

## **Mt. Haguro's Five-Story Pagoda**

The five-story pagoda on Mt. Haguro was originally built between 931 and 938 but was rebuilt in 1372 and restored in 1608. The 29-meter-tall cedarwood structure is registered as a National Treasure and is one of eleven five-story pagodas preserved from earlier times in Japan.

The original pagoda is believed to have been built by the order of Taira no Masakado (903–940), a warrior who led a rebellion against the emperor. According to legend, he often came to the mountain to worship at a temple that enshrined Myoken Bosatsu, a Buddhist deity. When Masakado was murdered for betraying the state, it was widely believed Shugendo practitioners had the power to appease his angry spirit.

During the Meiji era (1868–1912), the government declared Shinto to be the national religion. Legislation was passed to separate Buddhism and Shinto, whose deities and institutions had been integrated for centuries. Most Buddhist structures on Mt. Haguro were destroyed or removed as a consequence; however, the pagoda remained. It was repurposed as an auxiliary shrine to Sanjin Gosaiden, the shrine at Mt. Haguro's peak. The pagoda, located at the foot of Mt. Haguro, provided an accessible, alternative place for Shugendo worshippers to pray.

Pagodas are generally decorative in function but sometimes enshrine deities. Mt. Haguro's pagoda enshrines Okuninushi no Mikoto, the Shinto deity of nation building, agriculture, commerce, and medicine.

The structure is built within an ancient Japanese cedar forest. Jiji-sugi, whose name means "grandpa tree" and is the largest cedar tree on the mountain, stands next to the pagoda. It is 10 meters in circumference and is estimated to be more than 1,000 years old. The tree is designated a Special Natural Monument.