

Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine

The Hiyoshi Taisha shrine complex contains forty individual shrines in total—seven major shrines and thirty-three lesser shrines. The first record of religious practice in the area is found in the eighth-century chronicle *Kojiki*, which notes that the deity Ōyamakui no kami dwelled in a rock near the summit of Mt. Hachiōji, a foothill along the eastern side of Mt. Hiei. Over time, many more deities came to be enshrined in what was once the largest shrine complex in Japan.

Syncretism

For centuries, religious practice on Mt. Hiei was a syncretic fusion of Buddhism and Shinto. Hiyoshi Taisha has a long association with Enryakuji Temple, which was established in 788 and is the head temple of Tendai Buddhism. The shrines of Hiyoshi Taisha gradually became part of the Enryakuji religious complex and remained so until 1868.

Enryakuji was one of the largest and most influential Buddhist institutions in Japan until 1571, when the warlord Oda Nobunaga (1534–1582) had the entire temple complex burned to the ground, including the shrines of Hiyoshi Taisha. Nobunaga's successor Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) supported the rebuilding of the seven major shrines, and all were completed by 1601.

Sannō Ichijitsu Shinto

The buildings of Hiyoshi Taisha were not the only things that had to be reconstructed after the fire. All the shrine records were lost, and only one priest survived who still remembered the traditional rites.

After the fire, the shrine became closely associated with *Sannō ichijitsu* Shinto practices, which were created by the influential monk Tenkai (1536–1643). Tenkai oversaw the rebuilding of Enryakuji after the temple was destroyed in 1571 and used *Sannō ichijitsu* as the foundation for the burial and deification rites of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first shogun of the Edo period (1603–1867). The Tōshōgū Shrine at Hiyoshi Taisha was the prototype for the magnificent Tōshōgū Shrine in Nikkō where Ieyasu is enshrined.

Today, Hiyoshi Taisha is the head of nearly 4,000 shrines throughout Japan.

Hiyoshi Taisha Today

Many features of present-day Hiyoshi Taisha—from its physical placement and hierarchy of major deities to its rites, including the Sannō Festival—were reconfigured beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century. An 1868 government edict ordered the separation of Shinto and Buddhism, leading to the removal of Buddhist objects from shrines throughout the country. At Hiyoshi Taisha, more than 1,000 items, including statues of Buddhist deities, bells, and sutra scrolls, were destroyed on April 1, 1868.

The policy of Shinto-Buddhist separation also changed the hierarchy of the deities at Hiyoshi Taisha. During the centuries of combined Buddhist and Shinto worship, Shinto

deities were believed to be manifestations of Buddhist deities. The Buddhist aspect often determined the placement and hierarchies of deities. After the separation edict was issued, four of the seven primary deities at Hiyoshi Taisha were moved to reflect a new hierarchy of deities independent of their previous Buddhist counterparts. This reorganization of deities also resulted in a reimagining of the Sannō Festival.