

Yakushi Triad

Inside the Kondo (literally, Golden Hall) is Yakushiji's principal object of worship, the Yakushi Triad, consisting of Yakushi Nyorai, the Healing Buddha, flanked by two attendants, the bodhisattvas Nikko and Gakko. The Triad was consecrated in 697 by Empress Jito, who oversaw the completion of Yakushiji following the death of her husband, Emperor Tenmu, in 686. It was customary among elite members of society to pray to Yakushi Buddha when illness befell them or members of their family. Ironically, Emperor Tenmu originally planned the temple to pray for his ailing wife, but she outlived him and eventually completed its construction.

Objects of worship made of wood were rare in Japan at the time of Yakushiji's construction, and the Yakushi Triad is made from a total of 20 tons of bronze that was originally gilded (hence the name of the hall in which they are located). In addition, the necklaces and other accessories decorating the statues would have been replete with colorful gems. Fires and other disasters stripped the triad of these resplendent features, but it nonetheless remains in a near-complete state and has been designated a National Treasure.

The Yakushi Buddha image, which measures 2.55 meters in height, has been widely praised for its elegant posture, symmetry and aesthetically pleasing features. Okakura Tenshin (1863–1913), a Japanese scholar and author of *The Book of Tea*, once remarked that those who have not seen the Healing Buddha at Yakushiji are lucky "because they have the opportunity to see it for the first time."