

# Hawaii's Japanese Architecture



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Left photo

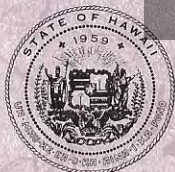
Early Zen Buddhist temples were protected from wind and cold with a curtain draped across the openings. Here, at the Maui Jinsha Mission, curtain tassels are tied in similar fashion as the *shimenawa* straw rope ends.

Upper right photo

The modular partition or *shoji* originates in early Japanese Buddhist and residential architecture. *Shoji* application in Hawaii has generally departed from examples in Japan. Contemporary translucent material in the Kōloa Hongwanji's *shoji* has been substituted for paper screens used in traditional Japan.

Lower right photo

*Shimenawa* is a straw rope which is hung at a Shinto shrine and used during ceremonies to prevent "impurity" from entering an area. This rope is traditionally twisted counterclockwise in regular intervals. The ends of the straw rope are pulled out and sacred paper called *shide* is tied in between.



The Honorable John Wai'ēe  
Governor of Hawai'i

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# Architecture of the Japanese in Hawaii

Religious buildings not only embody a spiritual or holy function, but frequently transcend a specific faith to stand as a tangible image for a particular community as a whole. Such has been the case with the religious buildings constructed by Hawai'i's Japanese community in the early twentieth century.

Serving as religious, social and cultural centers for an immigrant population assimilating itself into the larger cosmopolitan culture of Hawai'i, many Japanese temples and shrines combined the seemingly "pure" architectural motifs of the old country with materials and construction methods prevalent in Hawai'i to create new, unique, local architectural forms.

Far from their native country, immigrants not only clung to memories of their homeland, but also accepted Hawai'i's tropical island environment fostering a new hybrid building style. Buddhist details and ornaments, for example, were placed onto local plantation structures creating a design not to be found elsewhere in the world. Such buildings have come to represent the immigrant's transition from old Japan into Hawai'i's way of life.

Hongwanji Temple in Honolulu, reflected derivations from Indian Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim architecture. In almost all cases, these Hawai'i buildings no longer adhere to the strict stylized versions of the original Asian design.

## Shinto Architecture

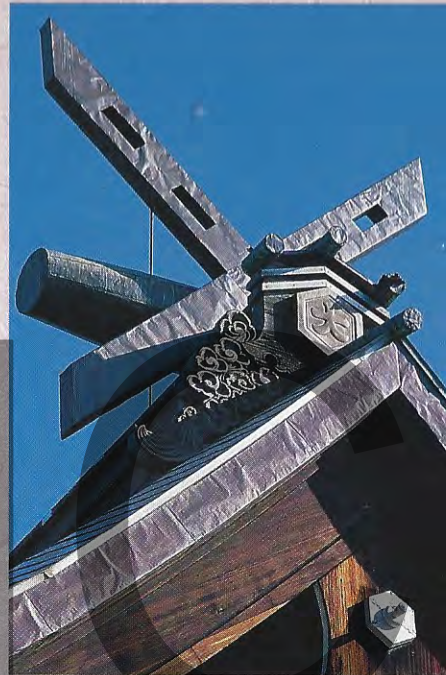
Shinto, or the "Way of the Gods," is defined as the indigenous faith of Japan which was present before Buddhism arrived from China. Unlike Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, Shintoism does not have a founder, but instead merely suggests a "way."

The shrine is the manifestation of the people's faith in *kami*, a particular spirit or divine sense. These shrines provide a dwelling place for one or more *kami*, and are not constructed to propagate the faith or teach doctrine. A good indication of a Shinto shrine is the *torii*, or symbolic entrance into the spiritual world.

The early Shinto shrines are simple and constructed of wood. They are elevated above the ground, built of natural materials and may have a few ornate details. Typical features include *chigi*, end beams which cross and extend toward the heavens, and *katsuogi*, short logs of finished wood tapered at each end.

## Buddhist Architecture

Most of the religious Japanese buildings in Hawai'i represent various Buddhist sects such as Hongwanji, Jodo, Shingon and Zen. The architectural derivation of these



*Chigi and katsuogi, Izumo Taisha Shrine.*



Elbow brackets supporting carved beams,  
Maui Jinsha Mission.

Whether faithful to the architecture of Japan or adaptive responses to a new environment and commitment to Hawai'i, these buildings maintained some Japanese sensibilities. Today, such shrines and temples remain as quiet reminders of the American immigration experience. In a national context, these buildings reflect our Asian architectural heritage in a dominant Western-based society.

## Japanese Architectural Themes

The buildings in this calendar reflect architecture based on three Asian influences: Shinto, Buddhist and non-Japanese derivatives. Although most early twentieth century Shinto shrines and Buddhist buildings in Hawai'i were inspired by Japanese architectural forms, other buildings, starting with the Honpa

Cover:

Nechung Drayang Ling, Wood Valley, Hawai'i. Originally built in 1926 by the Japanese immigrants of Pāhala, today this temple serves as a non-sectarian retreat in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The vibrant color scheme, reflective of Tibetan architecture, has been applied to the original Mission's Japanese form.

Hawai'i temples, however, is as varied as Hawai'i's population. Buddhist architecture was introduced to Japan from China and Korea. As the religion spread throughout Japan, these buildings began to develop regional characteristics.

The earliest prototype for Buddhist buildings in Japan is the Horyuji complex built in ca. 600 A.D. Introduced from China, these buildings typically consist of the *irimoya*, or hip and gable roof system, intricate bracketing to support the roof and construction on an elevated, platform base. As Japan became more confident, new variations of Buddhist architecture evolved, reflecting the numerous Japanese Buddhist sects, and also incorporating the original Shinto love of nature and simplicity.

## Conclusion

Hawai'i's Japanese temples and shrines may appear as insignificant material relics of a distant ethnic culture. To many people it is difficult to embrace such buildings in an environment which often reduces Asian architectural themes as exotic, foreign cliches or stereotypes. Our historical Japanese buildings, however, are precious and gentle reminders of Hawai'i's complex and diverse past. These buildings inform us about a process which continues to impact Hawai'i as a place and home.



Onion domed post, Hamakua Jodo Mission.



Torii, Maalaea Jinsha Mission.

Izumo Taisha, Honolulu, O'ahu. Built in 1923, this mission replicates the early Shinto shrine of Taisha Machi, in Chimane Ken, Japan. It includes such traditional elements of the shrine as the *torii*, or gateway, into the Shinto spiritual realm, a wash area for symbolic "purification," and rooftop *chigi* and *katsuogi*.



1  
Jan

Jinsha Mission, Mā'alaea, Maui. Shinto architecture in the rural sections of Hawai'i often integrated elements of traditional Japanese architecture with Hawai'i's plantation building forms. Elements such as the *karahafu* roofed entry and the roof top *chigi* and *katsuogi* are simply applied to this 1914, green and white, single-wall plantation building to identify it as a Shinto fishing shrine.



2  
Feb

Puna Hongwanji Temple, Kea'au, Hawai'i. References to Indian, Byzantine and Renaissance revival styles in this 1937 building indicate further departures in Hawai'i's Japanese Buddhist temples from the strict architectural formulas of Japan. Such forms suggest more eclectic and distant approaches to designing Buddhist temples.



3  
Mar

Hana Hongwanji Temple, Hana, Maui. The integration of the garden and the Buddhist form was evident in Japan during the Heian Period (784–1184 A.D.) when the Jodo or Pure Land sect was popularized in Japan. Here, in the secluded village of Hana, the 1939 Hongwanji temple is in harmony with a more Hawaiian, tropical setting.

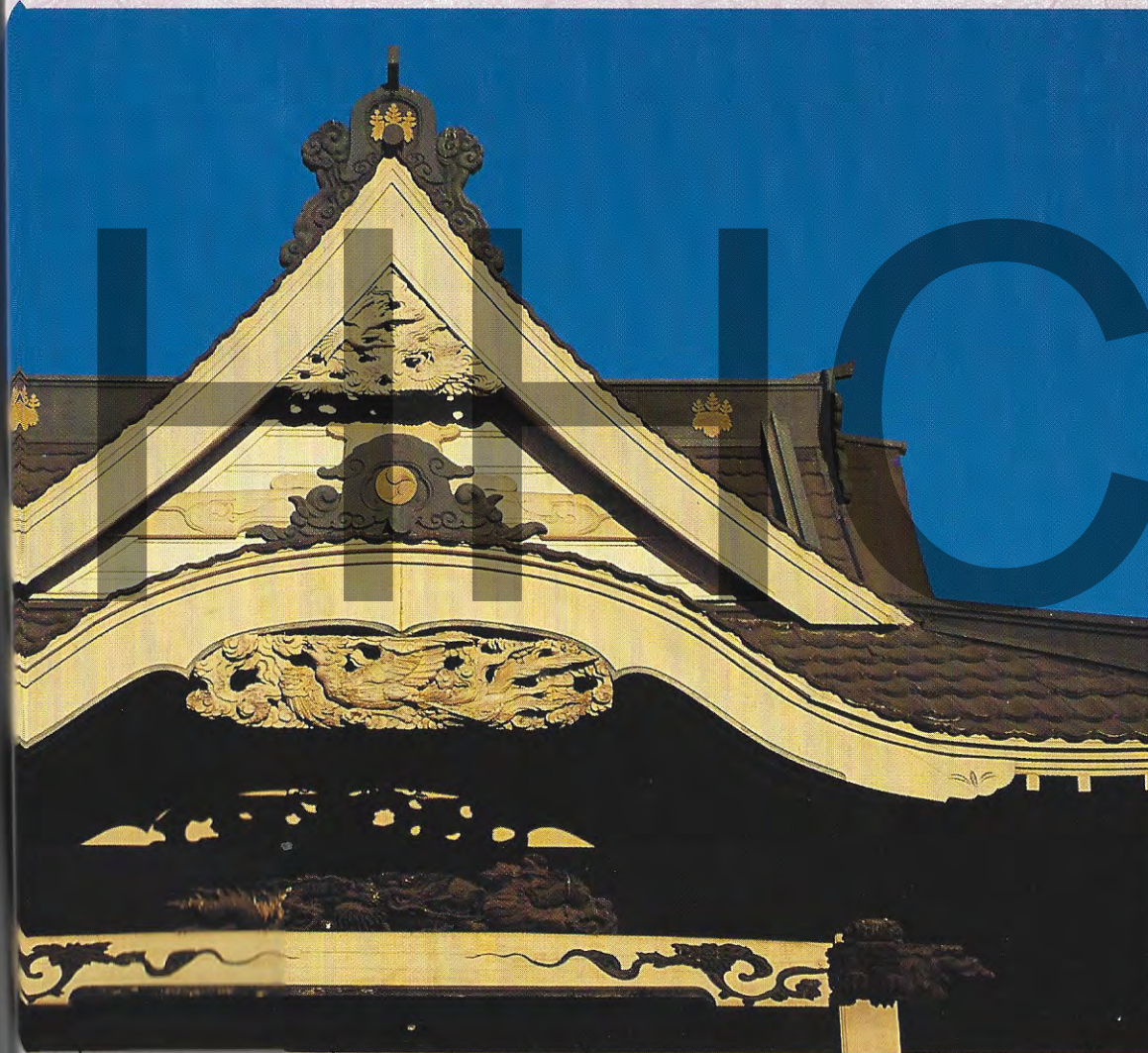


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5  
May

Mantokuji Soto Zen Mission, Pā'ia, Maui. The Japanese tended to prefer the *irimoya* (hipped and gable) roof form for many Buddhist temples. These roofs were also similar to earlier Shinto shrine and *kura* (farmhouse) forms. Ornaments between the roof beams and along the ridge of this 1921 building have been added to create a regional reference to Japan.



6  
Jun

Honpa Hongwanji Temple, Honolulu, O'ahu. Bon dances, joyous celebrations in honor of the dead, are performed in late summer at various Buddhist temples. Dancers circle the *yagura* (musicians' tower) in front of the 1918 Honpa Hongwanji Temple, which, like Bon festival, is rooted, at least in an architectural sense, in mystical Indian origins.



7  
Jul

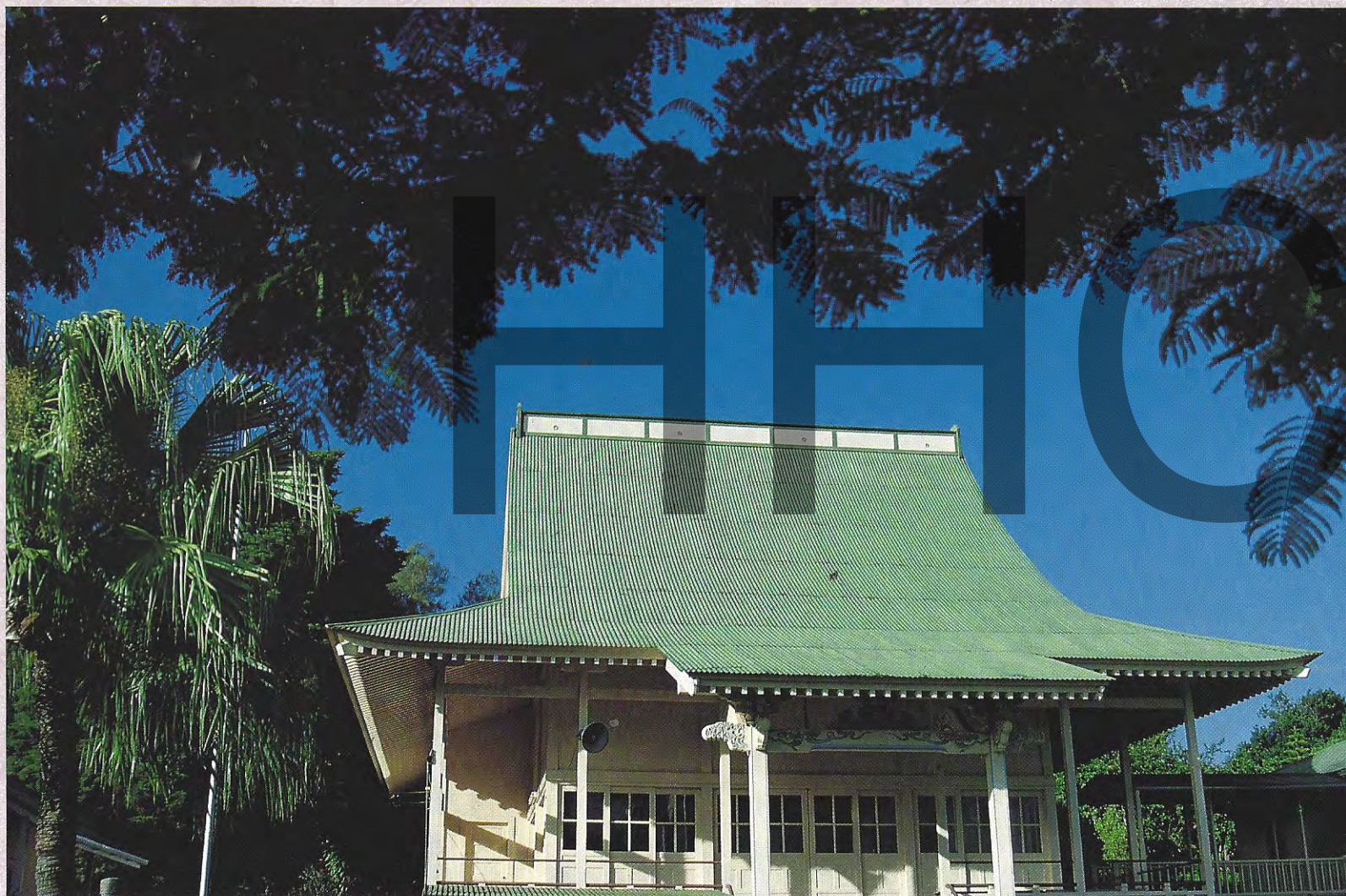
Jodo Mission, Kōloa, Kaua'i. During Bon the names of deceased temple members are displayed on *sotoba* (planks) symbolic of the early Buddhist "stupa," which became known as a pagoda in Japan. A white cloth is woven between the planks to symbolize the connection between Buddha and the departed souls. The temple in the background dates from 1910.



8

Aug

Hamakua Jodo Mission, Hamakua, Hawaii. This striking yellow and blue temple is dominated by its large *irimoya* (hipped and gable) roof. The open verandahs, as well as the entry with its highly embellished beams and brackets, are reminiscent of Japanese architecture. Major alterations, made in 1918, converted a rather modest 1897 structure into this more imposing form.



9  
Sept

Daifukuji Soto Zen Mission, Honalo, Hawai'i. The entry into a spiritual center was important for religious buildings. The entry of this temple, erected in 1919, exemplifies movement from the earth plane to the higher platform and veranda. The metal roof, vertical board siding and window framing all derive from Hawai'i's plantation architecture.



10  
Oct

Jodo Mission of Hawai'i, Honolulu, O'ahu. Resembling a Muslim palace more than a Japanese structure, this 1932 temple clearly represents the variety of derivative architectural forms used in Hawai'i by Buddhist sects. The minaret towers, Persian arched openings and symmetrical order all suggest a synthesis of Mughal Indian forms into the Buddhist temple.



11  
Nov

Makiki Christian Church, Honolulu, O'ahu. Although neither a Shinto shrine nor a Buddhist temple, this Christian Church, built in 1931, is obviously Japanese in design and inspiration. The design was the idea of Reverend Take Okumura and was inspired by the spectacular Himeji Castle in Japan.



12  
Dec