

NARRATIVE PICTURE SCROLLS

Colour 28 min

Version/English, German, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese

Planned by/Tokyo National Museum

Produced by/Sakura motion Picture Co., Ltd.

—繪卷—



"Tale of Genji Picture Scrolls"

◎EXPLANATION

It was during the Heian Period (A.D.794-1192) that a new culture uniquely Japanese emerged, independent of Chinese culture which until then had been dominant in Japan. One example is the invention of simplified Kana syllabaries based on Chinese characters. Another is the birth of Yamato-e painting, featuring subtleties in daily life and seasonal changes with exquisite touches. Emaki is a happy marriage of this painting-style and literature executed in picture scrolls. The unparalleled art of Emaki developed in aristocracy, in which courtiers of that time enjoyed life mostly indoors. One appreciates the art of scroll painting, as he unrolls the scroll with the left hand, while the right hand rolling back the scroll. It can be said that Emaki is an ancient version of motion picture invented by the aristocrats.

There are not many Emaki scrolls of the Heian Period extant today, some representative works being "Tale of Genji Picture Scrolls" "Scrolls of Frolicking Animals and People" "Illustrated Scrolls of a Story about Ban Dainagon" "Illustrated Scrolls of

Legends of Shigisan Temple" etc., which are all celebrated Emaki masterpieces. "Scrolls of Hungry Ghosts" and "Scrolls of the Hell", also as famous as the afore-mentioned scrolls, are said to belong to either the late Heian Period or the early Kamakura Period that ensued. The Kamakura Period is associated with numerous masterpieces of Emaki picture scrolls, which feature the origins of shrines and temples, biographical stories about famous priests, dramatic accounts of various wars, etc. Many of these are still extant today. Most famous above all are "Illustrated Scrolls of Stories about Heiji Civil War" and "Illustrated Scrolls of Biographical Stories about Priest Ippen"

Chronological studies of these picture scrolls graphically reveal both the decline of aristocracy and the new social background emerging at the beginning of mediaeval times. It is impressive to note that Emaki, an art form created by the aristocrats of the Heian Period, portrays the aristocrats' own fall as moving accounts of history.



"Scrolls of Frolicking Animals & People"

◎OUTLINE

Depicted at the beginning of the film are various social backgrounds such as aristocratic life of the Heian Period, birth of Kana syllabaries and Yamato-e painting, etc., showing how the art of Emaki developed. "Tale of Genji Picture Scrolls" are the oldest extant picture scrolls, revealing the aesthetic taste of the Heian aristocrats.

It is during the same period, however, that "Scrolls of Frolicking Animals and People" were created, a work completely different in style with fast-moving actions. There was already an appropriate background for its birth by the middle of the 12th century (The Completion of "Tale of Genji Picture Scrolls"), when the aristocratic rule was treading a path of decline, and the whole country thrown into an uproar. It was about this time that the Dengaku folk dance became extremely popular in Kyoto. "Illustrated Scrolls of a Story about Ban-Dainagon" representing a panoramic portrayal of the strife and fall of the nobility incorporate dynamic and fast-moving actions of the masses, in contrast to "Genji Scrolls" which deal with the similar subject describing the court life from inside. On the other hand, "Illustrated Scrolls of Legends of Shigisan Temple" are an expression of nature and lives of local commoners executed in a free and easy style. The scroll depicts healthy and warm hearted country folks.

"Picture Scrolls illustrating the Six Realms of Reincarnation" including "Scrolls of Hungry Ghosts" and "Scrolls of the Hells" may be said to represent the mental state of the declining aristocrats, while "Illustrated Scrolls of Stories about Heiji Civil Wars" depict the actual sufferings of the nobility who

in the course of repeated wars had their power gradually taken away by the warrior class.

"Illustrated Scrolls of Biographical Stories about Priest Ippen" depict commoners of the Kamakura Period that followed the aristocratic period. These scrolls are also executed with impressively warm touches, portraying various scenes of the four different seasons. Largely applied to the work are the techniques of Chinese landscape painting of the Sun Dynasty which is incorporated into the tradition of Yamato-e. This tradition was handed down to the following period and developed into a style of large sized paintings for the Tokonoma alcoves and halls. It is still alive even today.

◎STAFF

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