

A Garden in Uji Embodying the Yearning for the Paradise in the West – Byôdô-in Garden –

SUGIMOTO Hiroshi

Sub-Manager, Historic City Planning Promotion Section, Uji City, JAPAN

1. Creation of Byôdô-in

In the Heian period (794 to 1185), Uji was developed in the southern Heian-kyô (present-day Kyôto) as a residential suburb. The preceding building of Byôdô-in was originally built in the early Heian period as a private villa for Minamoto no Tôru, which was later purchased by Fujiwara no Michinaga. After being bequeathed to his son Fujiwara no Yorimichi, the villa was converted into a temple in 1052, which coincided with the beginning of the mappô, the age of the degeneration of the Buddha's law. The main hall of the villa was then renovated into a Buddhist sanctum and the Phoenix Hall (Hô-oh-dô) was added in the following year. The Fujiwara clan continued expanding the building and, by the time of the death of Fujiwara no Yorimichi in 1074, many additional sanctums and towers had been constructed on the grounds of about eight hectares. According to one record, among them were, in addition to the main hall and the Phoenix Hall mentioned above, Hokke-dô, Tahô-tô, Godai-dô, Fudô-dô, Goma-dô, Kyôzô (sutra repository), Shôrô (bell tower), Kita-Daimon (north gate), and Nishi-Daimon (west gate). In the areas surrounding these premises, in addition to ordinary monasteries, there were larger-scale monasteries such as Nansen-bô and Jôshin-bô.

There are some characteristics unique to Byôdô-in in terms of the layout of the temple complex: first, there are no tamped earth walls or other shields along the easternmost edge of the temple premises that faces the west bank of the Uji River; second, in general each temple faces east; and third, there is no axial line of the entire temple complex. The first temple (Jôdo temple) where a Jôdo garden was built was Hôjô-ji Temple in Kyôto, which was originally built by Fujiwara no Michinaga. This temple, and Hosshô-ji Temple endowed by Emperor Shirakawa, are surrounded by a tamped earth wall. On the premises of these temples, a Nanmen-dô

(south-facing temple building) and a pond are located on the south-north axis extending from the Nan-mon (south gate), and the pond is surrounded by the U shaped temple. Byôdô-in is significantly different in these features from the other two temples. The building style of the Phoenix Hall was taken over by Shôkômyô-in in Toba and Muryôkô-in in Hiraizumi, exerting a significant impact on the development of Jôdo temples in later years.

2. Byôdô-in Garden

It is obvious, both from records and the layout, that the Phoenix Hall is the main building of the Byôdô-in temple complex. The Phoenix Hall is a Tômen-dô (east-facing temple building) that houses the seated statue of Jôroku Amitabha Tathagata made by Jôchô. Consisting of Chû-dô (the central hall), which is a sanctum, and designed corridors on its south, north and west sides, the Phoenix Hall is architecturally an Amida-dô style depicting the Palace "Hôrô-kaku" of Amida Buddha. The hall is built on the central island in the pond and surrounded by a garden. The Byôdô-in Garden, a temple garden built around the Phoenix Hall, is a Jôdo garden aiming to reproduce the Gokuraku-Jôdo or the Land of Ultimate Bliss.

Aji-ike Pond, the centerpiece of the garden, spreads its surface mainly to the east and north sides of the Phoenix Hall at present, but it is known that the pond once also expanded into the west, the back side of the hall, largely along the pond terrace. While the trees on the bank now block the view from the front side of the Phoenix Hall to the east, the garden was originally connected to the bank of the Uji River, commanding a wide landscape toward the east. The Aji-ike Pond was made based on the garden pond that was built along with the original private villa. When the Phoenix Hall was constructed, the west side of the terrace was dug

to expand the pond area, with the central island remaining. The pond is fed by spring water from the terrace and within the pond, and probably drained into the Uji River. The entire pond bank, excluding the southern part that forms a terrace cliff, is a gentle slope where a pebble beach was constructed using fist-sized river stones, with ornamental stones at key positions. This style is basically the same as that of a *shinden*-style garden of the same period.

The east bank of the pond is faced by the facade of the Phoenix Hall. There was originally a narrow pebbled peninsula protruding from the south side of the facade, which was connected to a garden, also covered with pebbles, extending to the Uji River. Immediately following the death of Yorimichi, however, this part of the pond was reclaimed and the height of the garden was raised. In addition, a small imperial palace was constructed on the bank directly opposite, for the purpose of observing the Phoenix Hall. At the beginning of the 12th century, the Phoenix Hall was largely renovated when the transept-type structure with columns rising from the pond was altered into the *sô-danjôzumi-kidan* style or the podium stylobate style. The roofing was also changed to the *hon-kawarabuki* style, a combination of flat and rounded tiles. It is inferred that the original roofing was the *kogawara* style, a roof covered with wood layers, as is the one used for Konjiki-dô (Golden Hall) of the Chûson-ji.

3. Representation of the Land of Ultimate Bliss

According to an article about the establishment of the Tahô-tô pagoda in 1061, “Byôdô-in was converted from a residential villa to a temple, representing the Land of Ultimate Bliss with the statue of Amitabha Tathagata enshrined.” It was also reported that in the capital a song with a lyric saying “If you cannot believe in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, pay homage at the temple in Uji” became popular. These reports indicate that those in the capital recognized Byôdô-in as the Land of Ultimate Bliss in the present world.

Here is a perfect document to illustrate the specific function of the Land of Ultimate Bliss in the present world. According to a record of Goreizei Emperor’s Visit to Byôdô-in in 1067, a temporary lodge decorated with brocade and

embroidery was built on the pond in front of the Phoenix Hall, a dragon-headed boat and a *geki* (a kind of imaginary bird)-headed boat were floated out on the pond, and the emperor worshiped Amitabha Tathagata from the temporary lodge on the pond. The Jôdo sutra (the Pure Land sutra) preaches that people will be reborn in the Jewel Pond in the Land of Ultimate Bliss after their death. Considering the concept of meditation in those days, the worship by Goreizei Emperor was nothing but a simulated experience of rebirth in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. It should be particularly noted that the Byôdô-in Temple and Fujiwara no Yorimichi were rewarded for their efforts in arranging the visit. In addition, Rikyû-sha (Rikyû Shrine) located on the opposite bank of the Uji River, was also decorated with an order. Recent dendrochronological measurement of the main shrine of Rikyû-sha (the present Ujigami Shrine) has revealed that the shrine was constructed in 1060. Taking into consideration the year the shrine was built and the year of the visit to Byôdô-in by Goreizei Emperor, the two facilities were regarded as a pair. Byôdô-in in the next life, or nirvana, is dependent upon the existence of Rikyû-sha, or samsara, in the real world. Rikyû-sha was built as a symbol of the real world on the bank opposite the west bank of the Uji River where Byôdô-in is located. We may consider that the Uji River was regarded as the boundary to separate the next life from the real world. This is precisely because the Byôdô-in Garden faces the west bank of the Uji River and commands a wide landscape towards the east. We should therefore understand that the yearning by Fujiwara no Yorimichi for the Paradise in the West was not entrusted to the Phoenix Hall and the Byôdô-in Garden alone, but also to the space covering the wide natural landscape of the Uji region.

After the death of Yorimichi, the small imperial palace was constructed on the bank opposite the Phoenix Hall exclusively for the purpose of observing the hall. Consequently, some corrections had to be made in his concept, and in the early 12th century, the architectural expression of the Phoenix Hall was changed. These corrections and changes, however, did not weaken the power of Byôdô-in to suggest itself as the Land of Ultimate Bliss in the present world. We can verify this

because the designs of both Shôkômyô-in and Muryôkô-in (Hiraizumi) were based on the renovated Phoenix Hall and the Byôdô-in Garden.

Reference

- 1) 宗教法人平等院 2003 『史跡及び名勝平等院庭園保存整備調査報告書』
- 2) 吹田直子・杉本宏 2005 「平等院発掘」『佛教藝術』、第279号、一特集宇治の考古学・藤原氏別業の世界一、毎日新聞社
- 3) 杉本宏 2006 『日本の遺跡6 宇治遺跡群』一藤原氏が残した平安王朝遺跡一、同成社

*Translation's Notes

Reference

- 1) Religious Corporation Byôdô-in Temple 2003 "Research Report on the Garden of the Byôdô-in Temple, a Place of Historical Importance and Extraordinary Scenic Beauty, for its Preservation and Renovation."
- 2) SUIA Naoko and SUGIMOTO Hiroshi 2005 "Excavation of the Byôdô-in Temple" *Bukkyô Geijutsu*, the 279th issue, featuring Archaeology of Uji and the World of the Villa of the Fujiwara Clan. The Mainichi Newspapers Co., Ltd.
- 3) SUGIMOTO Hiroshi 2006 Archeological Ruins in Uji: the Heritage of the Fujiwara Clan Dating to the Heian Court Period. Archeological Ruins of Japan Vol. 6, Dôseisha



Fig. 1 Estimated Topographic Map and Major Ruins in the Peripheral Area of Uji in Ancient Times

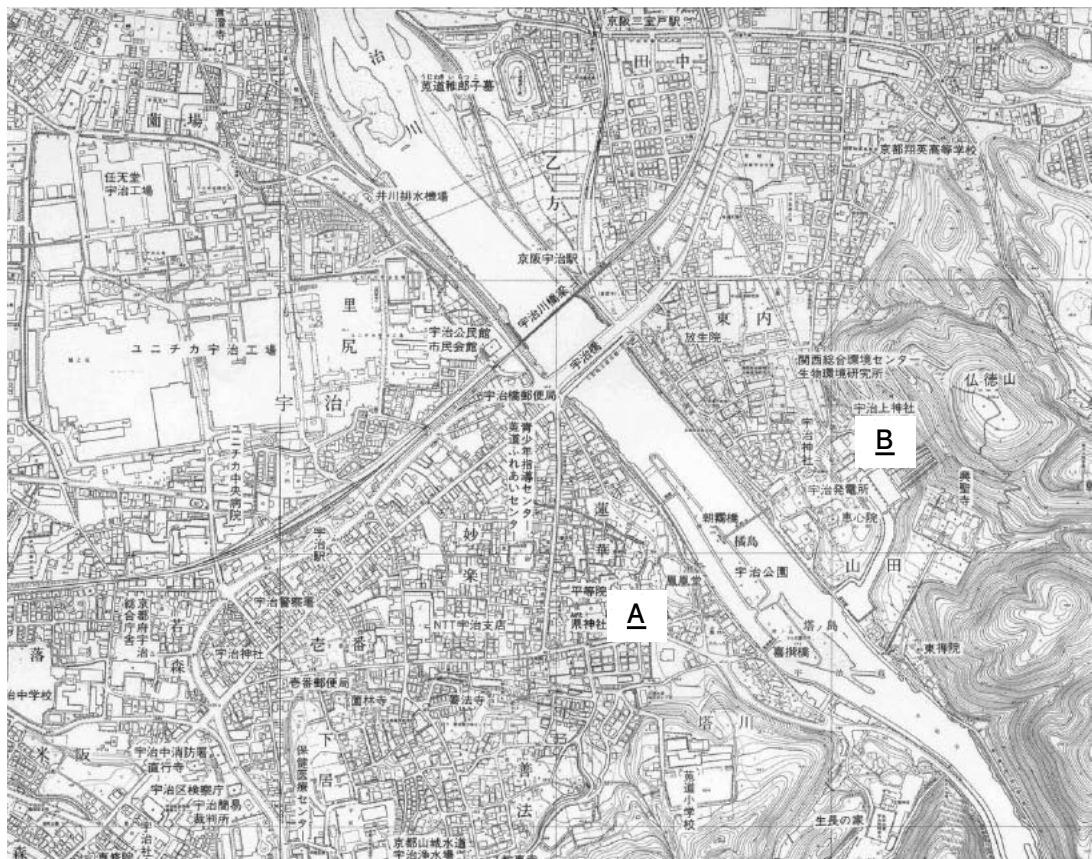


Fig. 2 Present-Day Topographic Map of the Peripheral Area of Uji (A : Byôdô-in Temple, B : Ujigami Shrine)

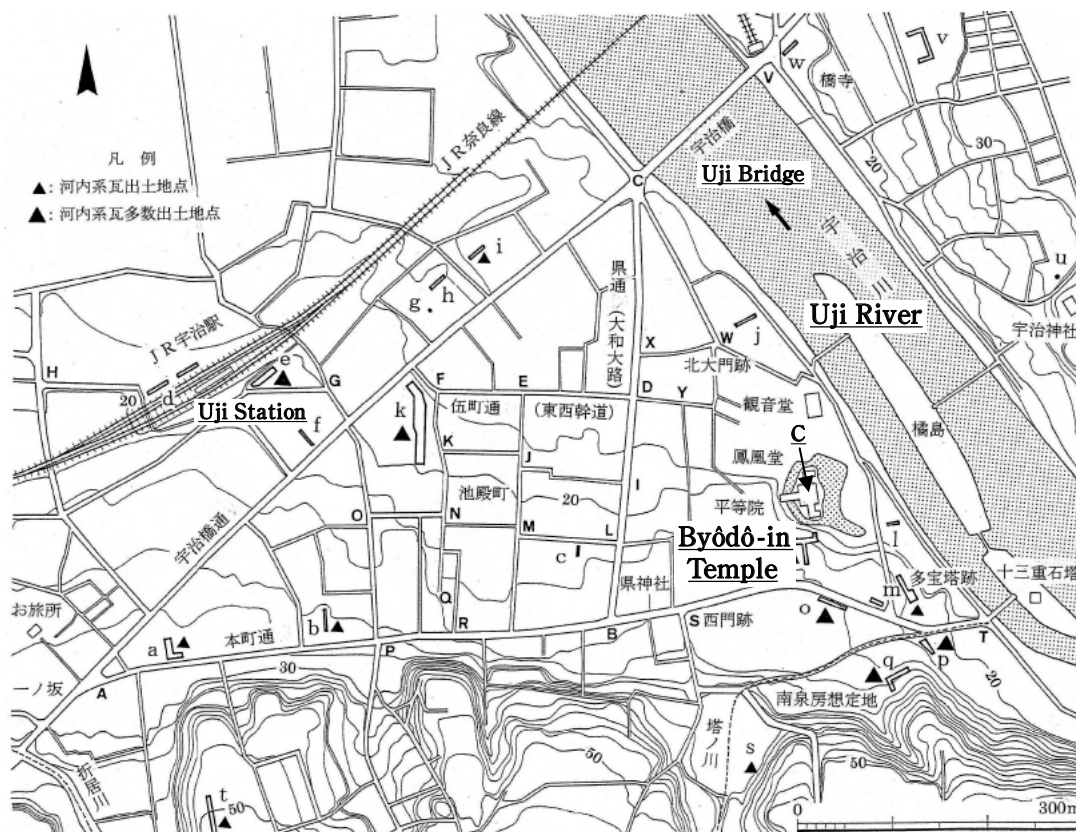


Fig. 3 Topography and Roads of the Peripheral Area of Byôdô-in (Source : Map prepared about 1965)

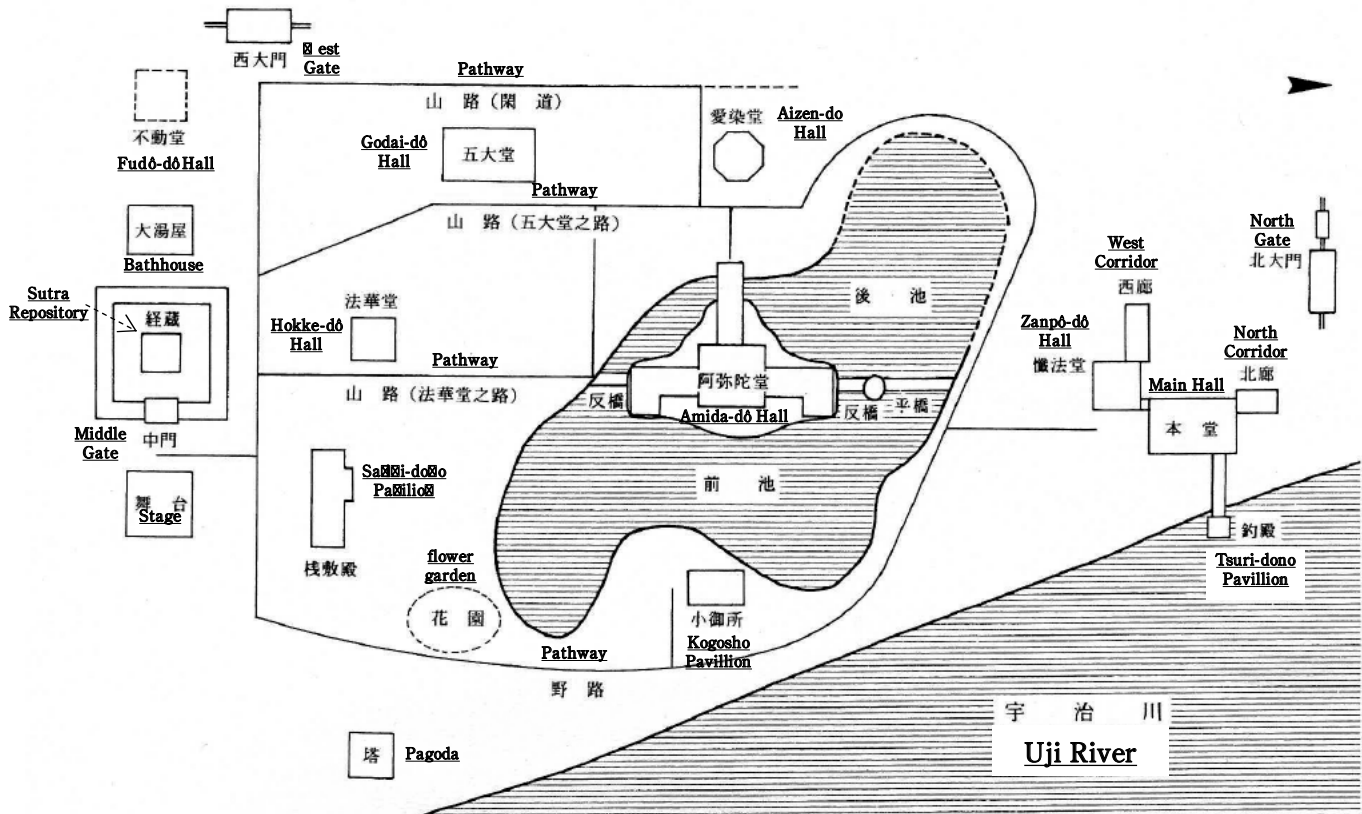


Fig. 4 Estimated Positional Relation of Temples and Halls of Byôdô-in Temple Complex

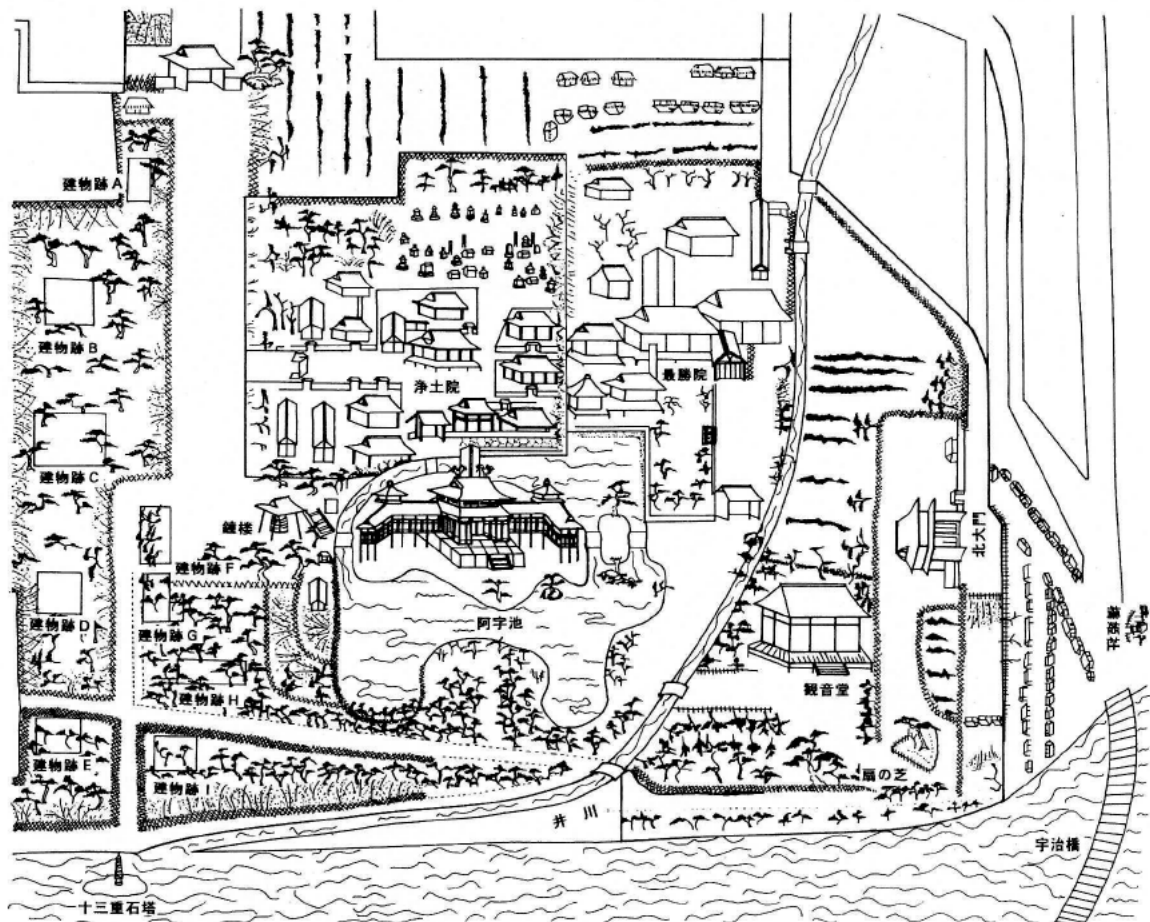


Fig. 5 "Ancient Map-Ôtsu of Byôdô-in Precinct" Owned by Saishô-in Temple (re-drawn and some letters added in the modern age)

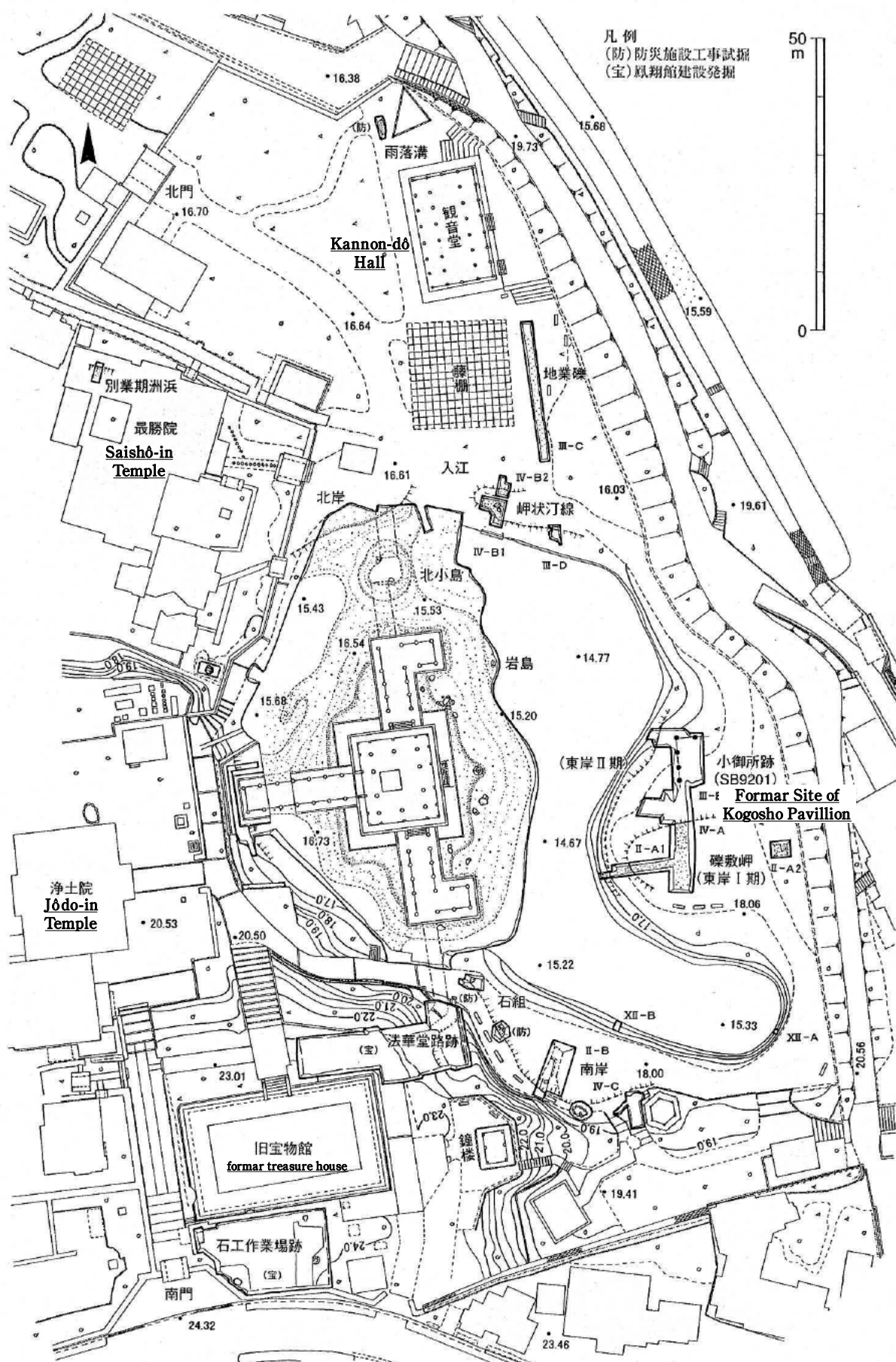


Fig. 6 Drawing Based on Byôdô-in Garden Excavation Research (source: garden improvement report)

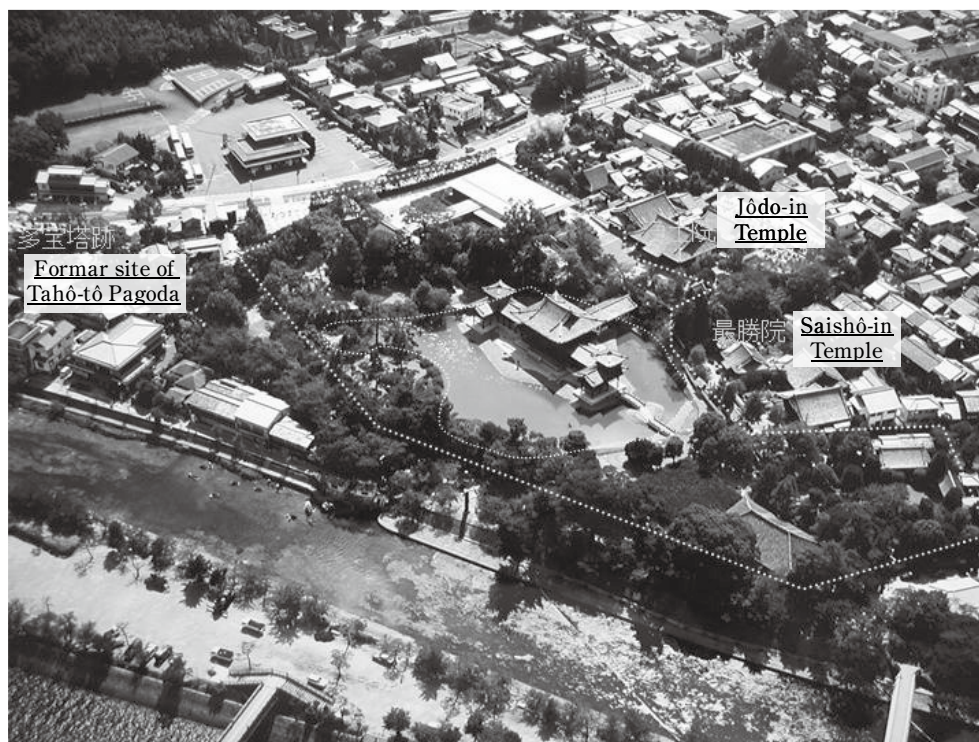


Fig. 7 Bird's Eye Photo of Byôdô-in



Fig. 8 Correspondence of Each Dan between Phoenix Hall and Image of Pure Land

*A Kansô-nenbutsu: A style of Buddhist training that involves reciting prayers while keeping an image of the Pure Land in mind

*B At the time of death, you will find yourself sitting in a golden lotus flower. When the flower closes, you will be led by Amitabha to the Pure Land and reborn in the pond there. (Excerpt from the Pure Land Sutra)

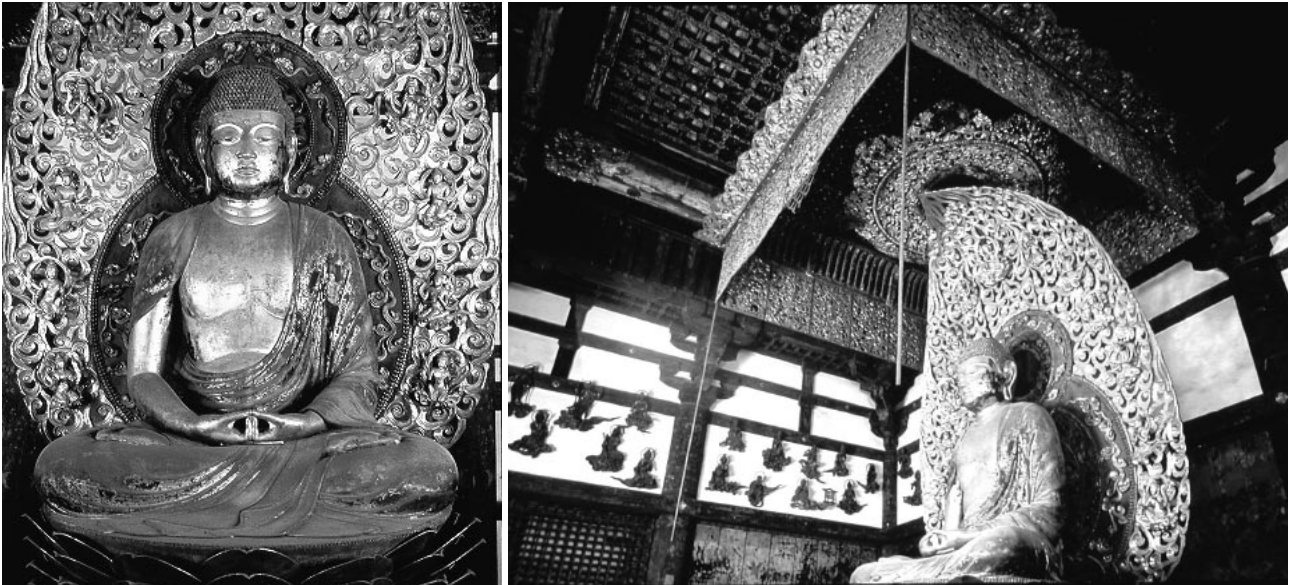


Fig. 9 Seated Statue of Amitabha Tathagata



Fig. 10 Painting of Amida's Pure Land on the Wall behind the Buddha in the Phoenix Hall



Fig. 11 Excavation of the Garden around the Phoenix Hall

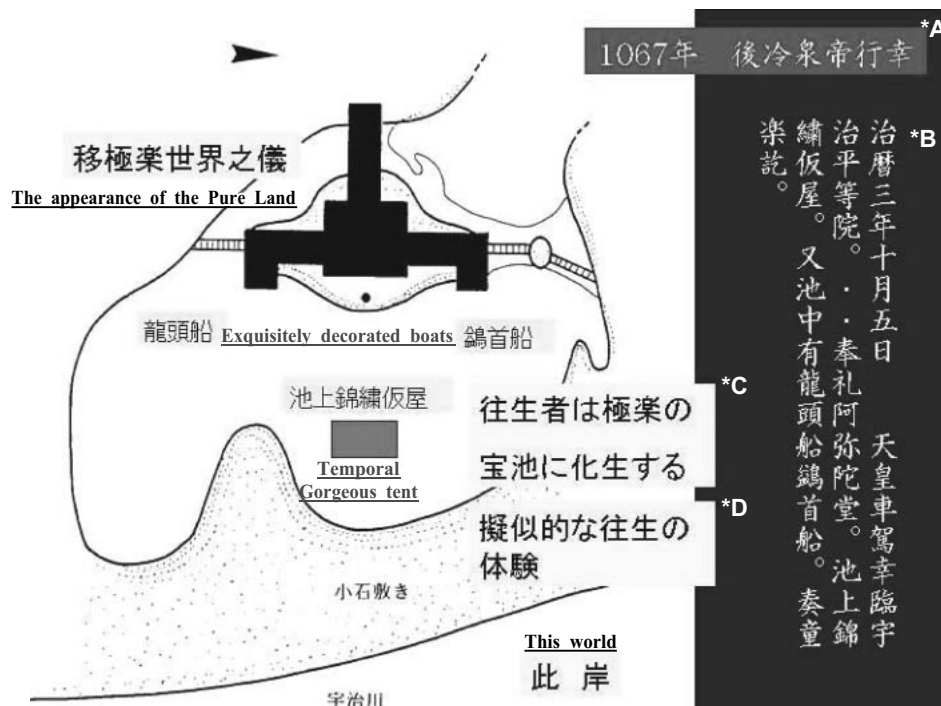


Fig. 12 In 1067 on the Visit by Emperor Goreizei

*A In 1067, Emperor Goreizei visited the temple for worship.

*B The emperor offered worship to the Amida-dô Hall in a gorgeous tent built in the pond. Exquisitely Beautifully decorated boats were floated out on the pond, on which children played music, were floated out on the pond.

*C The dead are reborn in the pond of the Pure Land. (Excerpt from the Pure Land Sutra)

*D Ritual to simulate rebirth into the Pure Land

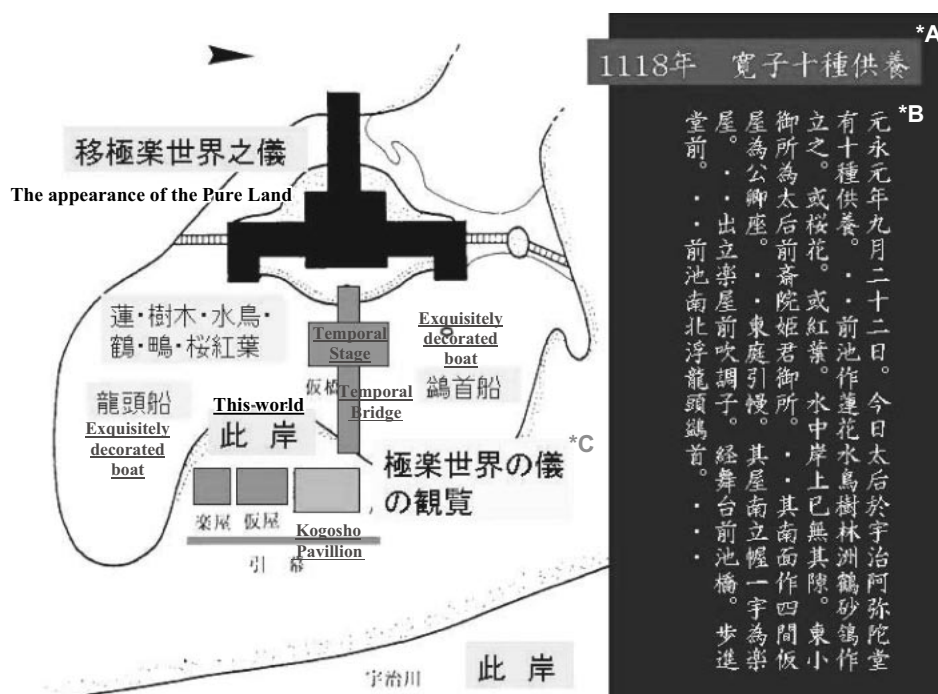


Fig. 13 In 1118 on the Occasion of a Memorial Service with Ten Offerings

*A In 1118, Empress Goreizei visited the temple for worship.

*B When visiting the temple for worship, Empress Goreizei was seated in the imperial palace on the bank opposite the Amida-dô Hall. Adjacent to the imperial place, structures were constructed to accommodate other participants and performers. A stage was set in the pond and man-made lotus flowers, water birds and other objects were densely arranged both in the pond and on the banks. Exquisitely decorated boats were floated out on the pond.

*C Viewing the world of the Pure Land

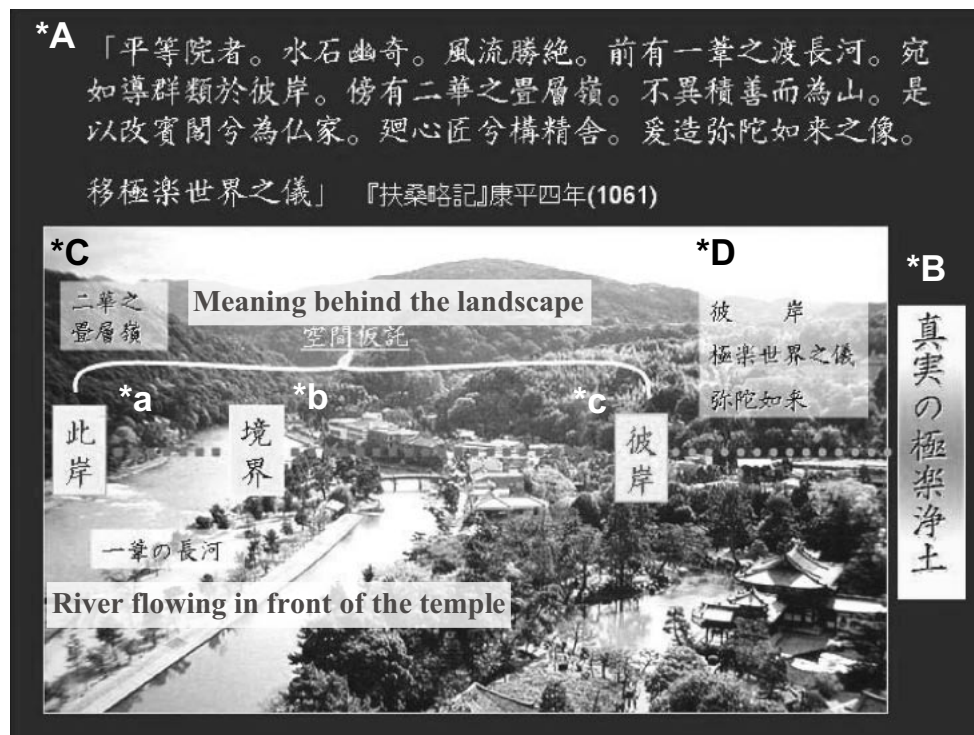


Fig. 14 Spatial Correspondence Based on *Fusō-Ryakki*

- *A The precincts of the Byōdō-in Temple look so beautiful. In front of the temple, a river flows as if guiding us to the Pure Land. We can see beautiful mountains around the temple, which seem to represent our good behaviors. The Byōdō-in Temple was converted from a residential villa. Here, the statue of Amitabha Tathagata is enshrined and the image of the Pure Land is reproduced. (*Fusō-Ryakki*, 1061)
- *B Authentic Pure Land
- *C Two beautiful mountains
- *D The appearance of the Pure Land The statue of Amitabha Tathagata
- *a This world
- *b Boundary
- *c The other world



Fig. 15 Structure of Spatial Correspondence of Byōdō-in
*A : This world, *B : The other world, *C : Authentic Pure Land

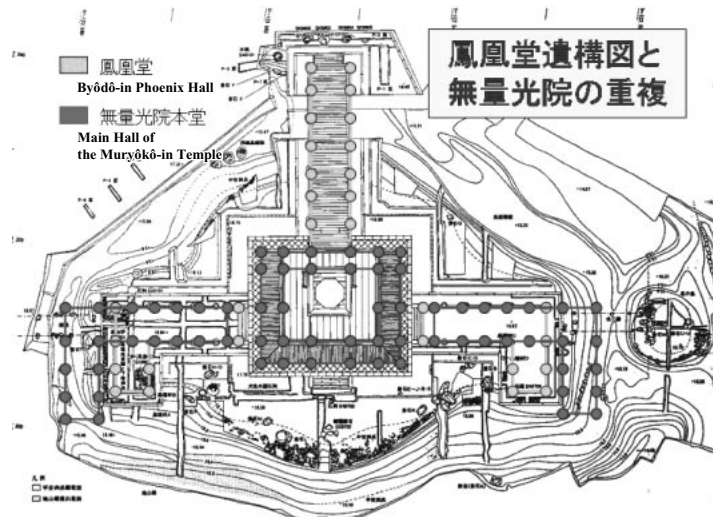


Fig. 16 Muryôkô-in Temple in Hiraizumi Superimposed over an Excavation Drawing of Phoenix Hall

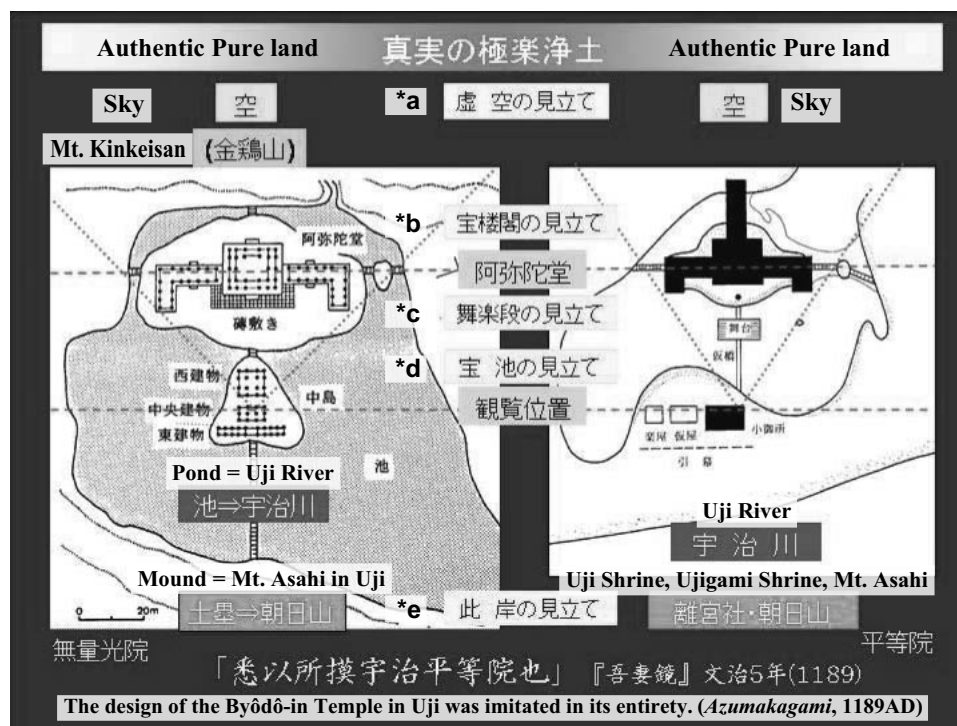


Fig. 17 Comparison between Muryôkô-in and Phoenix Hall at a Buddhist Memorial Service
Left : Muryôkô-in Temple (in Hiraizumi) , Right : Byôdô-in Temple (in Uji)

*a : Likened to the sky of the Pure Land, *b : Likened to the palace in the Pure Land,
*c : Likened to the stage in the Pure Land, *d : Likened to the pond of the Pure Land, *e : Likened to this world

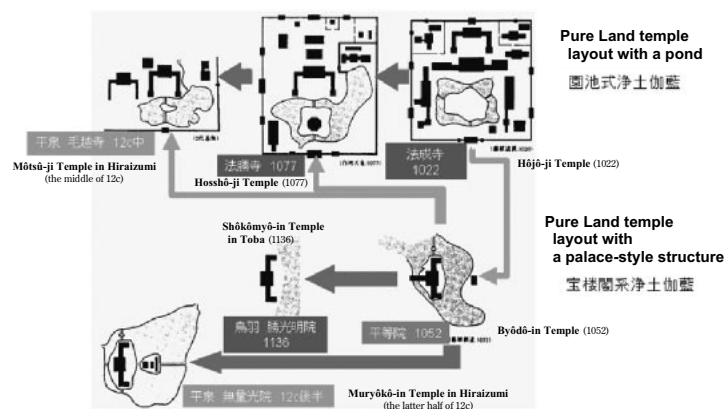


Fig. 18 Transition of Jôdo temple in Heian Period