**Five-story Pagoda**

**National Treasure**

The origins of the pagodas can be traced back to the stupas of ancient India, and are architectural structures that ultimately derive from burial mounds. They are used to enshrine the relics of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, and serve as reminders of the presence of the Buddha’s teachings in this world.

The Kofukuji Five-story Pagoda was originally erected in 730 by Empress Komyo (701–760), the daughter of Kofukuji’s founding patron, Fujiwara no Fuhito (659–720). Over its long history, it burned down a total of five times, with the current reconstruction dating to 1426. At 50.1 meters, it is the second-tallest wooden pagoda in Japan today. Famous for its deep eaves, the structure successfully blends references to architecture of the Nara period (710–794) with the dynamic architectural style of the Muromachi period (1136–1573) during which it was last rebuilt.

The pagoda houses sculptures of the Four Buddhas of the Four Directions, each flanked by two bodhisattvas. This represents a Mahayana Buddhist conception of time and space. The north-south axis represents the progression of time, and the east-west axis represents space. The Buddha of the past, Shakyamuni, is in the south, and Maitreya (Jp. Miroku), the Buddha of the Future, is in the north. Amida, the Buddha of the Western Realm of Ultimate Bliss is in the west, and Yakushi, lord of the Eastern Pure Beryl Radiance Realm, is in the east. The intersection of the two axes is here and now in this world and at its fulcrum is the central pillar, which rests on a stone foundation. It is not known if relics of Shakyamuni are interred in the foundation or in another location.