

History of Daisenji Temple

Mt. Daisen has been a site of Shinto worship since the area was first settled, and by the Yayoi period (300 BCE–300 CE), the mountain was revered as the dwelling place of a powerful deity.

About two centuries after Buddhism was introduced to Japan from Korea in 552, Daisenji became a center of Shugendō, a Buddhist sect that incorporates aspects of Shinto mountain worship and Taoism with mountain asceticism. The practice of Shugendō continued during the Heian period (794–1185), when the Tendai sect assumed control of the complex and, in 865, designated it Kakubanzan Daisenji Temple. The mountain's official deity became Dai Chimyō Gongen, a manifestation of the Buddhist deity Jizō Bosatsu, who protects travelers and children.

At the start of the Edo period (1603–1867), Daisenji drew a constant stream of visitors and also hosted one of the country's largest livestock markets, attracting vendors from as far away as the remote Oki Islands. With the establishment of the Meiji government in 1868, a decree was issued calling for the separation of Buddhist and Shinto religious practices. This proved devastating to many syncretic institutions, including Daisenji. In 1875 the temple name was abolished, and most of its structures were abandoned. Its main worship hall became the new location of Ōkamiyama Shrine, previously located in the city of Yonago.

The separation decree was later withdrawn, and in 1903 the temple's name was restored, but only 10 of its former 42 subtemples remained. With Daisenji's revenues and worshippers scattered, maintaining the temples proved difficult. Only a handful of buildings remain today.