

## **Lady Tachibana Shrine**

Lady Tachibana was the mother of Empress Komyo (701–760), who was the consort of Emperor Shomu (701–756), Japan's 45th emperor. Lady Tachibana may have prayed before this wooden altar-shrine containing a remarkably detailed bronze Amida triad that dates back to the second half of the seventh century. The Amida triad consists of the Amida Buddha and two bodhisattvas seated on lotus flower thrones.

The lotus flower is important in Buddhist iconography because it emerges from the mud at the bottom of a pond, but its flowers blossom on long stalks as if floating above murky waters, such as of earthly struggles with attachment and desire. It is because the world is full of such desires that the possibility of enlightenment exists.

The shrine is decorated on the sides with images of various bodhisattvas and figures of the Four Guardian Kings (Shitenno) and displays the influence of other cultures on Japanese culture during this period. The shrine is considered to represent a peak in the development of Far Eastern art.