



Syncretism and Separation of Japanese Religious Architecture, a Case study of *Onozaki Kusushi Shrine* After the 1868 Shintoism-Buddhism Separation Order

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Abstract. There are two main religions in Japan - Shinto and Buddhism - and the worship architecture of the former are called shrines, while the latter are called temples, differing both in their objects of worship and architectural styles. However, during the *Tokugawa shogunate*, which lasted two and a half centuries, Buddhism and Shintoism coexisted peacefully, and villagers far from the political and religious centres built a single building to worship both objects of worship. This is known as Shinto-Buddhism syncretism, but after the *Meiji* Restoration, the imperial government rejected this practice by issuing a decree separating Shinto and Buddhism. As Shinto was placed under the aegis of the state, Buddhist statues and Buddhist ritual objects were removed from syncretic religious architecture, which became pure shrines. This article clarifies how the two objects of worship were enshrined in a single building during the Shinto/Buddhist syncretism period, and how these buildings were converted into shrines after the Shinto/Buddhist Separation Order. As a case study, the *Kusushi Shrine* in *Onozaki, Ishinomaki*, built in 1862, is taken up.

Keywords: Shinto Shrine, Buddhist Temple, Conversion, Japan.

1 Introduction

Japan has two major religions, Shintoism and Buddhism, which naturally differ in their beliefs and religious architecture. Buddhism was introduced from China and Korea around the 7th century and was accepted by the Imperial Court, under whose patronage temples were built throughout Japan. Woodworking techniques developed during this construction process and had a major influence on Japanese architecture. Shinto, on the other hand, was derived from a kind of animism and did not have shrines for nature worship, but was inspired by Buddhist architecture, and gradually shrines were built to enshrine the sacred body [1]. Japanese people have believed in both religions, worshipping Shinto deities at shrines and Buddhist statues at temples [2].

The *Tokugawa shogunate* lasted for two and a half centuries from the early 17th century, during which time the two religions coexisted peacefully and some moved towards syncretism. Particularly in rural areas far from political and religious centres, a single

shrine was sometimes built in which the objects of worship of both religions were enshrined. The *Shogunate* was not concerned about such Shinto and Buddhist syncretism [3]. However, in 1868, when the Emperor's administration replaced the *Shogunate*, the new government issued a decree separating Shintoism and Buddhism, requiring that objects of worship of Shintoism and Buddhism were not placed in the same building. In the momentum of the abolition of Buddhism, articles related to Buddhism were removed from Shinto and Buddhist shrines.

It is known from the literature that before the *Meiji* Restoration, two objects of worship were enshrined in one shrine as a result of Shintoism-Buddhism syncretism, but it is difficult to know exactly how they were enshrined together and how they were converted into a specific religious building at present. In the case of conversion to one or the other, records and traces of Shinto/Buddhist syncretism were basically erased. In this context, the *Kusushi* Shrine in *Onozaki*, *Ishinomaki* City, seems to retain strong traces of the Shinto/Buddhist syncretism.

2 Research Method

The author has been deeply involved in the restoration of historical buildings damaged by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami [4] and has discovered eight *Kusushi* shrines 久須師 or 久須志 along the *Sanriku* coast of Miyagi Prefecture. According to the introduction to the *Miyagi* Prefectural Shinto Shrines Authority, all of these shrines were founded in the Edo period and are currently dedicated to the Shinto deity *Sukuna-Hikono-no-mikoto* 少彦名命, but it is known that the Buddhist deity *Yakushi Nyorai* 薬師如来 was also worshipped together and was called *Yakushi-do* 薬師堂. It is said that the Meiji Government's decree separating Buddhism from Shintoism and Shintoism caused *Yakushi* 薬師 to be read as *Kusushi* in the Japanese reading of a Chinese character, and the kanji *Kusushi* was applied to the name.

The area has been hit by several earthquakes and tsunamis over the past centuries, with many historic buildings collapsing and being rebuilt each time. However, the *Kusushi* Shrine in *Onozaki*, *Ishinomaki* City, was protected from natural disasters because it was separated from the open sea by a hillside, and although there have been some repairs and alterations, it appears to retain the appearance it had when it was built in the Shinto/Buddhist syncretism (Fig. 1). It may be possible to clarify how the shrine was used during the Shinto/Buddhist syncretism period and how the Shinto/Buddhist syncretism shrine was converted to a Shinto shrine by the Shinto/Buddhist Separation Order.

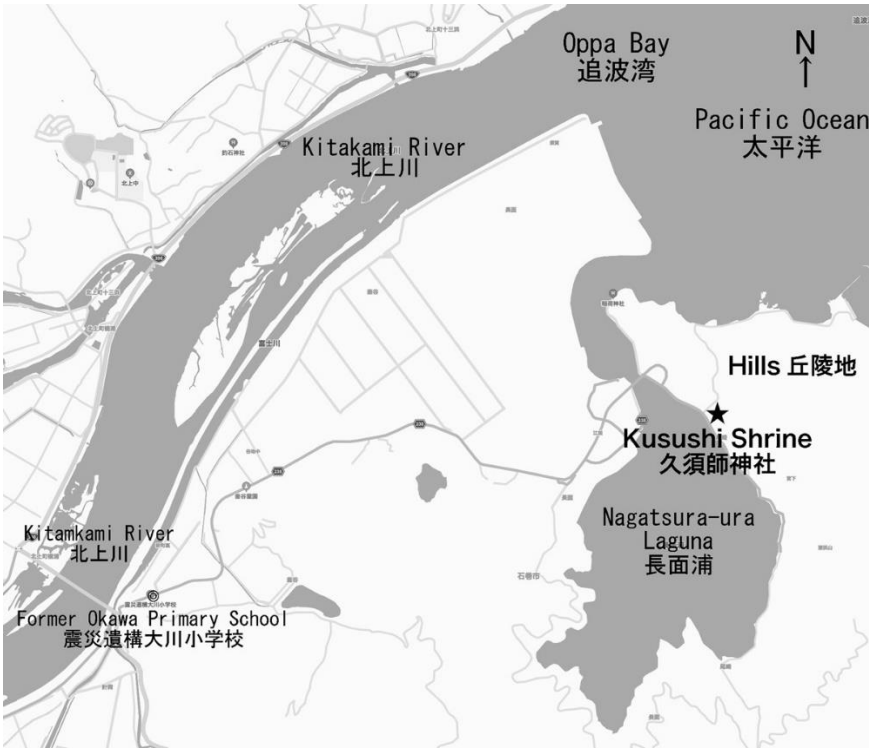


Fig.1. Location of Onozaki Kusushi Shrine, Ishinomaki City, Miyagi Prefecture. (source: Author)

3 Research Method Onozaki Kusushi Shrine

3.1 Foundation of Onozaki Kusushi Shrine

At the beginning of the 17th century, when the Tokugawa Shogunate established its authority throughout the country, villagers in coastal areas began to actively engage in shipping. Originally, the *Sanriku* coast was a treasure trove of marine products, so villagers sent agricultural and marine products to major cities such as Sendai and Edo on small transport ships. Once a stable community was formed, they decided to erect a shrine to pray for the safety of their lives and work. According to the records of the Miyagi Prefectural Shinto Shrine Office, the *Oharai Isomae* Shrine on the route to Edo was widely believed to have spiritual power, and it is said that *Shohikono-no-mikoto* and *Yakushi Nyorai*, who were enshrined there, were invited to be worshipped at the shrine.

In this way, the Shinto gods and Buddha were invoked one after another in the settlements in this area, and today, the existence of eight shrines is confirmed. In the village of *Onozaki* in *Nagatsura-ura*, a hall was built in 1670 and was subsequently rebuilt several times due to deterioration and natural disasters, and the current one is thought to have been built at the end of the Edo period. Other halls have likewise been

rebuilt several times, especially in the Showa period when they were destroyed and rebuilt by tsunamis and major earthquakes, giving them a new appearance. The axial woodworking and carving techniques of the Onozaki *Kusushi* Shrine are thought to date from the end of the Edo period, making it the oldest surviving *Kusushi* shrine (Fig. 2).



Fig.2. West-South View (source: Author)

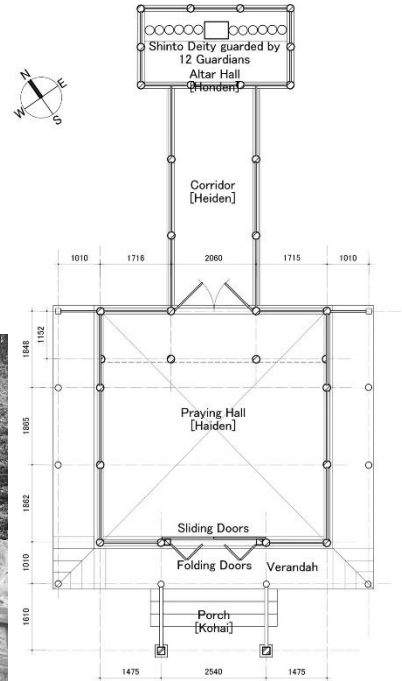


Fig.3. Plan of present Onozaki *Kusushi* Shrine (source: Author)

3..2 Present Shrine

The present-day *Kusushi* Shrine consists of three buildings: *Haiden* (praying hall), *Heiden* (connecting hall), and *Honden* (deity hall). The *Haiden* enshrines the principal deity *Sukunahikona-no-mikoto* and the Twelve Guardians, and together with the *Heiden*, it was built in the late *Meiji* period or later using machine-sawn timber. Only the *Haiden* uses timber processed with a hatchet, and is thought to have been built before the early *Meiji* period (Fig. 3). The *Haiden* has a 3 *ken* (span) wide by 3 *ken* (3 span) deep structure, with a protico and a surrounding verandah. The *Koryo* (carved wide beam), *Ebi-Koryo* (curved beam), *Tezasa* (carved rafter lifter) and *Kibana* (carved beam projection) decorate the eaves, and *Kumimono* (bracket) and *Ohgi-taruki* (radiating rafter) support the eaves, while the interior ceiling has a coffered ceiling, resembling a small Buddhist temple.

The roof is in the shape of *Irimoya* (hip and gabled roof) with a natural slate roofing, but as natural slate has not been produced in the area since the mid-*Meiji* period, it is thought that the roof shape and roofing material were different when the temple was first

built. The *Kannon-dō* of the *Tenyuji* temple (designated a cultural property by *Ishinomaki* City) in the neighbouring village was built in 1784 and has *Hogyo* (hipped roof), which is now covered with copper shingles, but it is known that it was originally thatched and then thatched with natural slate before taking its present form [5] (Fig. 4).

The *Kannon-dō* of the *Tenyuji* temple and the *Haiden* of the *Kusushi Shrine* have the same scale and features, and were probably widely erected in the region during the *Edo* period, both as shrines and temples. If so, it is highly likely that the roof form of the *Kusushi Shrine* was originally a thatched hipped roof form.



Fig.4. *Kannon-dō* of *Tenyuji* temple, restored in 2016 (source: Author)



Fig.5. Oldest *Munafuda*, dating back to 1862 (source: Author)

3.3. *Haiden* of *Kusushi* shrine

The administrator does not possess any documents relating to the construction of this praying hall, but several *Munafudas* (building dedication board) remain, from which the exact year of construction may be determined. The oldest of these *Munafudas* reads: 'Dedication to *Dewa* Three Temple-Shrines, the 2nd year of the *Bunkyo*, carpenter *Yohji*' (Fig. 5), which suggests that the temple-shrine was built in 1862 to enshrine *Sukunahikona-no-mikoto* and *Yakushi Nyorai*, which had been invoked from the three temple-shrines of *Dewa*. In addition to the sacred objects of the *Oarai Isomae Shrine*, the spiritual power of the *Dewa* Three temple-shrines was expected to be newly enshrined in the temple-shrine.

The next oldest *Munafuda* states that the deity hall (deity hall) was built in 1878 (11th year of the *Meiji* period), with the inscription 'Dedication to the New Palace (deity hall) of *Kusushi Shrine*, *Onozaki*, the 11th years of the *Meiji* period, April 8, carpenter *Sato Shokichi*'. This means that a new deity hall was built in addition to the

existing praying hall, and it is understood that due to the Shintoism-Buddhism Separation Order, the existing hall built in 1862 was converted into a praying hall, while a new deity hall was built behind it to house the Shinto sacred object. The next one is marked 'Donation for building of new stone wall, *Kusushi Shrine*, April 8 in the 12th year of the *Meiji* period (1879)'. The next *Munafuda*, states 'Slate tile roofing, *Kusushi Shrine*, April 8, 1896', indicates that the deity hall and the praying hall were covered with natural slate roofing in 1896.

4 Conversion into Pure Shrine

The present praying hall of the Onozaki Kusushi Shrine was rebuilt in 1862 as Hondo (the main hall) to enshrine the sacred deities (Sukunahikona-no-mikoto, Yakushi Nyorai and others) that had been invited from the Dewa-Sanzan. As the sacred objects was not placed directly on the floor, an altar was built at the back of the main hall, with the Shinto deity and Yakushi Nyorai in the centre and the 12 Shinsho (twelve divine generals) on either side (Fig. 6). The plan shows a row of pillars 1,152 mm from the back wall, with what appears to be a mortise and tenon for a stile and rail on the side. In accordance with the Meiji Government's Shinto and Buddhism Separation Order, in 1878 all the sacred objects were removed from the main hall, and only the Shinto deity and the Twelve Divine Generals were moved to a newly built deity hall at the rear of the building. In other words, when Shinto and Buddhist syncretic shrines were converted into shrines by the Separation Order, not only were Buddhist objects removed from them, but there was also a clear separation between the place of praying and the place of the sacred object (Fig. 7).

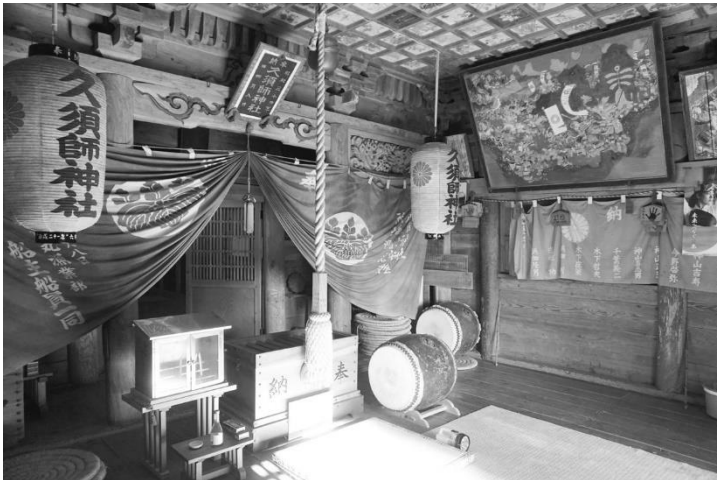


Fig.6. Present praying hall, former main hall. A space behind the curtain was once an altar for Shinto deity and *Yahukushi-Nyorai* Statue and his 12 Guardians. (source: Author)

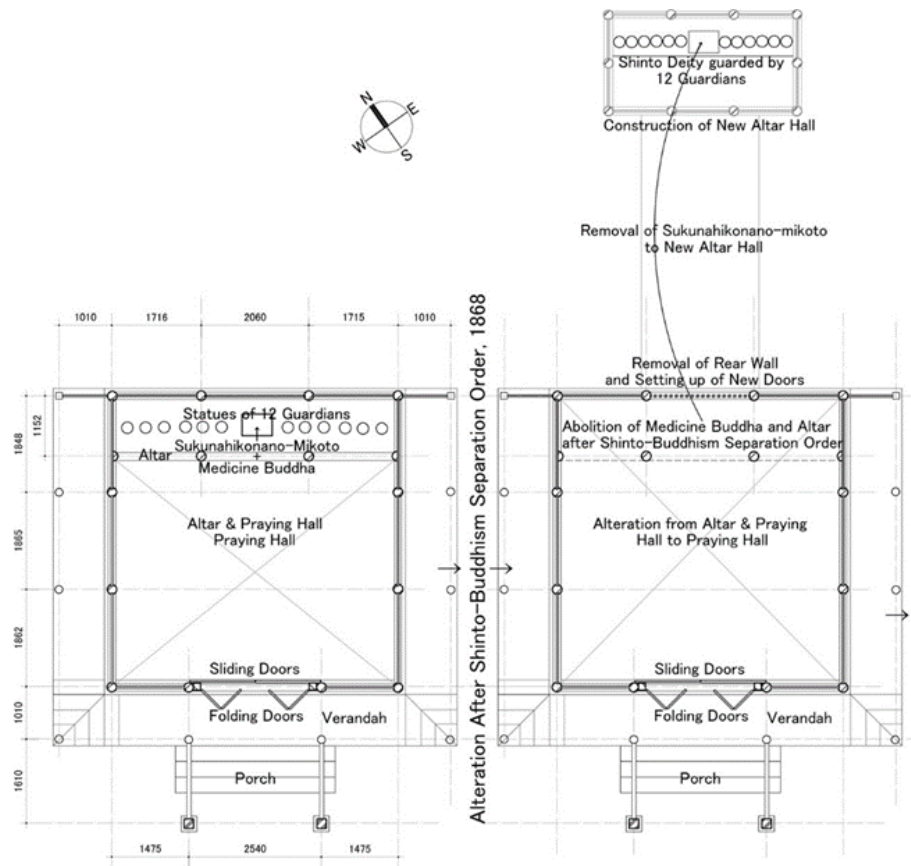


Fig.7. Plan of Kusushi Shrine before/after the Separation Order. (source: Author)

Following the separation of the praying and deity halls, the thatched hipped roof was converted to an half hipped gable roof with natural slate in 1891. How exactly were these alterations carried out?

Removal of the Altar. As mentioned above, the pillar at the back of the praying hall and the pillar in front of it have mortise holes at the same height, which are no doubt traces of a built-in altar (Fig. 8). Traces were also found of the removal of a board wall at the back of the praying hall when the connecting hall was built. In other words, in 1862, during the period of the syncretisation of Shintoism and Buddhism, this hall was built as a one-room building with an altar in the back, on which the deities of the deity and Buddha were displayed.

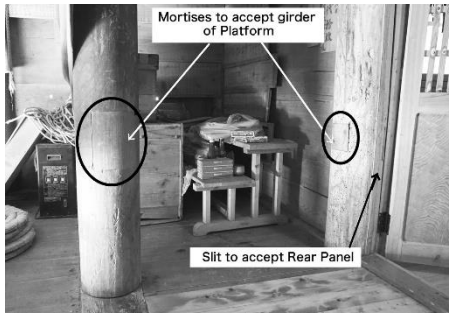


Fig.8. Traces of mortise and slot of rear panels.

(source: Author)

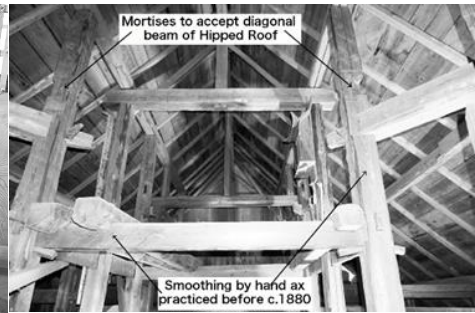


Fig.9. Traces of mortises of diagonal girders.

(source: Author)

Carvings, decorations, frames, etc. The altar and all of the deities and Buddhas enshrined on it were removed from the praying hall of (former main hall), but the carvings and decorations in the interior were left intact. Some new items were added to the shrine, and after it became *Kusushi Shrine*, dedicated Japanese arithmetic frames were offered by enthusiastic mathematicians, as the main deity, *Sukunahikona-no-mikoto*, is also a god of knowledge. One dedicated in 1887 is still in existence.

5 Conclusions

In the villages of the southern Sanriku area under the Tokugawa Shogunate, people built small buildings to enshrine both *Sukunahikona-no-mikoto* and *Yakushi Nyorai* for relief from illness and misfortune, in a 3 ken x 3 ken square flat structure with a hipped roof, which was based on the Buddhist *Kannon Hall* and *Yakushi Hall*. An altars was built at the back of the hall, in the centre of which was the sacred deity and *Yakushi Nyorai*, with the 12 guardians on either side. It was called *Yakushido* because of the prominence of the *Yakushi Nyorai*.

After the Meiji Restoration, the Shinto/Buddhist Separation Order eliminated all Buddhist-related objects and the hall became *Kusushi Shrine*. The altar was removed and the sacred objects moved to the deity hall at the back of the shrine in search of a more sacred place. The hipped roof was considered unsuitable for shrine architecture and was converted to an half hipped-gable roof style. Through the analysis of the history of the construction of *Onozaki Kusushi Shrine*, it was possible to clarify how the Shinto/Buddhist syncretism was practised within a single shrine and what changes were made after the Shinto/Buddhist Separation Order.

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