Court Culture and Spirituality

21H.154, Session 5
A Map of a Todaiji, Shōen (759)

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“three-way competition for control of lands and the profits that could be derived from them among wealthy peasants and the other elite provincial residents, provincial governors, and the great houses and religious institutions (kenmon)” (173)

“...seesawing game of shifting alliances, interests, and balances of power that transformed both public and private landholding” (174), e.g. provincial governors as competitors AND allies to shōen people
Fujiwara Era (Kamatari descendants)

- **Fujiwara no Yoshifusa (804-872)**
  - 850: emperor’s uncle and father-in-law
  - 858: regent (sesshō) to 9-years-old Seiwa

- **Fujiwara no Mototsune (836-891)**
  - Yoshifusa’s son
  - 876: regent to 8-years-old Yōzei
  - Creation of regency for adult emperors (kanpaku)

- **Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1027):**
  “...this world is indeed mine.”
Fujiwara Connections
Murasaki Shikibu

- Few details about life
- Born ca. 978
- Father: gov. of Echigo (1004)
- ca. 1005, enter service of Empress Shōshi (Emp. Ichijō consort and Fujiwara no Michinaga daughter)
Sei Shōnagon

- 966-1026
- Murasaki contemporary
- Kiyohara clan
- 993, enters service of Empress Teishi (another Ichijō consort; daughter of regent Fujiwara no Michitaka)
Historical Insights

- Gender relations
- Class and hierarchy
- Court politics/celebrity/values
- Spirituality
- Art and culture
- Environment
Heian Buddhism

• Close relationship with the elites
• Sign of anti-elitist, individualist shift
• Two key figures: Saichō and Kūkai
Saichō (767-822)

- Ordained at Tōdaiji in 785
- Builds Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei
- Key location: N.E. of Kyoto
- Alternative to Nara sects
- Founder of Tendai sect
  - Universal Buddha
  - Lotus Sutra
Kūkai (774-835)

- Sent to China in 804 (along with Saichō)
- Encounter with esoteric Buddhism: creates Shingon (“true word”) sect
  - Three mysteries: Speech, Body, and Mind
- Away from capital: Mt. Kōya
- Went to “sleep” in 835...still sleeping...

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Kūkai/Shingon and Culture

- Emphasis on mandala=new genre: *yamatoe* ("Yamato pictures")
Kana かな Syllabary

- Chinese characters/ideographs: difficulties
- Kūkai credited with 2 kana systems:
  - hiragana ひらがな & katakana カタカナ
- New literary genres:
  - waka (“Japanese poetry”): 5-7-5-7-7 syllable poems
  - Kokinshū compiled in 905
- Diaries and monogatari (romance, war, short stories)
- Folk lore: Konjaku monogatari (Tales from the Past)
Signs for Future Change?

- Buddhism: still elitist
- Tendai and Shingon as part of rulership
- Wealth and power