

Miroku Triad

Nara is home to several schools of Buddhism, known collectively as the “Six Buddhist Schools of Nara” (Nanto Rokushu). Yakushiji is the head temple of one of the six, the Hosso school. Since the Large Lecture Hall is the school’s principal place of learning, it is fitting that the great preacher of its teachings, Miroku Nyorai, should be enshrined here.

At the center of the Miroku Triad is Miroku Nyorai (Buddha of the Future), flanked by attendants, the Ho-onrin bodhisattva (large image on right) and the Daimyoso bodhisattva (large image on left). These revered images from Hakuho period (645–710) are accompanied by statues of Asanga (right) and Vasubandhu (left), Indian brothers who preached Yogachara, a school of Buddhist philosophy and psychology that flourished in early Indian Mahayana. The entire set has been designated an Important Cultural Property.

Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha and founder of Buddhism, is said to have predicted a future time when Buddhism’s influence would wane. According to the traditional Buddhist teachings his successor, Miroku (Maitreya in Sanskrit) waits in his Tushita Heaven until it is time for him to appear on earth, attain full enlightenment, and revive the Buddhist teachings. It is for this reason that Miroku is usually referred to as a bodhisattva (one who has yet to attain full enlightenment). The Hosso school is the only Buddhist school in Japan to refer to Miroku as “Nyorai” (Buddha).

On the far left and far right of the dais are statues of the Four Heavenly Kings, who are the guardians of the world and the Buddhist teachings.