

Document E

New Heian Capital

The excerpt below is from a book by a historian about Medieval Japan. The historian, Gregory Smits, currently works at Penn State University and has published many articles about the history of East Asia.

Emperor Kanmu decided to move the capital in 784, and his court packed up and left the city of Nara. Ten years later, in 794, Kanmu finally found the desired location for his new court: the city of Heinakyō (meaning "Capital of Peace and Tranquility"), later called Kyōto (meaning "the Capital"). Kyōto would remain Japan's **civil** capital until 1868.

Why did Kanmu make this expensive and troublesome move? There was nothing wrong with the physical environment or **facilities** in the old capital. Most historians agree that Kanmu moved his capital to get away from the Buddhist **establishment** of Nara, which was becoming so powerful that it threatened the **authority** of the civil government. Kanmu, a strong-willed **sovereign**, wanted to rule free from the **interference** of Buddhist temples or anyone else. He succeeded in **restoring** his power and authority in the short run, but it would not be long before the powerful **aristocratic families** of the capital began to **vie** with the Heian emperors for power and influence. **Moreover**, new Buddhist organizations took root in the new capital and later **wielded** economic, political, and even military power.

Vocabulary

- **civil**—political (not religious)
- **facilities**—buildings
- **establishment**—organization; formal group
- **authority**—power
- **sovereign**—ruler
- **interference**—meddling; intrusion
- **restoring**—regaining; getting back
- **aristocratic families**—nobility; upper class
- **vie**—compete; fight
- **Moreover**—also
- **wielded**—used

Source: Smits, G.J. "Topics in Medieval Japanese History," from online East Asian History Textbook. Penn State University. Retrieved March 17, 2011 from http://www.east-asian-history.net/textbooks/480/ch5_main.htm

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The excerpt below is from a book by a historian about Medieval Japan. The historian, Gregory Smits, currently works at Penn State University and has published many articles about the history of East Asia.

Emperor Kanmu moved the capital of Japan from Nara to Heiankyō in 784. Later, the capital was renamed Kyōto. Kyōto was Japan's civil (political) capital until 1868.

Why did Kanmu make this expensive and difficult move?

There was nothing wrong with the city of Nara. The location was good and there were many conveniences and services available there. Most historians agree that Kanmu moved the capital to get away from the Buddhist group in Nara. The Buddhists were becoming very powerful. This threatened the power of the civil government. Kanmu, was strong-willed ruler. He didn't want the Buddhists to interfere with his government. He regained his power when he moved but that did not last for long.

The powerful families of the nobility (upper class) began to compete with the Heian emperors for power and influence. Also, new Buddhist groups were formed in the new capital. Over time, these groups gained economic, political, and even military power.

Source: Excerpted and significantly modified from Smits, G.J. "Topics in Medieval Japanese History," from online East Asian History Textbook. Penn State University. Retrieved March 17, 2011 from http://www.east-asian-history.net/textbooks/480/ch5_main.htm