



# Renaissance in Japan: A Cultural Survey of the Seventeenth Century

*Kenneth P. Kirkwood*

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**Renaissance in Japan: A Cultural Survey of the Seventeenth Century** Kenneth P. Kirkwood  
*Renaissance in Japan* is a superb survey of Japan's literary giants—forerunners of today's modern Japanese writers.

Called the "Kyoto epoch," the age in which these writers lived was the period in which Japanese cultural development made many of its greatest advances. In these years of the early Tokugawa era, the old aristocratic culture was confronted with the new plebeian awakening, giving rise to dynamic social developments, in effect a peaceful revolution.

The humanistic movement that emerged during this period is epitomized in and popular arts and letters by such famous figures as Basho, the pilgrim poet; Saikaku, novelist of the gilded age, and Chikamatsu, Japan's greatest playwright.

In that stirring period Basho wrote such undying poetry as: "The lark sings through the long spring day, but never enough for its heart's content." Saikaku noted that "love is darkness, but in the land of love the darkest night is bright as noon." Chikamatsu wrote wisely that "art is something which lies in the slender margin between the real and the unreal."

In Japan it was the beginning of the end of the feudal Dark Ages—even though the political ramifications would not be manifest until the advent of the Meiji Restoration.

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