

Clay Statue Tableaux

At the base of the five-story pagoda are a series of Buddhist tableaux shaped like caverns dating from 711, which contain 97 clay figurines. The figures playing the central roles are surrounded by priests, attendees, ministers, and other more minor participants. The four sides of the tableaux represent famous scenes from the story of the Buddha. On the east side, Yuima, a layman, is engaged in a religious dialogue with Monju, the bodhisattva of wisdom. On the north side, the Buddha is passing from this world into Nirvana, mourned by weeping disciples. The agonized faces of his devotees are depicted in the scene, as well as a doctor taking the Buddha's pulse. The west side shows the Division of the Relics of Gautama (Shakyamuni), when his remains were distributed among eight tribes after his death some 2,500 years ago. On the south side, the Buddha of the future, Maitreya (in Japanese, Miroku Bosatsu) has achieved enlightenment and is giving a lecture.