

A Reliquary and a Record

More than three meters high and 820 kilograms in weight, this massive treasure pagoda (*teppoto*) dates from 1197. Inside the pagoda is a small crystal five-ringed tower (*gorinto*), with the rings symbolizing Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, and Air in ascending order. The tower contains relics of the Buddha brought back from China by Chogen (1121–1206), the founder of Amidaji Temple—along with the entire practice of worshipping such relics, known as *shari-shinko*. The pagoda itself is the work of Japanese artisans who learned how to cast metal from Chen Heqing, a Chinese craftsman active in Japan.

The podium features relief inscriptions on all four sides. The single large Sanskrit character in the center indicates a point of the compass. Meanwhile, the Japanese script provides a detailed record of why and when Amidaji was built, also listing the temple's location, the seven buildings that make it up, key equipment (such as the cauldron to heat the bathwater), a prayer for the well-being of the emperor, and the names of Chogen and important government officials.

This is the oldest treasure pagoda in Japan. Because it displays an extraordinary level of craftsmanship and provides an important account of Amidaji's history, it was designated a National Treasure in 1954.