is known of him.

At the close of the 18th century, a palpable tightening of government censorship control and perhaps a shift in public interest from the intense introspection provided by artists of the demimonde forced publishers to search for other subject matter. Landscape became a theme of increasing interest. In Edo the artist Katsushika Hokusai, who as a young man trained with Katsukawa Shunshō, broke with the atelier system and experimented successfully with new subjects and styles. In the 1820s and ’30s, when he was already a man of some age, Hokusai created the hugely popular print series Thirty-six Views

of Mt. Fuji. Andō Hiroshige followed with another landscape-travelogue series, Fifty-three Stations of the Tōkaidō, which offered scenes of the towns and way stations on the central highway connecting Edo and Kyōto. Both these and other artists capitalized on public interest in scenes of distant places. These landscape prints in some way assuaged the restrictive travel codes enforced by the shogunate and allowed viewers imaginative journeys.

Hokusai was also an important painter. His energetic rendering of the thunder god is a fine example of the quirky and amusing quality of his figural painting. A characteristic swiftly modulating brush defines the figure, and light cast from an unseen source, perhaps lightning, allows for a play of light and shadow over the figure to model a sense of body volume. All the more remarkable is the fact that Hokusai was in his 88th year when he painted this vigorous work.

Hiroshige painted as well, but his legacy is a vast number of prints celebrating scenes of a Japan soon to vanish. His View from Komagata Temple near Azuma Bridge is part of a series of 100 views of Edo. It demonstrates Hiroshige's finely honed abilities to effect atmosphere. The appearance of the cuckoo screeching in the sky alludes to classical poetry associated with late spring and early summer, as well as to unrequited love, while the tiny figures and the red flag of the cosmetics vendor suggest the transitory nature of life and beauty.

The depiction of famous views allowed for their idealization and also for important experiments with composition. Fragmentary foreground elements were used effectively to frame a distant view, a point of view adopted by some European painters after their study of 19th-century Japanese prints. Ironically, in their return to landscape and flora and fauna subjects, Japanese print arts revived the metaphoric vehicles of personal expression so familiar to the classic Japanese and Chinese painting traditions.

Although the time-tested themes of erotica, brothel, and theatre continued to be represented in 19th-century prints, an emerging taste for gothic and grotesque subjects found ample audiences as well. Historical themes were also popular, especially those that could be interpreted as critiques of contemporary politics. Ukiyo-e prints seemed to have been transformed from a celebration of pleasure to a means of widely distributing observations on social and political events. As the century closed, the print form, while active, was subsumed by the development of the newspaper illustration. This new form served many of the same purposes as prints and thus dramatically reduced the print audience, but it did not satisfy the needs of connoisseurs.

Ceramics

Ceramic and decorative arts flourished in the Edo period. While it was possible in almost all areas of the visual arts to accommodate the emergence of Japanese taste from the subdued or monochrome tastes of the Muromachi period to the burst of colour and pattern that was favoured in the Momoyama period, ceramics lagged behind. As the Edo period dawned, ceramic art also was able to participate in this development. Technological and supply limitations had previously hampered the ability of Japanese potters to produce a high-fired polychrome product. That problem was rectified in the early 17th century when the chambered climbing kiln was imported from Korea. This type of kiln was able to sustain controlled, high temperatures. Also, Korean potters working in western Japan discovered clay with a kaolin content high enough to allow vessels to be fired to the hard, fine surface classified as porcelain. In particular, white-glazed

porcelain provided an excellent surface for the application of pigments to produce polychrome design patterns. Initial interest was in the imitation of Chinese blue-and-white ware, but the palette was quickly expanded.

The potter **Sakaida Kakiemon**, active in Arita in western Japan, was a pioneer in expanding the colour range and design patterns on the newly achieved creamy white surfaces. His works were especially admired in Europe. Also produced in the Arita region, by potters working for the **Nabeshima** clan, was a high-fired ware most frequently seen as footed shallow plates or dishes. The designs applied to the ware were typically bold and employed combinations of **Yamato-e** style painting and textile patterns. **Kutani ware** was produced in similar shapes, although denser designs and darker colours were used in the decoration. Kutani ware was primarily commissioned by the Maeda domain and, like **Nabeshima ware**, was not for public consumption or export.

Kyōto ceramics, already noted for the low-fired **raku ware**, responded to the fashion for porcelain with a break from the older traditions. **Nonomura Ninsei** is the first identifiable Kyōto potter to use the high-fired, smooth-surfaced ware as a means to offer brilliantly coloured, painterly designs. Ninsei was far less interested than his predecessors in the inherent character of a vessel's randomly produced surface. His ceramic ware ranged beyond traditional vessels and included **incense burners**, candle holders, and other Buddhist liturgical implements. Kyōto artists who continued variations of the Ninsei legacy—referred to, after the place of production, as kyōyaki—included **Ōgata Kōrin**'s brother **Kenzan** and Aoki Mokubei (1767–1833). Kenzan's designs favoured uncomplicated and bold variations of rinpa painting style, while Mokubei's work reflected interest in Chinese sources. Not surprisingly, he was a member of an important circle of literati.

Lacquerware

Throughout the Edo period, innovations in the production and design of lacquerware met the demands of a widening and appreciative audience. Extremely time-consuming to produce, the finished lacquer product is strong and resilient if properly handled. Ensembles for the study (such as writing tables and boxes to hold ink stones and brushes), furniture, and dining ware were among the most frequent uses. Paralleling in many ways the trends in ceramics, Edo period lacquerware shifted from the sedate and simple styles of the Muromachi period as a taste for remarkably striking and complex objects developed. A delight in trompe-l'oeil was increasingly evident.

Lacquer was typically used for constructing **inrō**, the small, often multitiered and compartmentalized case that hung from a gentleman's kimono sash and held small belongings. It is perhaps in this format, especially from the late 18th century, that lacquer artists were most inspired by novelty and new fashions, such as the taste for verisimilitude. A lacquer inrō could be made to look as if it were made, for example, of aged and rotting wood or animal skin. Technically remarkable and frequently ingenious in construction and design, these and other objects were the aesthetic opposites of such early lacquer examples as Negoro ware. The later efforts seemed intent on disguising rather than revealing component materials.

Sculpture

Sculpture did not enjoy a great infusion of creativity during the Edo period. More obviously mannered and stylized interpretations of Buddhist deities and worthies were regularly produced. There were, of course, some sculptors of

exceptional talent. Shōun Genkei is renowned for his production (1688–95) of a set of 500 arhats (disciples of the Buddha) at Gohyaku Rakan Temple in Edo. His inspiration came from exposure to Chinese sculpture imported by Ōbaku Zen monks at Manpuku Temple to the south of Kyōto. Another expressive and thoroughly individualistic sculptor of the Edo period was the itinerant monk Enkū. He produced charming and rough-featured sculptures revealing bold chisel marks. His goals were to inspire faith and to proselytize. His works are totally without artifice, and the energy and power of his efforts are clearly conveyed.

Modern period

Japan's modern period is, for the purposes of this article, defined as beginning with the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and continuing through to the present. In the Japanese system of dating, this period encompasses the Meiji period (1868–1912), the Taishō period (1912–26), the Shōwa period (1926–89), and the Heisei period (began 1989).

Modernity for Japan has been a process of seeking definition in its cultural and political relationships with other nations, both Asian and Western. Japan's official intentions toward the West during the Meiji period can be described as a calculated attempt to achieve Western industrial standards and to absorb Western culture at every possible level. In the mid-1870s a wide variety of Western experts, including military strategists, railroad engineers, architects, philosophers, and artists, were invited to teach in Japanese universities or to in some other way assist in Japan's process of growth and change. Also during this time Japan was directly involved in two international conflicts: a war with China (1894–95) and a war with Russia (1904–05). Victorious in both these conflicts, Japan proved its ability to gear its newly established industrial base to the achievement of foreign expansionist goals. In 1910 Japan officially annexed Korea, a process it had begun in 1905 when it assumed a protectorate status over the peninsular nation. Japan's pretext was to establish a strong buffer zone against possible Western incursion, but Korea was essentially colonized as a source of labour and natural resources.

The Taishō period was characterized politically by a strengthening of popularly elected representative bodies, an interest in universal suffrage, and a comparatively liberal mood in the arts. In retrospect it was sometimes viewed as a romantic, euphoric period of cultural creativity following the more conservative Meiji era and preceding the militaristic mood of the 1930s. During this same period, as the Western powers with colonial and mercantile interests in Asia were forced to focus their attention on Europe during World War I (1914–18), Japan moved in to fill the vacuum, especially in China. The 1930s were characterized by a rise in militarism and further expansion on the Asian continent. This process culminated in World War II and in Japan's defeat by Western powers in 1945. The postwar period began with the Allied—almost exclusively American—occupation of Japan and was characterized by rebuilding, rapid growth and development, and increasing internationalism.

The development of the visual arts since 1868 was considerably influenced by changing political climates and goals. Assuming an official posture of encyclopaedic investigation and selective assimilation of Western culture and technology in the late 19th century, the Japanese cultural mainstream was systematically infused with the classical forms of Western painting, sculpture, and architecture. In the first several decades of the Meiji period, there was an upheaval in patronage and in the status of the traditional Japanese artist. The Meiji government pursued a policy of officially separating

whatever elements of **Buddhism** and **Shintō** had been joined over the centuries in Buddhism's attempt at a syncretic relationship with the **indigenous religion**. Buddhism was stripped of many tax privileges. There was, as well, a sometimes violent and destructive reaction to Buddhism owing to strong nativist sentiments. The cumulative effect of this official dismantling and unofficial persecution was to release a remarkable amount of Buddhist art onto the market. Temples were forced to divest in order to support themselves, and the patronage supplied to artists who created Buddhist **iconography** was seriously curtailed. Japanese artists also suffered because of the general trend to idealize all aspects of Western culture. Vast amounts of Japanese art, wood-block prints being the foremost example, went to Western collections.

This trend began to be reversed in the 1880s owing in part, ironically, to the efforts of **Ernest Fenollosa**, a recent Harvard graduate who arrived in Japan in 1878 as a philosophy instructor at the **Tokyo Imperial University** (now University of Tokyo). His avocational interest in Japanese and **Chinese art** became his passion. The Japanese reshuffling of cultural priorities placed him in a particularly advantageous position to acquire Japanese art—especially Buddhist art—of exceptional quality for Western collections. Working with a former student, **Okakura Kakuzō**, also known as Tenshin, Fenollosa also moved forcefully to influence the Japanese to reclaim their cultural heritage and to adapt creatively to changing tastes. The Japanese government sponsored the participation of Japanese artists and craftsmen in various late 19th- and early 20th-century international expositions held in Europe and America. These were of some help in advancing Western knowledge of Japanese culture. Collecting of the type endorsed by Fenollosa, as well as more popular collecting inspired by the flood of Japanese arts and crafts to Western markets, caused Westerners to take notice of a theretofore unknown visual arts tradition. This Western assessment of Japanese art was done in piecemeal fashion. Some obvious and immediate results included the influence of Japanese art on European and American painters and printmakers as well as the wider trend to **Japanism**. This initiation of communication between disparate visual worlds began the lengthy process of asserting the Japanese fine arts tradition within the context of world culture.

The early 20th century was not only a time of continued assimilation of Western art forms and philosophies but also a period in which traditional Japanese forms sought and achieved a new interpretive voice. With the rise of militarism, the visual arts were largely conscripted for straightforward propagandistic purposes or allowed only in thematically banal forms. Japan's defeat in World War II produced in many Japanese intellectuals and artists a distrust of the authority of the indigenous tradition, leading them to search for meaning in artistic movements and traditions abroad. Meanwhile, the postwar Allied occupation forces (1945–52) urged structural changes to ensure that Japan's cultural properties were properly honoured, protected, and made more widely available to general audiences. Censorship of contemporary materials, particularly for political content, continued to be imposed. In general, however, the occupation opened the way for international cross-cultural experimentation and the development of an “international style” that persists to the present.

Western-style painting

As early as 1855, preceding the Meiji Restoration, the Japanese established a bureau (later named Bansho Shirabesho, or Institute for the Study of Western Documents) to study **Western** painting as part of an effort to master Western technology.

Technical drawing was emphasized in the curriculum. Takahashi Yuichi, a graduate of that bureau, was the first Japanese artist of the period to express an artistic rather than strictly technical interest in oil painting. Through self-training and in consultation with the British illustrator Charles Wirgman, then in Japan, his level of mastery increased. His *Still Life of Salmon* (1877), one of seven known attempts by Takahashi at the subject, elevates this ordinary subject to a splendid study of form and colour.

A school of fine arts was established in 1876, and a team of Italian artists was hired to teach Western techniques. Most influential among them was Antonio Fontanesi. Active as an instructor in Japan for only a year, Fontanesi, a painter of the Barbizon school, established an intensely loyal following among his Japanese students. His influence is seen in the works of Asai Chū, who later studied in Europe. Asai's contemporary Kuroda Seiki studied in France under Raphael Collin and was among the most prominent exponents of a style that was strongly influenced by Impressionism in its informality and its use of lighter, brighter colours.

In general, it can be observed that in the Meiji period there was an initial calculated strategy to study Western representational methods for the larger purpose of bringing Japan to a perceived level of modernity. However, a small but influential group of painters became involved in a cross-cultural exchange that could not be controlled by government planning. Oil paintings that vary in skill of execution from awkward to highly competent were produced during this time. Unlike the comparatively sympathetic modes of painting that Japan assimilated from China, Western painting posed conceptual as well as technical challenges. Not only did unfamiliar materials such as oil and canvas have to be mastered but also new theories of composition, shading, and perspective—and the underlying Western philosophy of nature and its representation that had led to their development over the centuries—had to be absorbed.

The close of the Meiji period saw greater rigidification of painting schools, affiliations, and systems of official recognition through annual exhibitions. There were government-sponsored exhibitions and associations as well as protest salon or secessionist groups indicating a lively spirit of resistance to official control.

An increasingly sophisticated understanding of European art and cultural trends marked the Taishō period. The humanistic literary journal Shirakaba (“White Birch”) was devoted to and highly influential on these subjects, and it was instrumental in introducing Japanese artists to European Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Its publication period (1910–23) essentially spanned the Taishō era. The paintings of Kishida Ryūsei exemplify the extensive assimilation of sympathetic European moods into a Japanese mode. Kishida was a devoted follower of the Dutch painter Vincent van Gogh and later of artists of the Northern Renaissance such as Albrecht Dürer and Jan van Eyck. *Reiko with a Woolen Shawl* (1921), Kishida's portrait of his six-year-old daughter, attributes a knowing maturity to the sitter, an effect achieved, in part, through a slight distortion of features to produce a gnomelike adult visage.

The conscription of efforts during the war years enforced on the visual arts choices of severe puritanism, blithe optimism, or heroism. The work of Umehara Ryūzaburō is a case in point. In the early 20th century he studied with Asai Chū and in France with Pierre-Auguste Renoir. His ebullient palette and love of patterning, as seen in his famous *Cijincheng Palace* (1940), convey a cheerful mood. Not revealed in the painting is its occasion: the artist is present in Beijing as part of an occupying force in the midst of war.

In the postwar period Japanese artists enjoyed widely increased access to Western sources and the ability to travel more freely in the West. As a result, practitioners of virtually all modern artistic movements and styles—including abstract expressionism, minimal and kinetic art, and Op and pop art—can be found in Japan.

Japanese-style painting

Paralleling the intensive and systematic study of Western painting methods was a steady process of renewal occurring in the field of traditional painting. Fenollosa was particularly instrumental in redirecting and salvaging the careers of two important late 19th-century painters, Kanō Hōgai and Hashimoto Gahō. Fenollosa had particular notions about the ways these traditional Kanō school painters could adapt their techniques in order to create a more exciting and, perhaps to Western eyes, a more marketable product. He encouraged the use of chiaroscuro, brilliant palettes, Western spatial perspective, and dramatic atmospherics, and these techniques were indeed effective in creating new interest in the previously moribund forms of traditional Kanō painting.

A generation of painters inspired by the success of Hōgai and Gahō sought to expand the technical adaptations of these masters. Shimomura Kanzan, Yokoyama Taikan, and Hishida Shunsō stand at the beginning of the nihonga (“Japanese painting”) movement, in which traditional Japanese pigments were used but with a thematic repertoire much expanded. Format was no longer limited to scroll or screen and included occasional Western framed paintings. Shimomura’s portrait of Okakura Kakuzō pays homage to Okakura’s role as a mentor to the movement. This is a preparatory sketch for a completed portrait unfortunately destroyed in the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923. Yokoyama and Hishida sought out more international, often Asian, themes. Their nihonga used the materials of traditional Yamato-e painting but, like the later Kanō paintings, incorporated heightened dramatic and atmospheric effects.

Maeda Seison, prominent in the next generation of nihonga artists, which also included Imamura Shikō, Yasuda Yukihiko, Kobayashi Kokei, and Hayami Gyoshū, employed an eclectic assortment of earlier Japanese painting techniques. At Okakura’s suggestion he studied rinpa. His use of tarashikomi, a classic rinpa technique that achieves shading through pooling successive layers of partially dried pigment, clearly points out his wide-ranging adaptation of traditional techniques. Seison and others of his period were especially fond of historical subjects.

A somewhat distinct tradition of nihonga developed in Kyōto, finding natural precedents in the lyrical realism of the Maruyama-Shijō school of painters. Takeuchi Seihō was the most successful proponent of this lineage. Interestingly, his most distinguished student was Uemura Shōen, a woman who revived a style reminiscent of ukiyo-e beauty portraits but instead idealized women in domestic settings.

Nihonga continued to flourish after World War II. This essentially traditional style was energized, like other Japanese art forms, by the openness of the postwar years. Traditional themes of flora, fauna, and landscape were joined by abstractions and by modern urban and industrial scenes. The resulting works, which use traditional pigments and brushes, provide a curious Japanese version of modernism.

The literati movement seemed to proceed with the least disruption of any of the traditional lineages. Tomiooka Tessai (1837–1924) stands out as perhaps the latest of the literati masters. Noted for dense, rough brushwork and occasionally jarring choices in bright pigments, his creations were animated, cheerful evocations of Song dynasty poetry.

Wood-block prints

The world of wood-block prints was profoundly affected by the changes ushered in during the **Meiji** period. The print medium had long served both connoisseur and general audience. With the advent of mass-circulation newspapers, however, the latter group was co-opted. Illustrators and designers produced reportorial images and cartoons for newspapers, satisfying the public demand for illustration but removing a large block of economic support from the traditional print publishers. Print artists nevertheless continued to document the remarkably varied moods of the period. For example, a type of print known as Yokohama-e, named after the Japanese port city with a large resident foreign population, offered glimpses of the customs and appearances of the recently arrived visitors. Brutal, grotesque, and dark-humoured visions by such artists as **Kawanabe Gvōsai** and Tsukioka Yoshitoshi suggested that assimilation with the West was a socially and psychically traumatic process. **Kobavashi Kivochika**, a student of **Charles Wirgman** as well as of Gyōsai, is best known for his prints illustrating the Sino-Japanese War and for his highly successful visions of contemporary Tokyo. In the early 20th century two general currents moved the print world. The shin hanga (“new print”) movement sought to revive the classic ukiyo-e prints in a contemporary and highly romanticized mode. Landscapes and women were the primary subjects. Watanabe Shōsaburō was the publisher most active in this movement. His contributing artists included Kawase Hasui, Hashiguchi Goyō, Yoshida Hiroshi, and Itō Shinsui. Hashiguchi was determined to have complete control over his artistic output, and his tenure as a Watanabe artist was brief. His prints numbered only 16 and were mostly studies of Taishō women in a fashion thoroughly reminiscent, in technique and in composition, of **Utamaro**.

The other wood-block print trend was sōsaku hanga, or “creative print,” a movement modeled on European approaches to print production. The artist, instead of consigning his designs to the carvers and printers employed by the publisher, performed all aspects of production. This was a philosophy of total engagement with the work. The leader of this movement was **Onchi Kōshirō**. Also prominent was Yamamoto Kanae. A notable feature of sōsaku hanga works was a movement toward defining shapes using colour rather than outlines, as in traditional wood-block prints.

The print medium continues to be a particularly fertile arena of development in the Japanese visual arts. The use of the wood-block print has largely been usurped by lithography and other techniques, although there are periodic resurgences of interest in wood-block. Themes vary widely from traditional representational to abstract. The relatively inexpensive and easily portable format has made the modern Japanese print, and thus Japanese visions of modernity, widely available to international collectors.

Sculpture

Sculpture in the modern period was most productive in the bronze medium. The Italian Vincenzo Ragusa, along with other foreign technical experts recruited in the late 1870s, was a major influence in instructing young Japanese artists in bronze casting, although he privately despaired of their abilities at three-dimensional conceptualization. Japanese sculptors applied the new format to nonreligious subjects, including portraits and studies of anonymous subjects in a celebration of Japanese physical types. Takamura Kōtarō was particularly influenced by **Auguste Rodin**, as was Ogiwara Morie, who produced notably fine heroic figures.

In the postwar period, Japanese sculptors and their works became more visible at international art fairs and competitions. As in other media, traditional formats fell from favour. Abstract forms have dominated the contemporary sculptural field, which has also been marked by experimentation with diverse materials. Installation art has joined the larger sculptural repertoire, and outdoor sitings—both in open natural spaces and in urban environments—attracted much interest. Massive creations in bamboo and other works that interact with the environment are especially popular.

Ceramics

In addition to the continuation of various traditional lineages, the most significant development in ceramics of the modern period was the return to folk tastes. Yanagi Sōetsu espoused anonymity, functionality, and simplicity as a corrective to the industrialism and self-aggrandizement characteristic of the age. In league with potters such as the British artist **Bernard Leach**, **Hamada Shōji**, and Kawai Kanjirō, Yanagi engendered a robust, charming type of ceramic which recalled the wares that appealed to tea masters of the Muromachi and Momoyama periods. Kitaōji Rosanjin was the major exponent of highly decorated work in the Kutani and later kyōyaki traditions. His role was largely as designer and production manager. Long associated with a well-known restaurant in Tokyo, he was most conscious of the choreography of a total sensory experience in which his wares were an essential element.

Contemporary Japanese ceramics follows both traditional and abstract lines. Developments were marked by wide experimentation in form and a general movement from traditional, functional pieces to “art” or sculptural works. The line between sculptor and ceramicist became increasingly blurred.

James T. Ulak

ARTICLE

Additional Reading

The growing body of English-language literature on Japanese art consists of both adapted translations of significant Japanese works and original English-language studies. In addition to general surveys and monographs, exhibition catalogs play a unique role in providing a forum for important scholarly essays and for documentation on specific works of art.

The most comprehensive single-volume survey of Japanese art is PENELOPE MASON, *History of Japanese Art* (1993); while an abbreviated but serviceable introduction is found in JOAN STANLEY-BAKER, *Japanese Art* (1984). ROBERT TREAT PAINE and ALEXANDER SOPER, *The Art and Architecture of Japan*, 3rd ed. (1974), is especially helpful in relating early Japanese Buddhist developments to continental sources. Two multivolume series are noteworthy: *The Heibonsha Survey of Japanese Art*, 31 vol. (1971–80), a translation and adaptation of the Japanese original, featuring both site-specific and thematic studies by various specialists; and *Japanese Arts Library*), translations and adaptations of selected volumes of (1977– *Nihon no Bijutsu*, a monthly Japanese scholarly journal. LAURANCE P. ROBERTS, *A Dictionary of Japanese Artists* (1976, reissued 1990), is a nearly exhaustive compendium of Japanese artists dating from the 7th to the early 20th century, with brief biographies, listings of known alternate names in Japanese characters with English transliterations, and locations of important known works. *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan*, 9 vol. (1983), provides an excellent selection of general and specific articles on Japanese art with cross-references to important related articles on

history, literature, and other relevant topics. SHERMAN E. LEE, *A History of Far Eastern Art*, 5th ed. edited by NAOMI NOBLE RICHARD (1994), is especially helpful in providing a larger context within which to understand Japanese art. The development of visual expression in Japan from Paleolithic times to the 7th century is admirably summarized and related to Chinese and Korean material by GINA L. BARNES, *China, Korea, and Japan: The Rise of Civilization in East Asia* (1993). Other works of note treating the pre-Buddhist period include RICHARD J. PEARSON et al., *Ancient Japan* (1992); JAPAN, BUNKACHŌ and JAPAN SOCIETY (NEW YORK, N.Y.), *The Rise of a Great Tradition: Japanese Archaeological Ceramics of the Jōmon Through Heian Periods (10,500 BC–AD 1185)* (1990); and J.E. KIDDER, JR., *Japan Before Buddhism*, rev. ed. (1966).

The assimilation and adaptation of continental sculptural, painting, and decorative arts traditions through the vehicle of Buddhism occurred in three great movements, the first from the 6th through the 8th century, the second from the 10th through the 12th century, and the third from the 13th through the 15th century. Works that treat in whole or in part the complexity of the first two periods of Buddhist assimilation include KURATA BUNSAKU (BUNSAKU KURATA), *Hōryū-ji: Temple of the Exalted Law*, trans. from Japanese (1981); JIRŌ SUGIYAMA, *Classic Buddhist Sculpture*, trans. from Japanese and adapted by SAMUEL CROWELL MORSE (1982); YUTAKA MINO et al., *The Great Eastern Temple: Treasures of Japanese Buddhist Art from Tōdai-ji* (1986); NISHIKAWA KYŌTARŌ (KYŌTARŌ NISHIKAWA) and EMILY J. SANO, *The Great Age of Japanese Buddhist Sculpture, AD 600–1300* (1982); JŌJI OKAZAKI, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting*, trans. from Japanese and adapted by ELIZABETH TEN GROTENHUIS, (1977); and HISATOYO ISHIDA, *Esoteric Buddhist Painting* (1987; originally published in Japanese, 1969). The visual expression of native religious sentiment and its relation to Buddhism is summarized in HARUKI KAGEYAMA, *The Arts of Shinto*, trans. from Japanese and adapted by CHRISTINE GUTH (1973).

JOHN M. ROSENFELD, *Japanese Arts of the Heian Period, 794–1183* (1967); and YOSHIAKI SHIMIZU and JOHN M. ROSENFELD, *Masters of Japanese Calligraphy: 8th–19th Century*, ed. by NAOMI NOBLE RICHARD, (1984), are especially helpful in discussing the development of the court aesthetic.

From the 13th century, the ascension of the Kamakura military government, the arrival of Zen from China, and the proliferation of populist Buddhist sects constitute important elements of the third movement of assimilation. JOHN M. ROSENFELD and ELIZABETH TEN GROTENHUIS, *Journey of the Three Jewels* (1979); MIYEKO MURASE, *Emaki: Narrative Scrolls from Japan* (1983); VICTOR HARRIS and KEN MATSUSHIMA, *Kamakura: The Renaissance of Japanese Sculpture, 1186–1333* (1991); HIROSHI KANAZAWA, *Japanese Ink Painting: Early Zen Masterpieces* (1979; originally published in Japanese, 1972); and JAN FONTEIN and MONEY HICKMAN, *Zen Painting and Calligraphy* (1970), all provide excellent surveys of the period from varying perspectives.

The establishment of the Ashikaga shogunate and its subsequent arbitration of cultural life in Kyōto from the 15th century is well summarized in JAY A. LEVENSON (ed.), *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration* (1991). YOSHIAKI SHIMIZU (ed.), *Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture, 1185–1868* (1988), is informative of daimyo and shogunal patronage in this and other periods. WATANABE AKIYOSHI (AKIYOSHI WATANABE), KANAZAWA HIROSHI (HIROSHI KANAZAWA), and PAUL VARLEY (H. PAUL VARLEY), *Of Water and Ink* (1986), is an excellent treatment of the ink

monochrome painting style of this period. Although the following works treat a broader chronological period, their discussions of Muromachi developments are useful: LOUISE ALLISON CORT, *Shigaraki: Potter's Valley* (1979); JOHANNA BECKER, *Karatsu Ware* (1986); and TSUGIO MIKAMI, *The Art of Japanese Ceramics* (1972; originally published in Japanese, 1968).

The quarter century of political stabilization prior to the shift of power to Edo is called the Momoyama period; its vibrant aesthetic, including elements inspired by interaction with the West, is treated in METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART (NEW YORK, N.Y.) and JAPAN, BUNKACHŌ, *Momoyama: Japanese Art in the Age of Grandeur* (1975); TSUGIYOSHI DOI, *Momoyama Decorative Painting* (1977; originally published in Japanese, 1964); TSUNEO TAKEDA, *Kano Eitoku* (1977; originally published in Japanese, 1974); and HAYASHIYA SEIZŌ (SEIZŌ HAYASHIYA), *Chanoyu: Japanese Tea Ceremony* (1979). MOTOO HINAGO, *Japanese Castles*, trans. from Japanese and adapted by WILLIAM H. COALDRAKE (1986); and FUMIO HASHIMOTO (ed.), *Architecture in the Shoin Style*, trans. and adapted by H. MACK HORTON (1981; originally published in Japanese, 1972), discuss important architectural developments and their influence on artistic expression. Garden design, which developed as a significant expression from the mid-Muromachi period, is substantively discussed in MITCHELL BRING and JOSSE WAYEMBERGH, *Japanese Gardens: Design and Meaning* (1981); and IRMTRAUD SCHAARSCHMIDT-RICHTER and OSAMU MORI, *Japanese Gardens*, trans. by JANET SELIGMAN (1979; originally published in German, 1979).

The complexity of artistic developments during the nearly 300 years of the Edo period is at least sampled in the following works. WILLIAM WATSON (ed.), *The Great Japan Exhibition: Art of the Edo Period, 1600–1868* (1981), provides a broad overview of the period. The revival of the Heian aesthetic and the emergence of a distinctive decorative painting tradition are best treated in CAROLYN WHEELWRIGHT (ed.), *Word in Flower: The Visualization of Classical Literature in Seventeenth-Century Japan* (1989); HOWARD A. LINK, *Exquisite Visions: Rimpa Paintings from Japan* (1980); and HIROSHI MIZUO, *Edo Painting: Sotatsu and Korin* (1972; originally published in Japanese, 1965). The trends in Chinese-inspired literati painting are summarized in JAMES CAHILL, *Scholar Painters of Japan* (1972); YOSHIHO YONEZAWA and CHU YOSHIZAWA, *Japanese Painting in the Literati Style*, trans. and adapted by BETTY IVERSON MONROE (1974; originally published in Japanese, 1966); and CALVIN L. FRENCH, *The Poet-Painters: Buson and His Followers* (1974). Other styles of painting are discussed in ST. LOUIS ART MUSEUM and SEATTLE ART MUSEUM, *Ōkyo and the Maruyama-Shijō School of Japanese Painting* (1980); and STEPHEN ADDISS, *The Art of Zen* (1989). MIYAJIMA SHIN'ICHI (SHIN'ICHI MIYAJIMA) and SATŌ YASUHIRO (YASUHIRO SATŌ), *Japanese Ink Painting*, ed. by GEORGE KUWAYAMA (1985), while addressing a broad theme, is especially informative on Edo period "eccentric" painters. Treating a chronology extending beyond Edo but discussing many works from the period are MIYEKO MURASE, *Masterpieces of Japanese Screen Painting: The American Collections* (1990); and ELISE GRILLI, *The Art of the Japanese Screen* (1970).

The wood-block print is the dominant visual format of the Edo period. Very good introductions include RICHARD LANE, *Images from the Floating World: The Japanese Print* (1978, reissued 1982), which combines general essays with a highly detailed, if not exhaustive, illustrated dictionary; HELEN C. GUNSAULUS and MARGARET O. GENTLES, *The Clarence*

Buckingham Collection of Japanese Prints, 2 vol. (1955–65); and RIJKSMUSEUM (Netherlands) RIKJSPRENTENKABINET, *Catalogue of the Collection of Japanese Prints*), are well-documented presentations of large collections. (1977– ROGER S. KEYES, *Japanese Woodblock Prints: A Catalogue of the Mary A. Ainsworth Collection* (1984), provides a series of broadly informative thematic essays in interpreting a specific collection. JACK HILLIER, *The Art of the Japanese Book*, 2 vol. (1987), is a comprehensive resource for another important Edo visual format.

BEATRIX VON RAGUÉ, *A History of Japanese Lacquerwork* (1976; originally published in German, 1967); and ANN YONEMURA, *Japanese Lacquer* (1979), provide good introductions to Japan's long history of decorative lacquer use, including its extensive diversification in the Edo period. ANDREW J. PEKARIK, *Japanese Lacquer, 1600–1900* (1980), is useful specifically for the Edo period. The textile arts, important throughout Japanese history but especially expansive in the Edo period, are discussed in AMANDA MAYER STINCHECUM, *Kosode: 16th–19th Century Textiles from the Nomura Collection*, ed. by MONICA BETHE and MARGOT PAUL (1984); and ISHIMURA HAYAO (HAYAO ISHIMURA), MARUYAMA NOBUHIKO (NOBUHIKO MARUYAMA), and YAMANOBE TOMOYUKI (TOMOYUKI YAMANOBE), *Robes of Elegance: Japanese Kimonos of the 16th–20th Centuries* (1988).

Art of the Meiji period is introduced by FREDERICK BAEKELAND and MARTIE W. YOUNG, *Imperial Japan: The Art of the Meiji Era, 1868–1912* (1980). Other works of note include HENRY D. SMITH II, *Kiyochika: Artist of Meiji Japan* (1988); and JULIA MEECH-PEKARIK, *The World of the Meiji Print: Impressions of a New Civilization* (1986).