

Three-Story Pagoda

The Three-Story Pagoda of Jorakuji Temple is a magnificent example of traditional Buddhist Japanese architecture. Built in 1400, it is famous for its structural integrity and aesthetic harmony—qualities achieved through exceptional mathematical precision. Despite its age, very few repairs have been necessary since its construction, with historical records showing almost no replacement of the main framework or brackets. The pagoda is designated a National Treasure.

The pagoda was built in the Wayo (Japanese) architectural style, which emphasizes simplicity and elegance using clean lines and natural materials, rather than applied decoration. The structure exhibits subtle restraint through unpainted wood and gentle, gracefully curving rooflines. Additional structural details, including the three-step brackets supporting each story, create a consistent visual rhythm that gives the pagoda a balanced and light appearance.

The building's beauty and structural integrity are rooted in its use of the *shiwari* proportional system across all three levels. This mathematically rigorous technique determines the proportions of a building's structural materials using a unit of measure based on the sum of the height and width of one rafter. This unit was used to determine the distance between rafter centers, the distance from the center of one pillar to the center of another, the depth of eave projection, and other building measurements. Its application is historically significant, representing an early example where the method was applied uniformly to all three tiers of a pagoda.

The structure's placement on a hill behind the Main Hall is characteristic of the Tendai school of Buddhism, to which Jorakuji belongs. Pagodas symbolize the Buddha's body and teachings and serve as central objects of worship. Constructing the pagoda on elevated ground reflected the belief that the stability and defense of the nation depended on spiritual strength. Its elevation was thought to amplify the pagoda's protective power through a spiritual guarding of the surrounding region.