

# The Vicissitudes of the Miroku Triad in the Lecture Hall of Yakushiji Temple

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The Lecture Hall (Kōdō) of the Yakushiji in Nishinokyō, Nara prefecture, was closed to the public for centuries; in fact, for so long that its large bronze triad was almost forgotten and given little consideration in the overall development of the temple's iconography. Many books on early Japanese Buddhist sculpture do not mention these three images, despite their size and importance.<sup>1)</sup> Yakushiji itself has given the impression that the triad was shielded from public view because it was either not in good enough shape for exhibition or that the building that housed it was in poor repair. But the Lecture Hall was finally opened to the public in 2003 and the triad became fully visible for scholarly attention, a situation made more intriguing by proclaiming the central image to be Maitreya (Miroku, the Buddha of the Future). The bodhisattvas are named Daimyōsō (on the Buddha's right: Great wondrous aspect) and Hōonrin (left: Law garden forest). The triad is ranked as an Important Cultural Property (ICP), while its close cousin in the Golden Hall (*Kondō*), the well known Yakushi triad (Bhaiṣajya-guru-vaidūrya-prabha) Buddha, Nikkō (Sūryaprabha, Sunlight) and Gakkō (Candraprabha, Moonlight) bodhisattvas, is given higher rank as a National Treasure (NT). In view of the ICP triad's lack of exposure in recent centuries and what may be its prior mysterious perambulations, this study is an attempt to bring together theories on its history and provide an explanation for its connection with the Yakushiji.

Typical for early temples, the documentation on the Yakushiji is confusing and often contradictory. Some of the texts contain only oblique references to the Miroku triad, and the contents of one Edo period text could be an intentional fabrication in order to solicit approval from the office of the *bakufu* for rebuilding the Lecture Hall.<sup>2)</sup> The fires of 973 and 1528 could well have destroyed the temple's records, making later falsifications more likely to go unrecognized. Some examples of the contradictions include the following. In dealing with the statues, a 1015 history of the temple, *Yakushiji engi* (History of Yakushiji), states: "The statue of Yakushi Nyorai in the *Kondō* was made as a result of a vow by Emperor Tenmu and was brought by wagon from the old Yakushiji in Takaichi county, a trip which took seven days." But the *Kana engi* or *Yakushiji kokuzōshi* (Illustrated history of Yakushiji) of 1699 says "the triad was cast by priest Gyōgi at Kanaokiyama in the Yōrō period."<sup>3)</sup> The writer of the *Kana engi* knew the earlier theory, but wrote his in order to fit with his desire to credit Gyōgi with the work after the temple had been moved to Heijō. While Kanaokiyama is not on today's maps, it is said to be near Nishinokyō and bronze



The Lecture Hall (Kōdō) of the Yakushiji  
(Courtesy of Yakushiji. Photograph by Shūzō Koyama)



The Miroku (Maitreya) Triad of the Yakushiji (Courtesy of Yakushiji)

slag as evidence of a foundry has been found there, and the Yōrō period is dated to 717–24, Gyōgi’s time (670–749). It is natural to assume that such references refer to the NT Yakushi triad in the Golden Hall, but this assumption is not necessarily warranted.

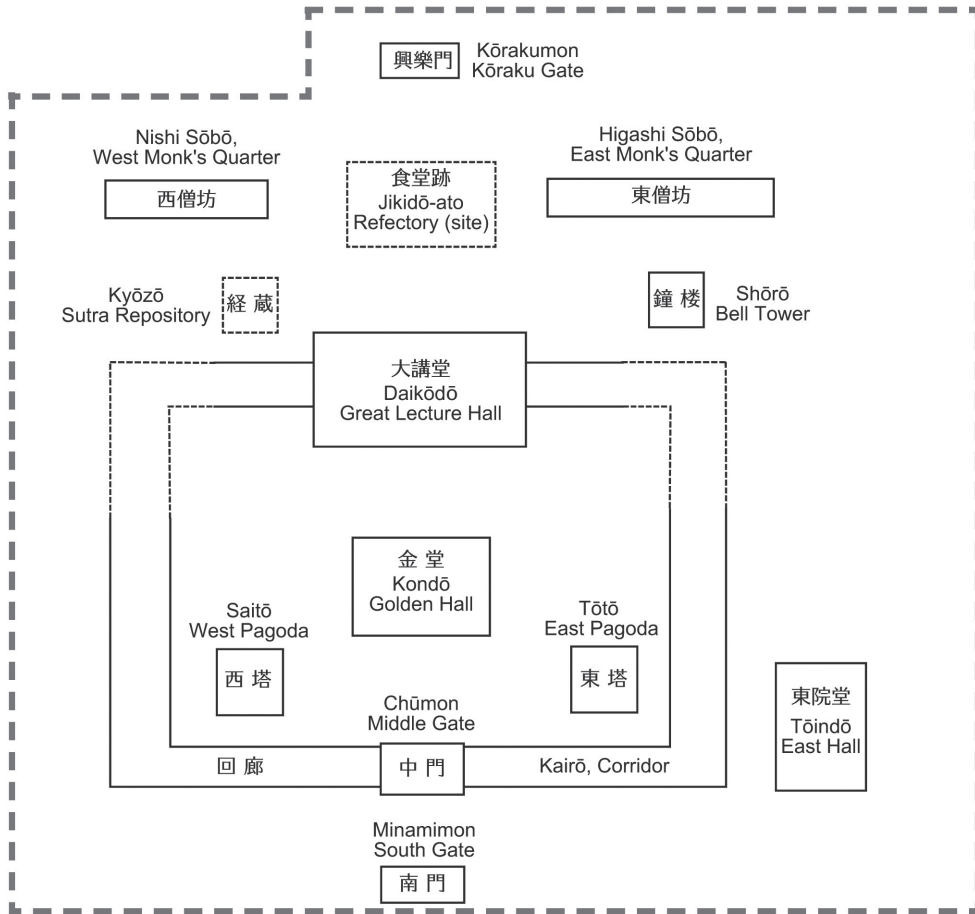
Supporting evidence for intentional falsification, Hasegawa Sei points to the temple’s desire to reconstruct the *garan* (cloistered complex) (which by the late seventh century or early eighth century included a Lecture Hall). A 1699 document, *Garan kyūki shōbatsu* (Citation from the old chronicle of the *garan*), requested the *bakufu* for permission to reconstruct the complex, but referred to the triad in the present Lecture Hall as the original main triad of the Moto-Yakushiji (i.e. the temple at Fujiwara).<sup>4)</sup>

The *Yakushiji engi*, the basic history of the temple written in 1333, says Emperor Tenmu originally built the temple in Okamoto no sato in Asuka.<sup>5)</sup> No site has been identified there, and the temple is not mentioned in other documents for several years, so Tenmu apparently changed his mind and relocated it. He also appears to have been obsessed with building a new capital, and put most of the resources into that project. The *Nihon shoki* and *Shoku Nihongi* reports the following about the temple and its statues, but fails to include Yakushiji in activities involving religious ceremonies sponsored by the court:<sup>6)</sup>

- 680.11.12 The empress was ill. Emperor Tenmu vowed to build a temple to the deity of healing, Yakushi, and obligated 100 individuals to take the tonsure. The empress recovered.
- 685.9.24 The emperor was unwell; scriptures were read in the Daikandaiji, Kawara-dera and Asuka-dera.
- 686.6.16 Special cloth gifts made to many high officials, including the *wajō* (distinguished monks) of the “four temples.” (Probably Asuka-dera, Kawara-dera, Tachibana-dera and Daikandaiji)
- 686.9.9 Emperor Tenmu died.
- 687.12.19 100th day service for Tenmu’s death at Daikandaiji, Asuka-dera, Kawara-dera, Toyura-dera and Sakata-dera.
- 688.1.8 Great public congregation held at Yakushiji.
- 697.7.29 Ministers and officials told to prepare for installation of Buddhist images (i.e. eye-opening ceremony).
- 698.10.4 Yakushiji nearly completed; priests ordered to occupy their quarters.
- 701.6.11 A Hata and a Kosobe were appointed “officials of the building of the Yakushiji.”
- 701.7.27 The offices (that supervise) palace building, the Daianji, and the Yakushiji in the political structure were elevated.
- 702.12.22 Empress Jitō died.
- 703.1.5 Maigre feast (*ōgami*) held in Daianji (former Daikandaiji), Yakushiji, Gankōji (former Asuka-dera) and Gūfukuji (former Kawara-dera).

Throughout the latter part of Tenmu’s reign the Daikandai-ji became the official court temple and was the locale of many court ceremonies, and during this time a

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great deal of use was made of the Kawara-dera, in its case, partly because of its geographical convenience and, otherwise, probable connection with Tenmu's mother. Several other temples are mentioned, but it was not until 688 that Yakushiji is mentioned, and then functioning only in Jitō's time.

Following the death of the empress, several ceremonies were conducted in the next five years in the Four Great Temples, the Yakushiji being one of them. It had set a new style with a pair of pagodas, the idea believed to be borrowed from the plan then current in Silla in Korea. Heijō (Nara) was founded in 710, and the Yakushiji was moved to the new capital in 718. It was assigned a significant location in the six *jō* two *bō* block, the newly-named Daianji accorded a similar location on the other side of the new city. The *Fusō ryakki* (A sketch of Japan) of the eleventh century notes that the pagodas were built in 730.<sup>7)</sup>

### Medieval History of the Temple

The medieval history of Yakushiji may be summarized briefly. In 973 (Tenroku 4), a fire that started in the Refectory that destroyed that dining hall, the Sutra Re-



pository, Bell Tower, Lecture Hall, some monks' quarters, Cloister, Middle Gate and Great South Gate. Taken literally, the Golden Hall and the two pagodas survived.

From the *Yakushiji engi* one learns that in 979 (Tengen 2) the basic structure and roofing for the rebuilding of the Lecture Hall were finished. In 986 (Kanwa 2) the Middle Gate was erected. Damage was inflicted by typhoon winds on the roof and upper structure of the Golden Hall in 989 (Eisō 1). Between 999 (Chōhō 1) and 1005 (Kankō 2) the Refectory was reconstructed.

Late Heian emperors and some aristocrats in Kyoto abdicated and erected temples for their retirement. For this they had their eye on ancient and suffering temples then living from hand to mouth. One of these retirement temples was the huge Hōjōji built by Fujiwara Michinaga, begun in 1020. When its only pagoda burned in 1058, the Hōjōji took two from the Yakushiji. Ishida Mosaku cites a Tempyō-period (722–48) record that says the Yakushiji had four pagodas (indicating that both the Fujiwara and Heijō temples were in operation).<sup>8)</sup> The two moved from the Yakushiji were dedicated in 1079 (Shōryaku 5)—these had to be the two from the Moto-Yakushiji—but, if one follows the chronology of the texts, these two and the Great South Gate were burned in 1117. Another dedication of new pagodas is recorded for 1132. Were these rebuilt, or is there a transcription error in copying documents? The Moto-Yakushiji certainly had no more to give and neither was moved from Heijō.

The civil war in 1528 (Kyōroku 1), when the area was controlled by Tsutsui Junko, devastated Yakushiji, fire wiping out the Golden Hall, the Lecture Hall and the west pagoda. The rescue of their icons was nothing short of miraculous. The Golden Hall was rebuilt around 1600, but until post-WWII tourism saved such temples, they lived a life of bare existence, primarily the object of pilgrimages, not made better by the pressures the Meiji government put on them. There is little to suggest that the triad of the Lecture Hall was visible to the public through these centuries, wherever it was. Ōe no Chikamichi, the perceptive pilgrim who wrote a diary of his visit to the old Nara temples in 1140, describes the *Kondō* Yakushi triad without reference to the other set.<sup>9)</sup>

An ambitious reconstruction program was planned in the 1970s to bring the Yakushiji back to its eighth century appearance. Successively, the Golden Hall (1976), west pagoda (1981), Middle Gate (1984), and sections of the Cloister were rebuilt. The temple has also constructed a whole new complex dedicated to Xuanzang (1991), the Chinese monk who spent about sixteen years in India and returned with twenty horses loaded with 1335 religious documents, which he spent the remainder of his life translating. This is because the text *Yakushiji engi* describes a Sai-in (western subtemple) of the temple, where its chief hall enshrined a painting of a Miroku triad. On the north side of the hall hung a painting of Xuanzang (602–64) translating sutras in the palace where he was honored by the emperor. In its modern history, when the Japanese army was in Nanjing in 1942, bones said to be those of Xuanzang were found and sent to Japan. They were preserved in a stone monument at the Jionji in Saitama, a Hossō temple. The Yakushiji negotiated for some as relics and has built the subtemple to memorialize him. From all indications, the last record in which this complex appeared is dated to 1780.<sup>10)</sup>

By way of comment, to return to the early dating problems, for some scholars, the 688 gathering recorded in the *Nihon shoki* marks the celebration for the completion of the temple. However, I look on it as a rallying event to garner support for the initial project, because the monks were not directed to move into their quarters until a decade later. Probably, as Jitō was aging, there was a concerted effort to finish the temple, hence the appointment of two skilled managers in 701 to ensure that this occurred, and raising the status of the offices meant more personnel and income, therefore more resources toward completing the project.

The 697 reference in the *Nihon shoki* is only to Buddhist images, but it was naturally thought that these were major ones, mostly likely the Yakushi triad. Critical to this is to discover how many of the Yakushiji buildings and images were moved to Heijō from its Fujiwara location, if at all. For long it was widely assumed that the entire temple was transplanted from there and rebuilt in Heijō, leaving an archaeological site that received the name Moto-Yakushiji (Original Yakushiji), but excavations in 1994 around the east pagoda recovered not only original eave-end tiles but also tiles from roof repairs extending into the late Nara and early Heian periods, assuring therefore that the pagoda was maintained as a functioning unit of the temple for at least two centuries.<sup>11)</sup> They were probably rather dilapidated by the time they were dismantled and relocated to Kyoto in 1079. Although the site of the Golden Hall was dug—scalped is a better word for it—many years ago, leaving the base stones of the columns (before archeologists realized how critical roof tiles are to dating), excavations along the south and east edges of the foundations of its platform in 1992 yielded 19 original tiles and one Nara period tile, meaning that it too had undergone repairs.<sup>12)</sup>

### **Transfer or New Temple?**

Alexander Soper, in his discussion of when and how the temple was moved, refers to Adachi's research in *Kokka*.<sup>13)</sup> Adachi Yasushi used *Chūyūki*, a record of activities at the court from 1087 to 1135 which outlines the history of the Hōjōji, one of the great Fujiwara temples constructed in the early eleventh century in Kyoto as mentioned earlier. After its pagoda burned in 1058, it was decided to move two pagodas from the Yakushiji.<sup>14)</sup> One supposes that to meet contemporary aesthetics they were reassembled there without their *mokoshi* or “skirt stories.” Then, this Hōjōji, with its pair of old pagodas, its many halls (including a Yakushi-dō) too extensive and expensive to maintain with a deteriorating political base, declined with Michinaga's descendants, was damaged in the wars over domination of Kyoto, and became largely defunct by the end of the fourteenth century.

Accordingly, as the capital moved north from Fujiwara to Heijō (710), to Nagaoka (784) and then to Heian (794), maintaining increasingly distant temples became more and more difficult. But parts of the Moto-Yakushiji were probably moved as original tiles have been found in excavations at the present Yakushiji, and the similarities of the two temples is beyond dispute. For instance, it is calculated that the platform for the Golden Hall of the Moto-Yakushiji had the dimensions of 29.5m on the north and south sides and 18.2m on the east and west sides, whereas the known dimensions for the platform of the present Yakushiji are 29.4m and 18.3m respec-

tively.<sup>15)</sup> The roof tiles of the Fujiwara palace and the Yakushiji were produced in the same kiln, a fact that indicates much contemporaneity and, of course, underscores the temple's political position.

The receptacle for the relics at the Moto-Yakushiji is in the center pole stone of the east pagoda, but it is in the center pole stone of the west pagoda at the Yakushiji. This odd switch has been an obvious fact since the west pagoda was destroyed in the sixteenth century. In the same style, typical of the Hakuho period, they both have a hole with smaller diameter below, larger at top, so as to hold a round lid as cover for the relics. Needless to say, this switch has caused considerable speculation. One, for example, was that only the east pagoda was moved to Heijō and was positioned as the west pagoda.<sup>16)</sup>

Older archaeologists thought that Moto-Yakushiji buildings had no *mokoshi*, as no base stones for such a surrounding porch system have been found, but in the 1994 excavation smaller roof tiles were also recovered, that is, 15cm in diameter as against 20cm diameter for normal Hakuho tiles, meaning they could have been only for a *mokoshi* system.<sup>17)</sup> As is well known, the *mokoshi* system of the present temple is one of the most striking features of the buildings today and was even impressive to the observant twelfth century pilgrim Ōe no Chikamichi. His diary speaks of every building having these porches.

It is by now clear that theories of the transfer have gone through a series of stages, from the general belief that the entire temple was uprooted and rebuilt in Nara in 718; the east pagoda only was moved and became the west pagoda in the Nara complex, as indicated by the location of the receptacle for the relics; to the theory that no buildings were transferred from the original site, but an entirely new temple was erected at Nara modeled on the original, the temple moved in name only. But, in fact, of the major temples moved to Heijō, only the Yakushiji kept its original name. Why was it not renamed like the others if a new temple was built in Heijō? In 679, Tenmu seems to have either encouraged or obligated temples to take Buddhist-style names. While titles were not consistent, the earliest temples tended to be anchored geographically or took the family name: Asuka-dera, Kawara-dera, Tachibana-dera and so on. If moved it was a good occasion to be renamed. The Yakushiji was always identified by its specific function.

When the Lecture Hall was opened to the public in 2003, the Buddha was designated to be Miroku (Maitreya). Yakushiji is today the leading temple of the Hossō sect in which Miroku was historically its chief deity. To the best of one's knowledge, from the oldest documents, the ICP icon was known as Miroku, as is explained in the temple's guide book because in the Tempyō period there was a *shoji* painting of Miroku Paradise as the chief icon of the *Shō-dō* (Main Hall) of the Sai-in, then its chief hall.<sup>18)</sup> Then the guide book says the ICP triad is known to have been the icon of the Miroku-dō of the Sai-in. Following that the triad's Buddha was renamed Amida in the Edo period when the Lecture Hall was rebuilt because the original Lecture Hall had enshrined the embroidery image as its main icon. It was designated Yakushi in the Meiji period when the documents were reexamined and was thought to have been the main image of the Moto-Yakushiji. But with the reconstruction of the Lecture Hall, the image was redesignated as Miroku, and elevated to the highest

position the temple can give it, which one suspects was both a spiritual and a practical decision.

If it is true that the triad was not initially designated Yakushi, then the temple already had one. But it does take a modern and cavalier attitude toward symbolism to condone the arbitrary switching, even if demeanor, pose, hand gestures and any other features have few distinguishing features.

Early assumptions that the ICP triad was the *sanzon* of the Moto-Yakushiji's Golden Hall and, correspondingly, the NT triad was the *sanzon* of the Yakushiji's Golden Hall are quite understandable, but the latter triad has had a history of being categorized in the Hakuho (645–710) or pre-Nara style, which is when the first temple was built. More recent scholarship has countered this traditional designation and placed it in the early Nara period, therefore associating it with the Nara temple (about 720) from the time of its production.<sup>19)</sup> And technical analysis confirms this, as explained later.

### Theories on the Location of the Triad

The documentation on the ICP Lecture Hall triad requires ingenious interpretation. The greatest effort to sort out the possibilities was made by Hasegawa Sei in 1984,<sup>20)</sup> but research on its physical features published in 1997 has changed the picture drastically.<sup>21)</sup>

Hasegawa deals with three theories as to why the triad came to be in the Lecture Hall. The 1699 (Genroku 12) *Garan kyūki shōbatsu* (Citation from old chronicles of *garan*) says it was originally the main set in the Moto-Yakushiji, but was moved to Hachijō-mura and temporarily put into the Yakushi-dō there. It was brought to the Saien-dō of the Yakushiji in the middle Eiroku years (1558–69). This is the document the content of which Hasegawa mistrusts because he thinks it was written to deceive the *bakufu* into giving permission for the temple's hoped-for reconstruction program. He then cites another document of 1780 (Annei 9) that the statues were moved to the Lecture Hall in order to repair badly damaged parts. In 1807 (Bunka 4) the temple again requested permission to rebuild the Lecture Hall. Permission was not granted.

The next theory requires knowing the pessimistic religious mood in the early eleventh century. *Mappō*, the End of the Law, expected in Japan in 1053, would see the disintegration of Buddhist philosophy and ritual paraphernalia, leading to drastic countermeasures in an attempt to preserve them. Objects from the size of monumental Buddhist statues down to sutras and jewels were buried in the ground.<sup>22)</sup> This theory depends on a text called *Uetsuki dōjō engi* (Story of founding of Uetsuki training center) of 1705 (Hōei 2). According to this document, during the Ōei era (1394–1427) a man named Iji Saburō in the town of Kujō dug a *jōroku* (16-*shaku*, i.e. large) Yakushi image in the mountains and gave it to the Yakushiji. Another document *Tamon-in nikki* (Diary of Tamon-in) for the 2nd day of the 11th month of Tenshi 14 (1586) says there is in the Yakushi-dō in Nishinokyō a large Buddhist statue which was dug up at the time of Junkei (man's name). The head of the statue fell off in a big earthquake. This triad constituted the main statues of the Uetsuki-dera. By way of comment here, the area where the events took place is Kōriyama, only three miles south of the modern city of Nara. Names like Hachijō and Kujō (eight and



nine) are remnants of the block designations of the ancient city.

In the third theory, the triad owes its position as the triad of the Lecture Hall to a text of 1780 (Annei 9) *On todoke moshi age kōjōshō* (Explanation document kindly requesting improvements). The triad was kept in the *Kōdō*, but after the fire of the Kyōroku era (1528–32) was temporarily put in the Miroku-dō of the Sai-in. It was moved again in the Annei era (1772–81) to the *Kōdō* which was subsequently rebuilt.

Hasegawa then turns to documents dealing with the neighboring Tōshōdaiji which for centuries was subsidiary to the Yakushiji, a temple located in the next old city block to the north. The text which describes the founding of the temple, *Konryū engi* (History of construction), says the main statues of the Tōshōdaiji were a *jōroku* Miroku triad made (cast) by a priest from Tang China. In another text of 1018 (Kanrei 2), an unidentified pilgrim's circuit of the Seven Great temples, *Shichidaiji junrei shiki*, says the main statues of the Lecture Hall were a Miroku triad, and quotes a story that they were once the main images of the Takada-dera. The bodhisattva on the right of the Buddha, Daimyōsō, was stolen and when the thief set out to melt it down it cried out, causing the perpetrator to abandon his plan. And two other documents, one datable between 1202 and 1344 and the other of 1701 (Genroku 14) tell this same story of theft of the bodhisattva and its vocal reaction to the start of incineration. The right arm and drapery were so damaged they had to be replaced. Wooden ones were attached. After the Takada-dera was severely damaged the triad was moved to the Lecture Hall of the Tōshōdaiji.

The documents refer to bronze images. The statues in the Tōshōdaiji are wooden, so they are replacements for the ones referred to in these first two texts, according to Hasegawa. By way of explanation here, the Takada-dera, now an insignificant archaeological site in Sakurai city, was the temple of the Takada clan which went down in infamous historical record in the *Shoku nihongi* in 763 for the killing of its monk(s) and the jailing of the murderer.<sup>23)</sup>

Then, continuing, the Buddha was kept in the Amida-dō of Tōshōdaiji, but this hall was destroyed in an earthquake in 1596 (Keichō 1). It must have survived the quake and been put elsewhere, but when the Amida-dō was rebuilt in 1610 it was too small for the large triad so it should have been put in another building. In effect, Hasegawa believes these references to Tōshōdaiji images describe the ICP triad in the Lecture Hall of the Yakushiji. Among the arguments are these: a *jōroku* gilt bronze triad; the Buddha called Miroku (simply because it was housed in the Miroku-dō); one of the bodhisattvas named Daimyōsō (the title for it being taken from an old illustrated manuscript, *Miroku bosatsu gazō-shū* (Portrait of Miroku bodhisattva) in which this bodhisattva is illustrated in this gesture); the right arm and drapery of this bodhisattva have been replaced. From textual evidence, between the Bunroku (1592–95) and Genroku periods (1688–1703) Yakushiji priests performed many ritual activities for the Tōshōdaiji, reinforcing the view that the latter temple was under the aegis of the Yakushiji.

Let's return to the rebuilding of the Tōshōdaiji's Amida Hall after the 1596 earthquake. Only financial difficulties would have prevented it from being rebuilt in its original size, but from that point it could no longer accommodate the triad. The *Yakushiji engi kokushi* (History of the founding of Yakushiji) of 1755 (Hōreki 5) says

the ICP triad was moved to the Miroku-dō of the Sai-in. This probably occurred between 1591 (Tenshō 19) and 1602 (Keichō 7), although a specific date is not given, but it could follow that 1596 quake. At some later date it was installed in the Lecture Hall, where it is today.

In brief, through a circuitous route to the Yakushiji, the triad was cast in the Chinese fashion by a Chinese priest at the Tōshōdaiji, moved around, possibly temporarily loaned to the Takada-dera for lack of space, and during a period of the Tōshōdaiji's misfortunes was transferred to the neighboring Yakushiji, ending up in the Lecture Hall as its *sanzon*. Incidentally, the eleventh century *Yakushiji engi* describes the Lecture Hall as seven by four bays, larger than it is today, but one does not know if the *engi* is describing the original hall or a replacement.

Hasegawa's theory is persuasive until one looks at the Tōshōdaiji icons. The Tōshōdaiji's initial history is unusually straightforward. Emperor Shōmu invited a qualified Chinese priest to perform ordination ceremonies. Ganjin volunteered and after several efforts he arrived in 754, performed the ceremony and was given land and a palace building belonging to Prince Niitabe to start his temple. The building became the Lecture Hall of the Tōshōdaiji, the temple then constructed between 759 and 764. For a few years it was just called Tōji (Chinese temple). Ganjin died in 763 at the age of 77.<sup>24)</sup>

In his entourage of 24 colleagues were skilled craftsmen, including sculptors knowledgeable in the latest style and techniques in China. All the main statues of the temple are made in the so-called dry-lacquer technique (*dakkatsu kanshitsu*), quite new for Japan. The main statue is a Vairocana Buddha, even larger (303cm) than the two NT and ICP bronze statues of the Yakushiji and, while the pedestal bears several scribbled Japanese names on the inside boards (probably helpers in the project), the temple's history credits Chinese priests Ijing (Gisei), Tanjing (Donsei) and Sicha (Shitaku) with making it.<sup>25)</sup> The seated statue of Ganjin, kept in a separate building, is in the same technique, perhaps made around the time of his death and therefore the oldest portrait statue in Japan. The huge Senjū Kannon (Thousand-armed bodhisattva; 5.36m) and Yakushi Buddha (3.68m) on the platform, acting as the Buddha's bodhisattvas, are both in an advanced form of the technique, involving the use of a wood core (*mokushin kanshitsu*) instead of a wooden framework over which the figure was modeled. This history of the temple therefore in both tradition and extant sculptures is associated only with a new Chinese technique and at no point mentions or suggests the presence of cast bronze statues. With Emperor Shōmu's project of creating an oversize Buddha for the Tōdaiji, begun in 745, the availability of copper and tin for other uses must have been drastically curtailed, perhaps partially explaining the remarkable economy of ore used for the ICP Yakushiji's Lecture Hall Buddha, as explained later. In fact, the imperial demand for copper should have had some bearing on the rising popularity of the other techniques.

When the Lecture Hall was opened to the public in 2003, a description of repairs made on the images was published.<sup>26)</sup> First of all, the statues had been in such bad condition that major repairs were needed before they could be put on public display, therefore explaining the temple's inability to show them. A large crack had widened

in the back of the Buddha and the two bodhisattvas were so distorted they were unable to stand alone. In a four-year process begun in 1993, as the building itself was being rehabilitated to its original form, their repairs include supports by iron rods from the back wall. The head of Daimyōsō was so badly damaged it was thought best to replace it, so a copy of the other was made for it.

Most surprising were the characteristics of the casting. It was cast in what Washizuka Hiromitsu called the “clay-mold” technique. Instead of wax, fine clay was used for the model employing piece-molds, resulting in far thinner walls.<sup>27</sup> Running at about half the expected weight, and so rough that an average thickness of the walls was difficult to measure—about one centimeter—imperfections everywhere had to be reworked, even in the face of the Buddha. The most significant discovery during the repairs was relative to dating. In the clay remaining inside the right arm of the Buddha a fragment of roof tile with embedded cloth imprint is in the style of the Nara period. The imperfect casting may have been used as supporting the conventional view that the triad was an earlier, Hakuho-period product, but it can now be definitely dated near the middle of the eighth century.

Once it was clear that the ICP triad is later than the NT Yakushi triad and the latter had probably been used as its model, the similarities have become far more apparent. And if the NT Yakushi triad was its model, it is likely that it was made by bronze casters long familiar with the latter, perhaps even from the same workshop now struggling with a new technique. The difficulties in casting the big Buddha for the Tōdaiji are well known. It was not the size, but the technique that was so difficult to master.

The most striking differences between the two triads is in the way the drapery and raised surfaces were handled. These were flattened out to be rather devoid of any reality, more stylized and less related to the falling folds of a costume. The designer seems not to have known what to do with the undergarment that appears as a band across the chest, which here is a smooth undefined surface, unlike the lined torso of the Golden Hall Yakushi. The broad and flat shoulders act like a shelf for a stretched torso. This way of layering on the drapery was the misleading feature for dating, making it appear to be closer to the Asuka than the Nara style and therefore quite acceptable as the original Buddha of the Moto-Yakushiji. But this is not to say that the drapery patterning is not without elegance. Graceful curves may not reach the grandiloquence of the NT Yakushi's drapery and create a similar robustness, but they give it a simple full-bodied, comely form. Accents like little sashes or hem frills do not exist. Only very close inspection reveals the surface flaws. It is, in fact, a superb example of casting.

One odd feature is that the outer garment covers the left foot. Clay images in the four groups of diorama scenes on the first floor of the pagoda of the Hōryūji, made in 711, have this same kind of overlap. As for the head, the bump (*ushnisha*) on top is quite low, and the eyes are unusually strongly articulated, in this case by outlining, as are other facial features. Strong eyebrow lines continue down to define the shape of the nose, and the upper lip and chin grooves are deep. The hand gestures of the two Buddhas are the same, but the Lecture Hall image, in keeping with a wholly simpler program, lacks the fine engravings on the right hand and left foot. Wrap-

around drapery of the hips emphasizes the wide-spread knees, leaving unshaped legs.

The bodhisattvas, perhaps more than the Buddha, have been so badly mistreated by the temple's calamities, it may be unjust to characterize them. The high bumps on the heads are hidden by tall plaques attached to the crown above the ears. The faces—one head is a copy of the other—are flat as though masked. A jeweled necklace is the only ornamental detail below the foreheads, other than upper arm and wrist bands. Torsos are short, legs are long, bodies are slightly bent and rather stiff. As they are now, repaired or replaced, the hand positions are quite different, and arm scarfs touch the lotus base of one, but not of the other. All in all, they seem less comfortable in their positions than do the two of the Golden Hall Buddha, but one grants that the restorers did what they could.

### Conclusion

How is one to judge the reliability and accuracy and then the applicability of the narratives and dates in the many scattered documents? Arguably, the best way is to include all, whether direct or indirect, and weave through the time to see if a coherent chronology can be extracted. Supplementing those already dealt with are further dates and events taken from the chronological list in the Yakushiji's exhibition catalog for the 1300th commemoration of the death of Emperor Tenmu (d. 686).<sup>28)</sup>

718	Temple moved to 6 <i>jō</i> 2 <i>bō</i> in Ukyō of Heijō.
722	<i>Sōgō</i> (high ranked priests) ordered to live at Yakushi-ji. A (memorial) Miroku image was made for Emperor Tenmu and a Shaka image for Empress Jitō.
730	East pagoda built.
973	Major fire: destroyed all but the Golden Hall and the pagodas.
979	Lower story of Lecture Hall built and its roof tiles put in place.
986	Middle Gate built.
989	Upper story of Golden Hall collapsed from a typhoon-strength wind.
999–1005	Refectory rebuilt.
1006–1013	South Great Gate built and two statues made for the Middle Gate.
1014	Priest Hosei (head priest) built Octagonal Hall (Hakkaku-dō) of Tō-in.
1053	<i>Mappō</i> .
1058	Hōjōji in Kyoto took two pagodas from (Moto-) Yakushiji.
1095	Buddhist relics dug up in the Moto-Yakushiji pagoda site.
1140	Ōe no Chikamichi stopped at Yakushiji on his pilgrimage of the Seven Great Temples of Nara.
1285	Tō-in-dō reconstructed.
1361	Earthquake destroyed Golden Hall, both east and west pagodas, and Middle Gate, Cloister, Sai-in and others collapsed.
1394–1427	A <i>jōroku</i> Yakushi dug up and given to Yakushiji.
1445	Powerful wind caused collapse of the Golden Hall and South

	Great Gate. Framework for a temporary Golden Hall was erected.
1512	South Gate built, the former West Gate of the Sai-in.
1524	Letter written for raising funds for rebuilding of Golden Hall and both east and west pagodas. Golden Hall reconstructed.
1528	Civil war fire destroyed Golden Hall, Lecture Hall, Middle Gate, west pagoda, monks' quarters and other buildings. Triad had been in Lecture Hall; put in Miroku-dō of Sai-in temporarily.
1558–69	Buddha triad brought to Saien-dō of Yakushiji from Hachijō-mura.
1596	Strong earthquake in area; no record of damage at Yakushiji.
1591–1602?	Triad moved to Miroku-dō of Sai-in.
1600	Framework of Golden Hall erected and its roof tiles laid.
1644	East pagoda repaired.
1650	West Gate of Sai-in was moved to become the South Gate.
1733	The foundation of the Tō-in-dō was raised and the building reoriented toward the west.
1772–81	Triad moved to Lecture Hall.
1852	The Lecture Hall was finished.
1898	East pagoda dismantling and repair begun.
1923	Tō-in-dō repaired.
1945	North Gate and East Gate collapsed.
1952	East pagoda and South Gate repaired.
1976	Golden Hall finished. The belfry was moved, and six blocks of the west monks' quarters were reconstructed.
1980	East monks' quarters reconstructed.
1981	West pagoda finished.
1984	Middle Gate finished, and building of Genjō Sanzō-in (Xuanzang subtemple) started.

The section on the Lecture Hall's triad in this exhibition catalog mentioned above provides a standard view of these Buddhist images before they had been restored and the building reopened. Written from the temple's viewpoint, using the Meiji designation as Yakushi, and the bodhisattvas as Nikkō and Gakkō, it would be impolitic to suggest that the triad had ever been anywhere but in the possession of the temple, either the Moto-Yakushiji of Fujiwara or the Yakushiji of Heijō.

Now that the mid-eighth century date is settled, one deals only with the temple in Nara. Around the middle of the century the temple had the wealth and political status to add a Sai-in, a complex of buildings outside the normal garan, dedicated to the Chinese monk Xuanzang whose studies in India led him to *Vijñānavāda* teachings, and from whose school the Japanese monks brought over its philosophy, known in Japan as Hossō. Among its notable proponents were Dōshō, returning in 654 and Gembō, returning in 735.

Hossō was one of the *Nantō Rokushū* (Six Sects of the Southern Capital), as later writers called them. There was much overlapping among these "schools," three of them disappearing, but Hossō remained strong, several temples officially subscribing to its tenets. Dōshō is particularly known for introducing cremation, and Empress



Jitō was the first ruler to be cremated (704), therefore making it socially acceptable. Some of Hossō's attraction was in the fact that it embraced all the main Buddhas perhaps as early as the seventh century: Amida, Miroku, Shaka and Yakushi. This fact also explains the seemingly arbitrary designations, a situation made more likely by the *mudrā* (hand gestures) not being clearly specific to each Buddha.<sup>29)</sup>

Gembō was in China almost two decades (716–35) and returned with a massive amount of Chinese documents and as an ardent advocate of *Yogacārā*, the philosophical support for Hossō. He was a favorite at the court and was appointed *sōjō*, the highest ecclesiastical rank. Hossō then became a politically powerful sect, called *Rokushū no chōja* (the senior of the sects). This made the Yakushiji the head temple of the sect and the center for honoring the founders and historic missionaries of its doctrines. The Sai-in was certainly built in Gembō's time, and on the north wall of its main hall was hung a painting of Xuanzang in his most characteristic pose, translating documents he had brought back from India.

First, one should trace the vicissitudes of the Sai-in, although the documents will naturally say less about it than they do about the *garan* of the temple itself. The ICP triad should have been made for the Sai-in around 750 and installed as Miroku. The Sai-in may have been a single structure, a Miroku hall, within a walled compound, entered by one or two gates. The major fire of 973 left it unscathed.

However, the earthquake of 1361 caused the "collapse" of the Sai-in, meaning that it could be re-erected by using primarily original materials. It probably was, but of less importance, as its outer compound structures became expendable. The West Gate was moved over to become the South Gate of the *garan* in 1512. According to the records this happened again in 1650, so whether it is a transcription error or history repeating itself after a replacement had been built, one will never know. But the civil war fire of 1528, which ruined all but the east pagoda of the *garan*—where the ICP triad had been kept in the Lecture Hall—left at least the Miroku-dō of the Sai-in intact, as the triad was then moved there temporarily. Did it stay there? Another document implies that around 1600 it was "moved" to the Miroku-dō. The inference at this point is that the Sai-in had been acting as a storehouse while the Lecture Hall was being rebuilt. By 1780 the triad had been installed in the Lecture Hall and the Sai-in disappears from the records, probably cannibalized beyond redemption.

Second and the purpose of this survey, to trace the history of the triad. In the swelling tide of affluence of the mid-eighth century, the Yakushiji, headquarters of the most popular Buddhist sect, added to its store of icons and had a bronze Miroku triad made for its west subtemple in the new casting technique. The fire of 973 may not have touched it, but the specter of mid-eleventh-century *Mappō* must have frightened the priests into long conferences over how to preserve it.

Was it actually buried to survive *Mappō*? If it was the question has to be asked why it was and the NT Yakushi was not, unless the one dug up (some time around 1400), which is just called a "jōroku Yakushi," was the NT triad. But one document says it was put in the Lecture Hall. The NT triad would have been put in the Golden Hall which did exist at the time, only collapsing in 1445. In other words, the NT triad was already there. Was the ICP triad then considered more important, or Miroku regarded as more vulnerable? In any event, random misfortunes undoubt-

edly occurred, but these could not be attributed to a single overpowering force. Some three centuries elapsed before a natural calamity (earthquake of 1361) did any damage. Objects in full view were still intact after *Mappō* and, given time to be on the safe side, if memory remained, the more valuable icons were recovered. If true, the ICP triad would have been underground about three hundred years, but it would not have been very far away and not forgotten, because when it was recovered it was given to the Yakushiji and put in the Lecture Hall. The Sai-in, therefore, at that time, must not have been physically able to accommodate it.

The local battles of around 1528 that included the destruction of the Lecture Hall means that the Sai-in survived, but was doing little more than providing storage space, as the triad was put there only temporarily. It may have been this early sixteenth century disaster which caused the most damage to the triad when it had to be rescued from the burning (or seriously threatened) Lecture Hall. Then, was it actually put in a smaller temple around the middle of the century? A temple with space which that survived the wars intact? Did the Yakushiji need a custodian of its icons until its major buildings were usable again? Documents dealing with the Uetsukidera claim it did (before 1586).

There is a major hiatus of three-quarters of a century after the civil war fire, until the Golden Hall is said to be under construction in 1600. For practical use, it would be the first major building to be rebuilt. At that time the triad was put in the Miroku-dō of the Sai-in, which therefore had been rehabilitated, and it was back home, but some time around 1780 it was moved to the Lecture Hall, the Sai-in apparently no longer a functioning temple unit. If the documents have any veracity at this point, the Lecture Hall was a long time in the process of reconstruction, not finished until 1852. The required permission from the *bakufu* had not been forthcoming and many temples were in a relatively impoverished state, the Yakushiji no exception. During this time the Lecture Hall would not have been available for normal use. As part of the temple's massive restoration program in the last half century, the Lecture Hall was reopened in 2003, where the bronze Miroku Buddha and bodhisattvas have been for more than two centuries, and can now be seen, ideally suited in scale and iconographically.

#### Notes

- 1) Asano Kiyoshi and Mori H., *Nara no jiin no Tempyō no chōkoku* (Sculpture of Nara Temples of the Tempyō Period), *Genshi nihon no bijutsu* 3 (Shōgakukan, 1968); Jean Buhot, *Histoire des Arts du Japon I: Des Origins à 1350* (Paris: Vanoest, 1949); Katsuki T., "Hakuhō Sculpture, a Reappraisal," *Oriental Art*, New series XI/3, 147–57, 1965; J. Edward Kidder, *Masterpieces of Japanese Sculpture* (Bijutsu shuppan-sha, 1961); Kuno Takeshi, *Nihon no chōkoku* (Sculpture of Japan), (Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1960); Machida Kōichi, *Nihon kodai chōkoku gairon* (Introduction to Japanese Sculpture of the Early Period), (Chūō kōron bijutsu shuppan-sha, 1974); Noma Seiroku, *Nihon no chōkoku: Jōko-Kamakura* (Sculpture of Japan: Antiquity to the Kamakura Period), (Bijutsu shuppan-sha, 1960); Tokyo National Museum ed., *Pageant of Japanese Art: Sculpture*, (Tōto shuppan-sha, 1953–54); Uehara Shōichi, *Asuka-Hakuhō chōkoku* (Sculpture of Asuka and Hakuhō Periods), *Nihon no Bijutsu* 21, (Shibundō, 1968); William Watson, *Sculpture of Japan from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Century* (The Studio Ltd., 1959); Karl With, *Japanische Plastik* (Berlin: Ostasiatische Zeitschrift, 1929).
- 2) Hasegawa Sei, "Kōdō sanzō no Yakushiji inyū ni tsuite," *Tsukuba daigaku geijutsu kenkyū hōkoku* 6, 1984, 5.

- 3) Kuno Takeshi and Inoue Tadashi, "Study of the Triad in the Kondō Yakushi-ji," *Acta Asiatica* I, (Tōhō Gakkai, 1960), 96–97.
- 4) Hasegawa, "Kōdō sanzō no Yakushiji inyū ni tsuite," 2.
- 5) Kuno and Inoue, "Study of the Triad in the Kondō Yakushi-ji," 96–97.
- 6) W. G. Aston trans., *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from Earliest Times to A.D. 697* II (Tuttle, 1972), 348–423; J. B. Snellen trans., *Shoku nihongi* (Chronicles of Japan, continued from 697–791 A.D.), *Transactions: Asiatic Society of Japan*, 2nd series 11, 151–239.
- 7) J. Edward Kidder, "The Chronology of the Early Yakushi-ji," *Studies in Indo-Asian Art and Culture* I (New Delhi, 1972), 116.
- 8) Ishida Mosaku, *Gekkō bosatsu ten* (Exhibition of Gekkō bodhisattva), *Mainichi shinbun: Sōkan hyakunen kinen* (Commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first publication), (Mitsukoshi, 1971).
- 9) Tokyo National Museum, *Pageant: Architecture and Gardens*, (Tōto shuppan, 1958), 72.
- 10) Hasegawa, "Kōdō sanzō no Yakushiji inyū ni tsuite," 3.
- 11) *Gekkan bunkazai hakkutsu shutsudo jōhō* (GBHSJ) 94/5, 75.
- 12) *GBHSJ* 92/5, 88.
- 13) Alexander Soper, *The Evolution of Buddhist Architecture in Japan* (Princeton, 1942), 46–47, note 80.
- 14) Ishida Mosaku, *Gekkō bosatsu ten*.
- 15) *GBHSJ* 92/5, 88.
- 16) Soper, *The Evolution of Buddhist Architecture in Japan*, 46–47, note 80.
- 17) *GBHSJ* 5/94, 75.
- 18) *Yakushiji: Hossō-shū Daihonzan*, Tokyo, n.d.
- 19) Matsuura Masaaki, *Asuka Hakuho no butsu-zō* (Buddhist images of Asuka and Hakuho periods), *Nihon no bijutsu* 455 (Shibundō, 2004), 75–79; Donald McCallum, *Hakuho Sculpture* (University of Washington Press, 2012), 88, 91–92.
- 20) Hasegawa, "Kōdō sanzō no Yakushiji inyū ni tsuite," 2–22.
- 21) Nedachi Kensuke, *Shūkan Asahi hyakka—Nihon no kokuhō* 5, (Asahi shinbun shuppan, 1997), 166.
- 22) Numerous sutra mounds have been excavated: Sakazume Hideichi, *Zuroku rekishi kōkogaku no kiso chishiki* (Illustrated Basic Information on Historic Archaeology), (Kashiwa shobō, 1980), 98–102; and, for examples, the report of a large hole under the floor of the Sutra Repository in Hōryūji containing an Amida of *jōroku* size: Kidder, *The Lucky Seventh: Early Hōryū-ji and its Time*, Hachiro Yuasa Memorial Museum, (International Christian University, 1999), 370; the seated bronze Shaka of the Jindaiji in Tokyo dug up there in the early twentieth century: Matsuyama Tetsuo, "Jindaiji dōzō shaka nyorai zō ni tsuite" (Concerning the bronze image of Shaka Buddha at Jindaiji), Bukkyō geijutsukai ed., *Bukkyō geijutsu* 133, (Mainichi sinbunsha, 1980), 63–70.
- 23) Kajikawa Toshi, "Nara jidai no sangaku jin" (Mountain temples of the Nara period), *Kikan kōkogaku* 34, (Yūzankaku, 1991), 36.
- 24) Oka Minoru, *Nara no Tera* (Temples of Nara), *Nihon no bijutsu* 7, (Heibonsha, 1965) 39–43; Kanaoka Shūyū, *Koji meisatsu jiten* (Dictionary of old and famous temples), (Tōkyōdō shuppan, 1970), 250–53.
- 25) Tokyo National Museum, *Pageant of Japanese Art: Sculpture*, 102.
- 26) Nedachi, *Shūkan Asahi hyakka—Nihon no kokuhō* 5, 166.
- 27) Washizuka Hiromitsu, "Techniques of Early Buddhist Sculpture in Japan," in *Transmitting the Forms of Divinity: Early Buddhist Art from Korea and Japan* (Japan Society, 2003), 134–35.
- 28) Yakushiji, *Yakushiji: Hakuho saiken e no michi* (Road to reconstruction in Hakuho style), (Asuka-en, 1986), 128–29. The chronological list includes the sources of the dates and information: 284–85.
- 29) The *Nihon shoki* says that in 648 four Buddhas were installed in the pagoda of Shitennōji (Aston, *Nihongi* II, 230). These were probably different Buddhas. Regarding designations, the four Buddhas of the wall paintings in the Golden Hall of Hōryūji are still being argued, which I believe were painted around 725 (Kidder, *The Lucky Seventh*, 332–38).