

Muryokoin Temple is considered to be one of the masterpieces of twelfth-century Pure Land Buddhist temple and garden design. Pure Land Buddhist temple design sought to create a physical representation of the Buddhist Pure Land Western paradise. The design of Muryokoin Temple and its garden is therefore not only architecturally important, but also tells us how twelfth-century Buddhists envisioned the Pure Land Western paradise.

According to the thirteenth-century historical record *Azumakagami*, the Muryokoin Temple was modeled after the famous Phoenix Hall of Byodoin Temple in Kyoto. Both temples featured a central worship hall (Amida Hall) with wing-like lateral corridors, and were built on islands surrounded by large ponds.

Muryokoin was established by Fujiwara no Hidehira (1122–1187), the third Oshu Fujiwara lord to rule Hiraizumi. The temple grounds, which are surrounded by earthen mounds, originally consisted of a pond with three islands set in extensive gardens. An Amida Hall, with an enshrined statue of Amida Buddha, stood on the largest island. The Amida Hall was located facing the east, in accordance with the Pure Land Buddhist belief that the Pure Land Paradise was located in the west.

Excavations have discovered evidence of buildings on the smaller eastern island, leading experts to believe that prayers were offered and ceremonies performed there. The ruins of a bridge that once connected the northern island to the Amida Hall have also been found.

The site of Muryokoin Temple is a part of the Hiraizumi UNESCO World Heritage Site, and one of the four twelfth-century Pure Land Buddhist gardens in Hiraizumi. The other three are at nearby Chusonji, Motsuji, and Kanjizaojin Temples.