

## Statue of the Miroku Buddha

The Lecture Hall's principal image is a statue of the Miroku Buddha dating back to the Kamakura period (1185–1333). Miroku is the Japanese equivalent of the Indian Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future. The statue is 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. Miroku was thought to be waiting in his Tushita Heaven until it was time to appear on earth, attain full enlightenment, and revive the Buddhist faith. Miroku is therefore usually referred to as a bodhisattva and not as a Buddha.

Standing at an imposing 2.84 meters, the Lecture Hall image of Miroku is made by the joined-block, or assembled-block construction technique that some believe had begun to gain a footing in Japan in the latter half of the tenth century. During the Heian period (794–1185), statues sculpted from single blocks of wood had superseded the bronze work that typified Buddhist images of the seventh and eighth centuries; but a growing desire to produce towering statues led to the innovative joined-block method. Apart from facilitating the construction of huge figures, the advantage of this technique was that each piece could be carved individually to predetermined specifications and then assembled. Furthermore, the final product was considerably lighter, as individual components were often hollowed out. It also meant that the overall process was simplified and made quicker, leading to a dramatic increase in the number of statues produced during the late Heian and Kamakura periods.