**HAA 18j: Japanese Architecture**

Lecture 6: The Shinden Palace

**Historical Eras**

Heian period (794-1185)

**People and Terms**

Sanjō Eastern Palace (*shinden* palace associated with Fujiwara regents)

Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1028), regent and powerful politician

Emperor Shirakawa (1053-1129), restores power to the imperial throne

Genpei War (1180-1185), civil war fought between Minamoto and Taira warrior clans

*The Tale of Genji*, authored by Murasaki Shikibu ca. 1000 CE

*Genji Scrolls* (set of Japanese scrolls illustrated *The Tale of Genji*), c. 1140s

*Manual of Garden Making* (*Sakuteiki*), 11th c.

Penglai: legendary island-mountain in Chinese mythology

*shitsurai*: Heian term that refers to acts of occasion-specific furnishing in a *shinden*

**Shinden Architecture**

・*Shinden* means “sleeping palace,” designates a mode of residential architecture for the Heian

aristocracy, emerging sometime during the tenth century.

・Originally laid out symmetrically along a north-south axis with a southern orientation. Aside

from *shinden*, other buildings include “facing halls” (*tainoya*) and the “fishing pavilion”

(*tsuridono*), connected by covered corridors.

・Layout became irregular to accommodate the size of the residential lot, and to maximize fresh

air and views of the garden. Interior gardens (*tsuboniwa*) were common.

・Simple construction, with roofs of either cypress bark shingles or wooden planks, raised floors

with pillars set into the ground, a *moya*/*hisashi* layout with little to no fixed partitioning inside.

・Partitions were created with reticulated shutters, bamboo blinds, silk screens, sliding-

door panels, and painted folding screens. Furnishings include lamps, armrests, and tatami

mats, which were arranged in different ways depending upon use and occasion.

・Japanese term for garden (*tei’en* or *niwa*) originally meant “courtyard.” *Shinden* gardens were

conceived of as microcosms of Penglai or a Buddhist Pure Land. Designed around a pond with

islands and bridges. Techniques of borrowed scenery (*shakkei*) and miniaturization common,

and plantings were planned around all four seasons.

・Floor-sitting and removal of shoes common. Influences later residential styles such as *shoin*

and *sukiya* architecture.

・Although no examples of *shinden* architecture survive, its historical nature can be gleaned

from temple buildings such as the Ninnaji Golden Hall (1640s), which is based upon the

Emperor’s Sleeping Palace (Shishinden) at the Imperial Palace, originally constructed in 1613.

・*Shinden* architecture can also be imagined through early court paintings such as the *Genji*

*Scrolls* (1140s) or *Imperial Visit to the Horse Race* (13th c).

**Further Reading**

*A Tale of Flowering Fortunes*, tr. William and Helen McCullough (Stanford Press, 1980)

*The Tale of Genji*, tr. Dennis Washburn (W.W. Norton, 2016)