During the Heian period, the emperor’s role became almost completely ceremonial. His primary function was to perform the many ceremonies that made up the religious festivals and celebrations. These services became more and more ornate as people rigorously followed increasingly complex customs. An account of a monastery dedication attended by the emperor Ichijo described the ostentatious nature of this court life: “the monarch’s arrival was heralded by a crescendo of drums, strings and reeds. Jeweled nets were suspended from branches of the plants fringing the pond. Boats, adorned with gems, sat in the shade of trees, and peacocks strutted on an island in the middle. Gold and silver were strewn all across the monastery floor.”

Heian nobles at the Kyoto court led a life focused on beauty and manners, guided by an intense courtly code called *miyabi*. Miyabi stressed appearance, restraint, and decorum. It was thought terribly rude to laugh with your mouth open. While eating, court nobles never touched food with their hands and avoided ever letting another diner see their mouths. Sometimes letters would be returned unread if the paper had been folded improperly or if the handwriting was considered unrefined. Men made their own perfume and the nobles were known by their individual scents. Rules of clothing were so closely followed that women would be shamed and ostracized if one of the 12 layers of thin silk gowns she wore had a sleeve 1 inch longer than the customary length. Combining colors was essential to apparel, so much so that one noble remarked of a fellow courtesan that her outfit of 12 multi-colored robes was “really not very bad - only one purple was a bit pale”.

Attention to appearance in the *miyabi* was most noticeable in the ideal of beauty and personal appearance of the court nobles. The perfect face was round and white with a tiny mouth. Both sexes applied liberal amounts of white powder to their faces. Women used lipstick in an attempt to make their mouths look smaller, and applied red rouge to their cheeks. All women and many men blackened their teeth with an iron substance. Women shaved their eyebrows and painted two small black artificial eyebrows high on their foreheads. Men wore pointy beards on the tips of their chins, and sometimes mustaches. Women grew their hair as long as possible, with the ideal being to have locks that were longer than a person was tall. People were advised to sleep only at night so that no one would see them asleep because they were believed to be uglier when lying down.

Nobles spent their days at the court leisurely pursuing pastimes influenced by Chinese culture. Memorization of Chinese poetry and the ability to compose rhymed couplets was essential to their court life. Go, a Chinese board game played with white and black tiles, was popular. Men played a game called footbag in which players used their feet in an attempt to keep a small ball from touching the ground on a special court. Landscape painting was popular. Nobles attended the many Shinto ceremonies, festivals and parties presided over by the emperor.