

## **Three-story Pagoda**

### **National Treasure**

The graceful lines of Kofukuji's Three-story Pagoda have made it famous as an example of Buddhist architecture of the Heian period (794–1185). Erected shortly after the destruction of the entire temple complex in 1180, it is one of the two oldest structures at Kofukuji today, along with the Northern Round Hall.

The 19-meter high pagoda was originally built in 1143 at the behest of Fujiwara no Kiyoko (posthumous name Kokamon'in; 1122–1182), the consort of Emperor Sutoku (1119–1164). The pillars and lintels of the inner sanctuary, as well as the ceiling, inner walls, and inside faces of the four doors, were richly decorated with floral vining patterns and paintings of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, pavilions, and what appear to be images of patrons. The first story contains a set of four murals painted on wooden panels that each depict 1,000 images of one of four Buddhas: Yakushi facing east, Shakyamuni facing south, Amida facing west, and Miroku facing north.

A notable feature is an image of the goddess Benzaiten enshrined on the eastern face of the central pillar and surrounded by images of 15 attendants. It is said to have been installed by the famous monk Kobo Daishi (Kukai; 774–835). Benzaiten's crown has a coiled snake with the face of an old man that is surmounted by a Shinto-style torii gate. The image combines the Indian Buddhist goddess Benzaiten and the native Japanese deity Ugajin.