

Miniature Five-Story Pagoda

The Hōrinkan's intricately detailed five-story pagoda (*gojūnotō*) is a National Treasure. At a glance, the pagoda may appear to have been made recently, but in fact the majority of its components date to the Nara period (710–794). Though it is only 5.5 meters tall, both its interior and exterior perfectly replicate the architecture and joinery of full-sized five-story pagodas.

Due in part to the structure's age, it is not known exactly when or why it was built. It is thought that the pagoda was made at the request of Empress Kōmyō (701–760) and was originally kept in Gangōji's Nishi Shōtōin ("West Pagoda Hall"). Even so, the purpose of its creation is still unclear. For many years, it was believed to be a one-tenth scale model of the pagoda that once stood on the southeastern part of Gangōji's grounds. This connection was disproven in 1927, when surveys of the larger pagoda's foundations revealed that they had very different relative dimensions.

A second theory suggests that the miniature pagoda may have fulfilled the same function as a full-scale version. Five-story pagodas are derived from Indian stupas, which were originally built to mark and protect relics of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. Similarly, Japan's five-story pagodas are built to hold Buddhist relics called *busshari*. These reliquary pagodas stand in the east and west of most temples in Nara, but in the case of Gangōji, records show only an eastern pagoda. Therefore, it is possible that the small pagoda kept in the West Pagoda Hall was not the model for a larger structure, but the structure itself. Appropriately, the miniature pagoda now houses *busshari* that were donated from Sri Lanka in 1966.