

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Heian Japan: Centers and Peripheries by Mikael Adolphson, Edward Kamens and Stacie Matsumoto

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unfolding. In this regard, then, the important achievement of *Time Frames* is its account of historiographical theory, which leads to a deeper appreciation of Japanese cinema as an object of study.

*Heian Japan: Centers and Peripheries*. Edited by Mikael Adolphson, Edward Kamens, and Stacie Matsumoto. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, 2007. xiv, 450 pages. \$50.00.

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Scholars and students of Japanese history and culture should buy this book. *Centers and Peripheries* weaves together the latest scholarship in history, religion, literature, and art during the first three centuries (794–1086) of the Heian era (794–1185). It is welcome to have such an outstanding collection of first-rate essays in one volume.

The articles in this volume demonstrate how durable bonds of kinship and lordship underpinned the ad hoc and pragmatic policies of the Heian court in the aftermath of the administrative collapse of the earlier bureaucratic state with its intrusive mechanisms of control and taxation. Culturally, “fertile innovations and epochal achievements in literature and the arts” (p. 1) appeared as a Chinese-Japanese hybrid style of writing and language came to be used by men and women of the court and, with less skill, members of the provincial administration. Buddhism, too, experienced a marked shift from text to ritual as the basis for practice, and at the same time, Buddhist rituals originating in the capital came to influence beliefs and sculpture in the provinces.

The Fujiwara, members of a noble lineage who dominated the court during much of this period, merit the attention of Joan Piggott and G. Cameron Hurst. Piggott explores how Fujiwara no Tadahira ensured Fujiwara influence through institutional innovations and ties to the provinces, while Hurst analyzes how the famous Fujiwara no Michinaga wielded power through alliances with provincial governors. How the rank of “mother of the nation” allowed Fujiwara women to exercise political power that was otherwise institutionally denied them becomes evident in Fukutō Sanae’s related essay.

Well-written essays by Bruce Batten and Karl Friday provide an important counterpoint to the centrally themed essays of Hurst, Piggott, and Fukutō. Friday elucidates the relationship of center and province from the perspective of a warrior, Taira no Tadatsune. Informal networks of kin-

ship and lordship tied even the most recalcitrant warrior to the capital, and the court astutely relied on rivalries and alliances when choosing to use military force. Pragmatism outweighed a narrow concern for legality. After Tadatsune's death and posthumous pardon, his sons were forgiven as well, even though they did not "officially" surrender.

The western island of Kyushu serves as the backdrop for Batten's essay. The court delegated authority and the ability to defend Japan's borders to the northern Kyushu headquarters of Dazaifu. This area remained important by serving as an entrepot for trade even as official diplomatic missions ceased. Links to the capital remained vibrant because state policies meshed with "parochial interests."

Robert Borgen's account of the travels of the priest Jōjin from the Heian court to the capital of the Song Dynasty illustrates how pragmatic diplomatic exchanges had become as priests were treated as if they were official envoys. In contrast to the practice of earlier ages, knotty diplomatic quandaries were resolved in favor of verbal exchanges. Remarkably, the Song emperors even took the opportunity when meeting with visiting priests to correspond, informally of course, with their Japanese counterparts. Ties to the Fujiwara influenced Jōjin's actions as well: he offered the hair of one of their deceased consorts to a Chinese temple, thereby melding his "private" and "public" responsibilities.

The essays of Charlotte von Verschuer and Wayne Farris provide a snapshot into the life of the provinces. Verschuer's detailed and informative account focuses on the nature of trade and taxes. Skilled use of archaeological evidence and analysis of a complaint penned by low-ranking provincial employee against a rapacious governor allow one to reconstruct life in the provinces and infer how factional alliances at the court permeated local administration, with some members siding with and others against provincial governors.

Farris provides an overview of the environmental causes of famine in the Heian era. His narrative contains striking and largely unexamined references to monetary transactions: the price of brown rice fluctuated; peasants were criticized for attempting to sell their progeny; and in response to hunger, the court, or some of its more generous members, distributed cash, ranging from a few hundred strings (each string consisting of slightly under a hundred coins) to 500,000 coins, to those in need. One wonders if Heian Japan could be further explored in light of the work of Amartya Sen, who in *Poverty and Famines* (Oxford University Press, 1981) argued that a collapse in purchasing power, not a dearth of food, causes most famine. That the court provided aid in cash suggests that it possessed greater ability to mitigate the ill effects of famines than has commonly been assumed.

The institutional flexibility and imagination of the Heian state becomes evident in Mikael Adolphson's article recounting how temple networks were created outside of earlier groupings that had been recognized by the

state. Temples designated as *jōganji* were given tax exemptions, but later designations, such as *betsuin* and *matsuji*, arose as these temples became more tightly controlled by the most successful religious institutions.

Turning to the essays that explore belief and language, the enormously erudite Ryūichi Abe persuasively reveals in a tour de force how ritual language, and in particular the utterance of mantras and dharanis, shifted from being peripheral practices according to Buddhist practice of textual exegesis to central in both ritual practice and the production of new writings.

Samuel Morse, in an engrossing study of statues of the Eleven Faced Kannon, suggests that they proved to be more important than texts in the religious life of the provinces. Eighth-century “rites of repentance” constituted “collective purification of evil karma” (p. 161) which disseminated from the capital, where they had been designed for the protection of the emperor and the well-being of the state, and gained influence in the provinces for providing protection against epidemics. From these statues, one sees that the concerns may differ, but the denizens of Japan were increasingly becoming a community united in belief.

Changes in the practice of burying sutras, which initially arose in response to the notion of *mappō*, “the final degenerate age of the Dharma,” constitutes the topic of Max Moerman’s work. Initially these burials aimed to preserve Buddhist texts, but as time passed this notion of decline served as a “rhetorical center on which other personal familial and political anxieties converged” (p. 267). A historical notion of change gradually gave way to a more immediate sense of salvation, directed toward the figure of Amida, but these competing visions of “concern with future rebirth, nostalgia for a past golden age, and visions of a paradise in the present world” (p. 267) continued to coexist. By charting where these sutras were buried, Moerman shows that a considerable number were posited in northern Kyushu, although the most lavish burials were accomplished by figures such as Fujiwara no Michinaga during his pilgrimage to Kinpusen in 1007.

The essays of Edward Kamens and Ivo Smits explore language, with Kamens persuasively arguing that the distinction between “male” Chinese and “female” Japanese did not apply. Considerable overlap existed in the creation of Chinese and Japanese poetry, as language and poetic patterns were fused during the Heian era. Smits argues that the relatively modern bias favoring classical Japanese is mistaken, for Chinese writing (*kanbun*) maintained its ideological supremacy until the arrival of a fused form of “Japan China” (*wakan*) which in the end allowed Japanese literature to become a center unto its own (p. 122).

In spite of the strength of these essays, a clearer explanation of the scope of this work is in order. Why 1086 represents the terminal date for its chronological coverage deserves some explanation. Varying the translation of common terms risks sowing confusion as well. Most notably, Piggott translates the term *kanpaku* as “chief of staff,” which implies considerable

subservience to the sovereign, while elsewhere this institution, dominated by Fujiwara scions, is referred to as “chancellor” or a “regent for an adult emperor.”

Taken as a whole, these essays prove mutually reinforcing and informative. They are grouped according to five categories—“Locating Political Centers and Peripheries”; “Shifting Categories in Literature and the Arts”; “Establishing New Religious Spheres”; “Negotiating Domestic Peripheries”; and “Placing Japan in the Ancient World”—and it is a sign of their strength that they can be compared and organized in ways that vary from how they appear in the book (and indeed were done so in this review). Adolphson and Kamens recognize the multiple connections between their essays. They provide four different groupings of these essays in the introduction: “The Early Tenth-Century Turning Point,” “Multiple Centers and Peripheries,” “Integration of Centers and Peripheries,” and “Privatization.”

Adolphson and Kamens discuss how this volume “self-consciously follows a tradition of edited volumes of essays on premodern Japan” but that “common focus on one theme explored assiduously and collectively across disciplinary boundaries” allows it to “break from its predecessors” (p. 2). They explain the organizing principle of this work as follows:

the theme or image of centers and peripheries has presented itself as a compelling model, a powerful instigator for new efforts to represent our understanding of the shape and experience of the past—only to resolve or dissolve, chimera-like, as investigations proceed still deeper into the texts and other artifacts of the past that inevitably make the emerging picture still more blurred and markedly more complex. In the essays in this volume, “centers and periphery” serves as a point of departure and in some cases also as a point of return; it emerges as a construct to be contested, redefined, modified, augmented, or elaborated. (p. 3)

This theme, in other words, attempts to make the dichotomy of center and periphery more complex. In fact, the trope of “center and periphery” has been integral to historical coverage of Heian Japan for the last 75 years. In his 1931 monograph, *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (D. Appleton; second rev. ed., Stanford University Press, 1978), George Sansom devotes a chapter entitled “The New Capital and the Provinces” to the Heian age, while John Hall, in his landmark *Government and Local Power in Japan, 500–1700: A Study Based on Bizen Province* (Princeton University Press, 1966), alternates his analysis between capital and countryside. A recent compilation of Japanese historical essays translated into English (Joan R. Piggott, ed., *Capital and Countryside in Japan, 300–1180* [Cornell East Asia Series, 2006]) possesses a similar theme.

What is original about this series of essays is that they perceive that “a singular dichotomy between center and periphery is inadequate” because “within Kyoto and the countryside several centers and various degrees of

peripheries [existed] with fluid boundaries and a substantial middle ground in-between” (p. 5). The various centers designated in these essays include Buddhist texts, rituals, the court, Chinese texts (*kanbun*), and Japanese literature. The ambitious attempt to map “multiple centers and peripheries” and, through them, a new “middle ground” of “inclusion” and “complexity” ultimately fails to provide adequate analytical clarity. Statements that Dazaifu in northern Kyushu served as both a “center in its own right” (p. 5) and a “periphery . . . not so distant from the Kyoto center, nor even all that peripheral” (p. 8) epitomize the limitations of a model that manages, most remarkably, to be both protean and procrustean.

A profusion of centers obscures that the idea of the capital remained important and that courtiers exercised disproportionate influence throughout the archipelago. Court-sponsored prayers became the basis for regional beliefs to ward off illness, and important regions were conceived of as capitals, or miniature capitals in their own right. For example, Dazaifu came to be known as the “capital of the western periphery” (p. 257) while the northern city of Hiraizumi was modeled after the capital, which suggests that Heian imaginations were captivated by centers, rather than middle grounds or peripheries. An exploration of hierarchies of capitals, alluded to in Borgen’s essay, linking China to Japan, Dazaifu, and the provincial headquarters, could further illuminate the age. Likewise, the mystique of the capital, and the durability of its social networks, ensured that even unfair decisions met little resistance. The actions, language, rituals, and processions of the nobility demonstrated their supremacy, which in turn translated into political power and economic wealth.

These criticisms suggest not a weakness of the book, but rather the profound and underlying strength of its individual components. These essays will inform our understanding of the age and represent the starting point for “new and innovative approaches along multidimensional and multidisciplinary lines” (p. 10) in Heian studies for many years to come.

*Householders: The Reizei Family in Japanese History.* By Steven D. Carter.  
Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge, Mass., 2007. xiv, 515 pages. \$55.00.

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The potential pitfalls of writing a book like this are numerous. After all, the topic—one thousand years of the Reizei, an aristocratic family of Japan famous for its poetry—comes across, depending on one’s perspective, as