

BOOK REVIEWS 書評

Cosmology of Kyoto: Tales of the Millennium— Visual Mindscape of Old Japan

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Requirements: Macintosh (68030 or faster CPU recommended); System 6.0.7 or later; QuickTime 1.5 or later; 256-color 13" monitor; 4 Mb available RAM; DC-ROM drive (dual-speed or faster). KanjiTalk or Japanese Language Kit is required for Japanese mode. Power Macintosh compatible. Reviewed on a Performa 475 with 8 Mb of RAM, Apple dual-speed external CD-ROM drive, and 14" color monitor.

Having selected English or Japanese mode, then a gender and appropriate facial and body type, you find yourself in a wasteland to the south of Kyoto's Rajōmon. In this most recent of your endless reincarnations in the Six Realms of Existence (current karma score conveniently shown in a small box), your goal, as always, is to make your way through the perils of this *shaba* world, in the form of the city of Heiankyō, to paradise; the hazards, as always, are those awaiting the denizens of that spirit-ridden city: poverty, starvation, and disease; robbers, footpads, and cutthroats; sword-happy warriors and turf-conscious diviners; demons disguised as beautiful women; and a wide variety of other citizens anxious to relieve you of your clothes, your money, and your life.

Luckily, however, as a more modern karmic traveler, you have at your command a facsimile of the sort of information that might have been possessed by a well-informed denizen of Heiankyō, in the form of a marvellously stocked reference database containing some 400 informational screens on tenth- and eleventh-century Heian period history, literature, society, and religion (there is also an even more immediately useful pocket guide to the various perils and opportunities lying in wait for you in life and what to do when you encounter them). One of the snazziest features of this info-game is not even software, but rather a heavy-duty folding paper grid-map of Heiankyō, with every street and the locations of many official buildings and residences carefully labelled. It may come in handy for teaching future *Genji* courses. And there are other helpful interactive software maps that zoom in successive views from all of Asia to Japan, Heiankyō, the Imperial Palace, and finally the Dairi (Imperial Palace Residences). Like all male residents of the Palace an inveterate *nozoki*, I tried to get a peek inside the buildings reserved for the Emperor's consorts, but entry to those is apparently forbidden by the Heian equivalent of the Imperial Household Agency). And in reference mode, one has immediate access not only to maps, but also to topics keyed to any given point in the game, with access as well to any other topic by alphabetical or topical search (illustrated when possible with appropriate artworks whose sources are identified). Also accessible in this mode are a chronological timeline and a substantial bibliography indicating which works were used in constructing the game.

Cosmology of Kyoto is an absorbing and informational game. It is not, however, without a few minor drawbacks. On the setup I used (see above), for example, the Japanese fonts failed to load properly even with extensions disabled (System 7.5 notoriously conflicts with several extension programs, notably Ram Doublor and who knows what else; players using System 7.5 may have to restart with the shift key depressed to disable extensions). Also, with the dual-speed external CD-ROM I used, too much time was spent waiting for the next step to load; triple- or quad-speed may make a considerable difference. More problematically for the

interactively-challenged duffer, most wrong moves result in one's having to wander the same hells over and over; once you fall into them, you are forced to passively experience repetitious and boring scenes for a full five minutes before you are finally reborn and able to get on with your karma. This may indeed represent the closest the living can come to knowing hell in modern times, but once that point is granted, it is after all a bit of a bore.

The Japanese mode differs from the English in that all reference text is in Japanese and the subtitles for speech (which can be toggled on or off) are in Japanese instead of English. Since the characters populating the game speak a lively but rather fantastical Heian *jidaigekigo*, it may be difficult without subtitles to figure out exactly what is being said, whether by the highest ranking court lady's version of *asobasekotoba* or by the lowest gutter-rat's version of whatever nasty argot Heian gutter-rats are imagined to have spoken in (lots of these here -- see Kurosawa's film *Rashômon* for examples of similar speech). Still, in Japanese mode the *nesshin* student of intermediate to advanced accomplishments can learn a lot of language of the sort used in TV historical dramas, not to mention a lot of vocabulary and kanji, and can learn as well quite a bit about every aspect of Heian culture, whether in English or in Japanese. This is the first attempt I have seen to provide one with an experience of a Heian life built upon a complex and unsystematic web of religion, superstition, philosophy, metaphysics, geomancy, folklore and narrative, and certainly represents the sort of phenomenological experience rarely available in the usual university course on premodern Japanese history. As one instructional sheet states, "This game is not based on the the sort of history which accords perfectly with a progressive, chronological flow of time. It seeks instead to convey the reality of the Heian period through a totality of many different images, arranged in sequences and combinations which unfold like dreams." And, amazingly, that is exactly the experience one gets. The interesting musical effects only add to that experience.

This game has real breadth and depth, and, in spite of the occasional problem, is long on the educational side of edutainment, which cannot be said for much of this sort of software. Highly recommended.