



CHAPTER 4

Changing of the Guard

THE RISE OF THE SAMURAI AND THE TWILIGHT OF THE IMPERIAL ORDER

*In the middle of the twelfth century, the centuries-long competition for control of the Japanese nation between the Fujiwara clan and the imperial house—between government by civil dictator (kanpaku) and that by retired emperor (insei)—entered a long, violent and messy end game. By the end of the century, power would slip irrevocably from the grasp of either faction and into that of the military elite who had long served them. The wars that wrought this revolution tore the very fabric of Heian-period society apart, leaving the glorious capital in ruins, the great temples in Nara burned to the ground. In the aftermath, a new age of military government was instituted, and in the following four centuries civil war would follow civil war as different military clans and factions fought with each other for the new title of **shogun** and the leadership of the nation. The imperial court and aristocracy, having no political power and increasingly cut off from sources of wealth, became like ghosts, growing paler and paler with each passing generation, feeding on the memories of their former glories.*

Cultural Flowering from Chaos and Upheaval

And yet out of all this social and political upheaval the evolution and development of Japanese culture continued apace. In each of the arts new heights were achieved, and arguably in the field of sculpture a pinnacle was reached that has never since been matched in Japan and perhaps even elsewhere in East Asia. New forms of Buddhism reinforced the religion's role both within the philosophical and intellectual life of the nation, but also within the life of the common man. The imperial court and metropolitan aristocracy, stripped of their political role, focused even more on their cultural pursuits, especially as concerned music, literature, poetry, calligraphy, and painting. While their wealth lasted they continued their long

tradition as art patrons, and when it finally ran out they not infrequently fell back on their education and cultural accomplishments to find a way of keeping rice in the bowl. The new aristocracy of the military—or **samurai**—clans also became important patrons of the arts, and by the end of the medieval period they were even more important than the imperial court as arbiters of taste in all things cultural.

From whence had this new military elite sprung? Early in the Heian period, the court and metropolitan aristocracy had become reluctant to venture far from the palaces and mansions of the capital. However, their primary source of revenue was their country estates, or *shōen*, scattered throughout the provinces. As mentioned in Chapter 3, to remedy this, they appointed agents to oversee their provincial properties, and these positions often became the hereditary privilege of certain clans. These provincial clans could be subbranches of the great aristocratic houses that actually owned the *shōen*, or even of the imperial family. Equally they could have a commoner ancestor who had proved particularly able in overseeing his lord's affairs, and the hereditary nature of these positions meant the establishment of new clans. It was the duty of these provincial clans to enforce their lord's will within the domain of the *shōen* and also to defend his rights against the encroachment of any neighboring *shōen*. They therefore maintained a level of martial capability that had long been abandoned, even in form, in the capital. Furthermore, the imperial provincial government established in the seventh and eighth centuries became little more than a series of stipends and titles to be competed for at the court. But, anyone who attained such an office would often fail to depart for his newly acquired post—instead sending a proxy in his name to oversee affairs. By the twelfth century, provincial administration had become lax to the point of nonexistence, and power had

devolved naturally, but haphazardly, into the hands of the provincial clans.

All of the great reforms of the seventh and eighth centuries that had made life so pleasant for the court and aristocracy had done nothing for the Japanese peasant, who worked his land basically as a bonded serf attached to a *shōen*. Whenever imperial taxation or the demands of the *shōen* lords became too great, an uprising would occur, and one or other of the provincial clans would be called on to quash the rebellion. When such uprisings occurred among the common townsfolk in the capital or elsewhere, once again these provincial clans would be ordered to put down the unrest. By the tenth century, they were known as samurai—literally “one who serves”—a reference to their role as military policemen.

End of an Epoch: The Hōgen, Heiji, and Genpei Wars

Two of these samurai clans, the Taira and Minamoto, both descended from imperial princes of the ninth century, came to prominence in the first great conflict of the twelfth century, the Hōgen Rebellion of 1156 to 1159. The occasion was the scramble for power on the death of the *insei*, retired emperor Toba (1103–56), and the accession of the new emperor Go Shirakawa (1127–92; r. 1156–8), and of the new *insei*, retired emperor Sutoku (1119–64). As had happened in the previous several reigns, government control should have shifted smoothly to the new *insei* Sutoku, but the head of the Fujiwara clan tried to reassert his role as *kanpaku* and he found a willing ally in the new emperor, Go Shirakawa. The latter recruited the services of members of the Taira and Minamoto clans, while the *insei* Sutoku was supported by other factions within the Fujiwara and Minamoto clans. After three years of civil war Go Shirakawa and his Minamoto and Taira allies proved successful. The *insei* Sutoku was sent into exile, and his Fujiwara and Minamoto supporters executed. Go Shirakawa then established himself as the new *insei*, and both his allies, Taira no Kiyomori (1118–81) and Minamoto no Yoshitomo (1123–60), were given important positions at court.

However, the Fujiwara *kanpaku*'s renewed attempts to take control of the government were frustrated by the now retired emperor Go Shirakawa's intention of wielding power himself. The next year, the Fujiwara recruited Minamoto no Yoshitomo to organize a coup and imprison Go Shirakawa (see Fig. 213). What is now known as the Heiji Rebellion was quickly quashed by Taira no Kiyomori. Yoshitomo was killed, but his sons Yoritomo (1147–99) and Yoshitsune (1159–89) fled to their provincial domain in the east of Honshū island, and thus out of Taira control. With the Fujiwara leadership now effectively out of the picture as well, for the next twenty years the Taira managed the affairs of the capital and court with the blessing of Go Shirakawa. The latter throughout his long career as *insei* skillfully played the Taira and Minamoto against each other, and in 1180—with the Taira growing ever more complacent and arrogant in their power—he encouraged the

two Minamoto brothers to launch a bid to wrest control from the Taira clan. Thus began the five-year Genpei civil war.

In 1185 the Minamoto army under the brilliant leadership of Minamoto Yoshitsune decisively defeated the Taira at Dannoura, a small village near the port of Shimonoseki. The male members of the Taira clan were almost completely wiped out, as well as a great many of the women. The infant emperor Antoku was plunged to a watery grave in the arms of his Taira grandmother when she saw from their boat that their cause was lost. The story of the Taira family's tragic fortunes is immortalized in one of the great works of the fourteenth century, the *Heike monogatari* (*Tale of the Heike*). Yoshitsune's elder brother Yoritomo had sat out most of the war in far off Kamakura, where he had established the Minamoto power base in 1180. When the war ended, Yoritomo launched a campaign against his remaining samurai rivals in the northern provinces of Honshū, and also against his brother Yoshitsune, of whom he was jealous. Yoshitsune was hunted down in the province of Iwate and committed suicide before his brother's troops could capture him. Yoritomo made an example of Iwate's samurai clan—a subbranch of the Fujiwara—destroying their city of Hiraizumi, known as the “capital of the north” (see pages 152–4). The other samurai lords were soon brought to heel by Yoritomo and either pledged their allegiance to him or were wiped out.

The First Shogun: Minamoto no Yoritomo

Yoritomo thus succeeded in bringing all the archipelago, except for Hokkaidō, under his control, and established a military form of government called the *bakufu*. Unlike the Taira, he decided to forego the pleasures of the capital, and made Kamakura the center of his government. He thus removed the function of power from the sphere of influence of the imperial court and metropolitan aristocracy and of the great Buddhist centers around the capital and in Nara. For this reason the period of time that the Kamakura *bakufu* ruled the country is known as the Kamakura period (1185–1333).

Finally, in 1192, the imperial court were obliged to grant Yoritomo the title of Seiitai Shogun, literally “Barbarian-subduing General,” and therefore the *bakufu* is also referred to in English as the shogunate. Yoritomo carried out extensive land reforms in the provinces. Although he preserved the ancient imperial bureaucracy there, these offices remained the mere honorary titles and stipends they had long ago become. The only difference was that they were handed out by the *bakufu* instead of the imperial court. Yoritomo's land reforms consisted of the granting of *shōen* that had previously belonged to his enemies, or simply to powerless members of the old aristocracy, as gifts to his lieutenants and allies. These great lords, who owed their first allegiance to the Shogun, came to be known as *daimyo*, which literally means “great name.” The term made its first appearance in the eleventh century, and was applied to any lord (whether court aristocrat



201 Portrait of Yoritomo. Late 12th century copy of the original of 1179 attributed to Fujiwara No Takanobu. Hanging scroll, color on silk; height 54 7/8 in. (139.3 cm). Sentōin, Jingoji, Kyoto.

or samurai) of a large estate. By the Kamakura period, as most of these great estates passed into samurai hands, the title daimyo took on a totally military association. The primary retainers of a Shogun, therefore, were by definition daimyo, and by the fifteenth century they came to be officially recognized by this title. Yoritomo obliged his daimyo to reside with him in Kamakura, and to appoint stewards (JAP. *shugo*) to oversee their estates—thus giving rise to a whole new crop of military class established by the stewards.

This system meant that by the end of the medieval period in the sixteenth century there were literally hundreds of little “lords” sitting on their own fiefs scattered across the archipelago. The phenomenon has given rise to the characterization of the post-imperial period until the restoration of 1868 as feudal. However, for all intents and purposes this term, with its concept of fiefs and their supposed obligation to a central ruler, could as easily be applied to the organization of the *shōen* which came before. For the great mass of the peasantry, it made little difference whether they were bonded to an estate whose lord was a court aristocrat or a samurai.

Yoritomo himself played a delicate game with the imperial court, and the *insei* Go Shirakawa. His official position, even as Shogun, was as the emperor’s servant—as had been that of the Fujiwara *kampaku* who had come before. However, Go Shirakawa was, by 1185, an old man and it rapidly became

clear that his *insei* government, which was supposed to operate alongside the *bakufu*, was increasingly one of mere form. Nevertheless, the Minamoto never tried themselves to usurp the imperial throne, nor did any of the other shogunal dynasties which followed. The emperor and court aristocracy remained at the top of the social order, the samurai elite below them, followed by the peasants, and last of all the craftsmen and merchants in the towns. However, by 1185 it had been centuries since real power had actually resided with the imperial throne, and the Shogun, like the earlier *kampaku* and *insei*, became the position and title with which that real power lay.

There has survived a pair of portraits of Yoritomo, dating one from the beginning of his career and one from near the end of his life, after he had taken the title of Shogun. The first is in the Sentōin, the Hall of the Retired Emperor, built in Go Shirakawa’s honor at Jingoji and is part of a group of three portraits from a set of five commemorating *insei* Go Shirakawa’s role in the restoration of the temple and the support of his four most trusted advisers. These painted portraits are thought to be early thirteenth-century copies of a set traditionally attributed to the artist Fujiwara no Takanobu (c. 1146–c. 1206) and executed in 1179, a year in which all of the subjects were still alive and Go Shirakawa at the height of his power. They are among the earliest extant examples of portraiture in the secular *yamato-e* (or Japanese) style. The painting traditionally identified with Minamoto no Yoritomo shows a relatively young man—Yoritomo was thirty-two in 1179—dressed in formal court costume and seated on three layers of tatami mats (Fig. 201). Extending from a fold of one sleeve and held by an invisible hand is a cream-colored *shaku*,



202 Portrait sculpture of Minamoto no Yoritomo. 13th century. Wood with paint; height 35 1/2 in. (90.3 cm). Tokyo National Museum.

a thin piece of wood emblematic of Yoritomo's court rank and carried on ceremonial occasions.

The sculpted portrait of Yoritomo as shogun is dated to the end of the thirteenth century and exemplifies the translation of the *yamato-e* style of portrait painting into a three-dimensional form (Fig. 202). Such sculptures and paintings became increasingly common within the ancestral shrines of the great clans. In this sculpture, now in the Tokyo National Museum, the pale, alert face of the young courtier has given way to the plump jowls and sharp, confident gaze of the shogun. For this posthumous portrait, Yoritomo is shown wearing less formal attire, an upper robe known as a *kariginu* (hunting jacket) and below it baggy pantaloons over a more form-fitting undergarment. His head is covered by a tall black hat made of starched gauze. Images such as this were habitually made for the ancestral shrines of the great clans, and presumably this sculpture once held its place amongst a pantheon of images in a Minamoto family shrine, or perhaps in one dedicated solely to Yoritomo.

Repairing the Damage: Cultural Revival in the Early Kamakura Period

After 1185, the whole of the capital and the Kansai region had been laid waste, the battle zone extending all the way to the southwestern tip of Honshū and east into the Kantō region. In particular, the Taira had set fire to both Tōdaiji and Kōfukuji as these temples had allied themselves with the Minamoto. By the twelfth century, it was not only the court and aristocracy that needed to have their property protected, but the Buddhist foundations as well. Some of the great monasteries, such as the Tendai center of Enryakuji, even created their own monk militias to rival the forces of the samurai lords. The Enryakuji monks were known to march down in force and threaten the emperor in order to obtain some favor or concession. Thus, whether they defended themselves or had others defend them, the great temples and monasteries were often as politically involved in these civil wars as the court and samurai. Nevertheless, the destruction by the Taira of the national temple of Tōdaiji was met with profound shock. It was agreed that both should be rebuilt immediately, and Minamoto no Yoritomo pledged the lion's share of funding, with the rest made up by emperor and aristocracy. The rebuilt temples and their refurbished images—largely by the Kei school of sculptors—are arguably Japanese Buddhist sculpture's most sublime expression.

Minamoto no Yoritomo, doubtless with an eye to consolidating his reputation as the nation's shepherd, also made sure that the imperial palace and capital were returned to something like their former prosperity. Commerce returned to normal within the city now most commonly known by the name of Kyoto, and the aristocrats in their mansions and the emperor and *insei* pursued with even more attention their cultural pursuits. Some aristocrats, deprived of their *shōen* and,

therefore, their income, became professional tutors in the Confucian classics, calligraphy, painting, or the playing of the *koto*. Some of their clients would have been other aristocrats or samurai, but as their poverty increased they would not be above teaching the sons and daughters of prosperous merchants and craftsmen. While Kyoto retained its central position within Japan's social and cultural structures, the division of power among a number of samurai daimyo tied to the *bakufu* meant that a number of provincial towns began to grow in influence as well. Not least of these was the seat of the Minamoto *bakufu*, Kamakura, which (as already mentioned) grew in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries from an obscure fishing village to the second city of the nation.

There was also renewed interest in Chinese culture. By the end of the tenth century, China had reunited under the Song dynasty (960–1279), but in 1126 the Song lost half of its empire to foreign dynasties from the northern steppe, and in 1279 all of China would fall into the domain of the Mongol empire. However, for the first century of the Kamakura period, the Song empire still retained the rich, cultural south of China, and furthermore they had an enterprising merchant navy. The overall aesthetic of Song China was a great deal more sober and introspective than the comparatively gaudy exuberance of the Tang empire (618–907). After the upheavals of the twelfth century, the Japanese elite in the medieval period—whether courtly or samurai—were extremely receptive to this new sobriety.

Its greatest proponent within Japanese culture was the new Buddhist school of Zen (Ch. Chan), which was imported from its Chinese centers by several different figures in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Zen looked for its sponsorship within the new samurai elite, and in particular the Minamoto *bakufu*. Zen monks became important advisers within the shogunate and the various retinues of the daimyo. They became great figures in poetry and painting, introducing the spare literary and visual formats of the Song literati very successfully to their samurai patrons, and ultimately setting the tone and taste for these matters even within Kyoto. While the imperial court remained largely immune to the allure of Zen, they were receptive to other aspects of Song intellectual culture in poetry and painting, and their art—even when it celebrated the lost golden age of Heian—was tinged with a sadness born of experience that gave their works a depth never quite obtained during the long prosperity of the Heian period.

While Zen was shaping the intellectual life of the samurai elite, another Buddhist movement was lighting up the lives of the peasantry and merchant classes. Amida Buddhism had begun in the Middle Heian period (951–1086) as a movement that preached the repetition of the *nenbutsu* mantra calling on Amida Buddha as the practitioner's best method for obtaining release—in this instance rebirth into the Pure Land of Amida. With the descent into chaos in the twelfth century, this recipe for salvation gained even greater currency as people became increasingly convinced that the *mappō* (the degenerate phase at the end of the Buddha age) was upon them. In the first

century of the Kamakura period a variety of charismatic figures arose who organized this "Pure Land" Buddhism into a variety of different sects, all of which proved remarkably popular with the oppressed peasantry and merchant class.

When Yoritomo died in 1199, his two sons, Yoriie and Sanetomo, were too young and inexperienced to control the Kamakura shogunate, and a power struggle ensued between their mother, Hōjō Masako, her father, Hōjō Tokimasa, and her brother Hōjō Yoshitoki. At first Tokimasa won out, forcing Yoriie into exile and assuming the office of regent for Sanetomo, who was elevated to the position of shogun. However, in 1205 Masako joined with her brother and forced Tokimasa into exile, the brother assuming the regency himself. The Hōjō family would control the Kamakura shogunate until its fall in 1333. There is a subtle irony in the fact that this family, an offshoot of the Taira clan, was able to achieve through guile the supremacy that the leaders of the Taira had failed to attain, and a further ironic twist of fate in that they were eventually toppled by Ashikaga Takauji (1305–58), who traced his ancestry back to a great Minamoto general of the Late Heian period.

Following Go Shirakawa's death in 1192, the *insei* government continued to function as a powerless partner of the Kamakura regime for three more decades. Following the assassination of Sanetomo in 1219, the *bakufu* fell into disarray, and in 1221 the *insei*, retired emperor Go Toba (1179–1239; r. 1184–92), rallied samurai and court aristocrats loyal to the imperial house and attacked Masako and her brother. Known as the Jōkyū Rebellion, it was speedily quashed by the Hōjō. Go Toba was sent into exile to the island of Oki off the west coast of Honshū, and those who had supported him were executed and their property confiscated. After this, the Kamakura *bakufu* made sure that the *insei* was no more than a retired emperor, and tried to ensure that the imperial throne itself was held by either a child or an imbecile. After Sanetomo's death, the office of shogun passed first to a Fujiwara of the Samura branch in Iwate, who passed it on to his son. Then the title was given to a series of imperial princes sent out to Kamakura. The real power in the *bakufu*, however, remained with the Hōjō family.

Decline into Perpetual Civil War: The Nambokuchō and Muromachi Periods

By the end of the thirteenth century, the Kamakura *bakufu* had lost control of its alliances with the other samurai clans, and by 1319 they had allowed an able emperor to take the throne. Go Daigo (r. 1319–39) first tried to stage an overthrow of the *bakufu* in 1324, but his plans were discovered and stopped. In 1331, he actually attacked Kamakura, but once again his forces were foiled, and he was deposed and sent in exile to the island of Oki. He escaped in 1333 and managed to gain one of the Kamakura generals as his ally—Ashikaga Takauji (1305–58). Together they finally crushed the failing

Kamakura regime, and Go Daigo returned to Kyoto fully intending that the *bakufu* was gone forever and a new golden age of imperial rule had begun. However, the period that has come to be known as the **Kenmu Restoration** was short-lived. In 1335, Takauji, feeling that he had been poorly recompensed by the emperor, led a revolt and chased Go Daigo from the capital. Takauji then placed the fourteen-year-old Kōmyō (r. 1335–80) on the throne and in 1338 assumed the title of shogun. Go Daigo fled to the mountains of Yoshino, south of Nara, taking with him the imperial regalia. With the support of other clans opposed to Ashikaga supremacy, he set up a southern court (JAP. *nanchō*) in opposition to the northern court (JAP. *hokuchō*) of the Ashikaga puppet in Kyoto. Thus was inaugurated the Nambokuchō period (1336–92) and a civil war that lasted for nearly sixty years.

Although the country could hardly be considered under the control of either party, the Ashikaga maintained a firm control over Kyoto and the area around the capital. Ultimately, in 1392 the Ashikaga shogun Yoshimitsu (1358–1409) persuaded the emperor Go Kameyama (r. 1373–92) of the southern court to relinquish his claim and to turn over the imperial regalia to Go Komatsu (r. 1384–1413), the emperor in Kyoto. Yoshimitsu promised that the position of emperor would alternate between the southern and northern lines of the imperial family, but this was a promise never kept. Yoshimitsu, arguably the most astute of the Ashikaga shoguns, had succeeded to that position in 1368, when he was only ten years old, but a decade later he was sufficiently in control to move the seat of his government from Takauji's original Kyoto headquarters to the Muromachi district of Kyoto. The name of the period following the reunification of the imperial lines is therefore known as the Muromachi period (1392–1573).

Even though Kyoto was relatively unscathed by actual warfare during the Nambokuchō, it nevertheless went into a steep decline, the result of commercial stagnation caused by the constant conflict and by a series of natural disasters, namely earthquakes, fires, and plagues. Aristocrat and merchant alike suffered. The fortunes of the aristocracy had, in particular, been distinctly diminished by the arrival of the Ashikaga in Kyoto. Most of those who still retained *shōen* within the Kansai region had these stripped from them by the new military elite of the Ashikaga *bakufu*. Those with properties further afield often had them confiscated by the war lords who set up what were, in fact and function, independent states. The emperor, to whom all at least professed allegiance, became little more than a forgotten figurehead, sitting in a palace that was rapidly falling down around him. By the end of the fourteenth century, many of the capital's literati and craftsmen—whether impoverished aristocrat, monk, or commoner—had fled, looking for provincial patrons and a safer existence.

In 1395, Yoshimitsu relinquished the position of shogun, and retired to a palace now famously known as the Kinkakuji (Golden Pavilion) in the Kitayama (Northern Hills) district of Kyoto (see Fig. 262). Unlike the *insei* of the late Heian and early Kamakura periods, the retired shoguns really did

relinquish the direction of political affairs, although perhaps not their political interests. Yoshimitsu, however, in his golden pavilion set in a beautiful and (for the time) modern park had the resources and the time to cultivate the arts. This he did with a certain gusto, which he handed on to his grandson Yoshimasa (1430–90). These Ashikaga shoguns and their courts built palaces inside and outside Kyoto, where they hoped to create little islands of splendor amidst the chaos and decay beyond their walls. In these efforts they were assisted by a new class of men, known as *tonseisha*, who had become monks in order to escape low social rank, but who did not affiliate with any particular Buddhist temple. In fact, the Ashikaga were noted for cultivating associates from all ranks of society, including those at the time considered the very lowest. Among the arts, the Ashikaga particularly fostered the development of *renga* (linked verse), *Nō* drama, **tea ceremony**, and **flower arranging**, and were famous for their collection of Chinese paintings. Yet Kyoto was not revived by this patronage but fell into even greater neglect and disarray. Yoshimasa was so keen on his pleasures that in 1459 he started construction of a new, vast, and luxurious palace to replace the shogunal residence in the Muromachi district. In a city where people were starving in the streets, there was an immense public outcry, and Yoshimasa ceased construction out of shame when the emperor sent him a poem in reproof. Less than ten years later Yoshimasa would launch the capital into a war that would leave almost half of the city in ruins.

Yoshimasa's retirement from the position of shogun in 1467 triggered factional disputes between the daimyo which culminated in the **Ōnin War** of 1467 to 1477. The principal theater of this conflict was Kyoto, the northern half of which, including the precinct of the imperial palace and the Muromachi district, were completely destroyed. After the war, Yoshimasa immediately set about creating a little paradise for himself and his coterie to the east of the city, as his grandfather had done to the north (see Fig. 263). However, the city itself would not recover and be rebuilt until the succeeding Momoyama period (1573–1615), almost a hundred years later, as the Ōnin War was followed by a series of civil wars between the daimyo called the **Sengoku Jidai** (Age of the Country at War). The Ashikaga *bakufu* survived in name only, and few parts of Honshū were left unaffected as the different daimyo conquered their rivals, and in turn were conquered themselves. Finally, one of the daimyo, Oda Nobunaga (1534–82), burnt the capital yet again and chased the last Ashikaga shogun, Yoshiaki (r. 1568–73), from it. On the final departure of the Ashikaga from Kyoto, the city's remaining citizens instituted a curious ritual at the Ashikaga clan's funerary shrine, where for a small fee one could beat the effigies of Takauji and his descendants. This particular custom lasted as late as 1887. Nobunaga succeeded in uniting the country under his rule, but it would be his successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98), who would rebuild the capital and imperial palace and restore both of them to something of their former glory.

Rakuchū Rakugai

Paradoxically, the darkest hour of Kyoto's history also proved to be one that united its citizens—from emperor down to the homeless in the street (of which there were many at this period)—in a sense of the city as an entity unto itself, and of which each and every one of them was a component part. In terms of the visual arts this gave birth to a new subject in genre painting known as *rakuchū rakugai*—literally “scenes in and around the capital,” Raku being another of Kyoto's many epithets. The invention of this subject matter is attributed to Tosa Mitsunobu (1434–1525), the foremost painter of the imperial court through the tumultuous events of the Ōnin War and its aftermath. The **Tosa school** was founded at the end of the twelfth century by Fujiwara no Tsunetaka, or as he came to be known—Tosa Tsunetaka. It became the leading school of *yamato-e* painting at the imperial court until the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Masters of this school usually have the surname of Tosa, although this does not necessarily indicate that they are Tsunetaka's blood descendants—only his spiritual ones, adopting the name as one did a court title. Critics have often characterized the seven hundred years of the Tosa tradition as one hidebound to the conventions of Heian-period *yamato-e*, churning out stale and trite images for a court stagnating in memories of the past. However, the format of *rakuchū rakugai* demonstrates that these *yamato-e* conventions could still be implemented to innovative and dazzling effect.

The standard device of scenes seen from a bird's eye view and framed by gold-dust clouds is with *rakuchū rakugai* applied to a vast panorama of the imperial capital, normally spread over two massive six-panel folding screens (JAP. *byōbu*). A sea of golden clouds breaks at particular points in order to reveal the streets and buildings of the city. The right-hand screen normally bears a vista of the eastern, and principal, section of the city, stretching from the southern boundary to the imperial palace in the north, while the upper sections of the panels look into the Eastern Hills, where many of the more important Buddhist foundations are located. The left-hand screen normally details the region to the north and west of the imperial palace. On these screens three areas are given particular prominence: in the first panels of the right screen, the Gion festival procession and the merchant district through which it passes, and in the last panels the imperial palace and the neighborhoods where the mansions of the court aristocrats were traditionally sited; and on the left screen, the first panels comprise the headquarters of the *bakufu* in the Muromachi district and the mansions of the powerful daimyo. These areas might be seen as references to the three classes present in Kyoto at that time: the townsmen, the court aristocracy, and the samurai.

Unfortunately no actual *rakuchū rakugai* screens known to be by Tosa Mitsunobu have survived to the present day. One of the earliest surviving is a pair in the National Museum of Japanese History (JAP. Kokuritu Rekishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan) and datable to between 1525 and 1535 on the basis of the buildings