**Heian Art**

In 794 the capital of Japan was officially transferred to Heiankyo (present-day Kyoto), where it remained until 1868. The term Heian period refers to the years between 794 and 1185, the end of the Gempei civil war. The period is further divided into the early Heian and the late Heian, or Fujiwara, eras, the pivotal date being 894, the year imperial embassies to China were officially discontinued. The next period is named after the Fujiwara family, then the most powerful in the country, who ruled as regents for the emperor, becoming, in fact, civil dictators.

**Early Heian Art**

In reaction to the growing wealth and power of organized Buddhism in Nara, the priest Kukai (posthumous name Kobo Daishi, 774-835) journeyed to China to study Shingon, a more rigorous form of Buddhism, which he introduced into Japan in 806. At the core of Shingon worship are the mandala, diagrams of the spiritual universe; the Kongokai, a chart of the myriad worlds of Buddhism; and the Taizokai, a pictorial representation of the realms of the Buddhist universe.

The temples erected for this new sect were built in the mountains, far away from the court and the laity in the capital. The irregular topography of these sites forced Japanese architects to rethink the problems of temple construction, and in so doing to choose more indigenous elements of design. Cypress-bark roofs replaced those of ceramic tile, wood planks were used instead of earthen floors, and a separate worship area for the laity was added in front of the main sanctuary.

The temple that best reflects the spirit of early Heian Shingon temples is the Muro-ji (early 9th century), set deep in a stand of cypress trees on a mountain southeast of Nara. The wooden image of Shaka, the "historic" Buddha (early 9th century), enshrined in a secondary building at the Muro-ji, is typical of the early Heian sculpture, with its ponderous body, covered by thick drapery folds carved in the hompa-shiki (rolling-wave) style, and its austere, withdrawn facial expression.

**Fujiwara Art**

In the Fujiwara period, Pure Land Buddhism, which offered easy salvation through belief in Amida (the Buddha of the Western Paradise), became popular. Concurrently, the Kyoto nobility developed a society devoted to elegant aesthetic pursuits. So secure and beautiful was their world that they could not conceive of Paradise as being much different. The Amida hall, blending the secular with the religious, houses one or more Buddha images within a structure resembling the mansions of the nobility.

The Ho-o-do (Phoenix Hall, completed 1053) of the Byodoin, a temple in Uji to the southeast of Kyoto, is the exemplar of Fujiwara Amida halls. It consists of a main rectangular structure flanked by two L-shaped wing corridors and a tail corridor, set at the edge of a large artificial pond. Inside, a single golden image of Amida (circa 1053) is installed on a high platform. The Amida sculpture was executed by Jocho, who used a new canon of proportions and a new technique (yosegi), in which multiple pieces of wood are carved out like shells and joined from the inside. Applied to the walls of the hall are small relief carvings of celestials, the host believed to have accompanied Amida when he descended from the Western Paradise to gather the souls of believers at the moment of death and transport them in lotus blossoms to Paradise. Raigo (Descent of the Amida Buddha) paintings on the wooden doors of the Ho-o-do are an early example of Yamato-e, Japanese-style painting, because they contain representations of the scenery around Kyoto.

In the last century of the Heian period, the horizontal, illustrated narrative handscroll, the emaki, came to the fore. Dating from about 1130, the illustrated Tale of Genji represents one of the high points of Japanese painting. Written about the year 1000 by Murasaki Shikibu, a lady-in-waiting to the Empress Akiko, the novel deals with the life and loves of Prince Genji and the world of the Heian court after his death. The 12th-century artists of the emaki version devised A system of pictorial conventions that convey visually the emotional content of each scene. In the second half of the century, a different, more lively style of continuous narrative illustration became popular. The Ban Dainagon Ekotoba (late 12th century, Sakai Tadahiro Collection), a scroll that deals with an intrigue at court, emphasizes figures in active motion depicted in rapidly executed brush strokes and thin but vibrant colors.