

Ueno Toshogu Shrine: *Shaden* (Main Building)

The Ueno Toshogu Shrine main building (*shaden*) is elaborately decorated with gold leaf, lacquer, and a vast array of intricate sculptures. It was built in 1651 on the orders of shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu (1604–1651), who considered the shrine's original building insufficiently impressive for a sanctuary enshrining his grandfather, the great warlord Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616) who was deified in the Shinto pantheon. Iemitsu had the main building reconstructed in the imposing *gongen-zukuri* style, in which a shrine's worship hall (*haiden*) and main sanctuary (*honden*) are both under one roof, connected by a narrow corridor (*ishi no ma*) to form a building in the shape of the letter H. This style required a high level of architectural skill, but Iemitsu spared no expense—as is evident also in the building's walls and doors, which are covered entirely with gold leaf.

The building's exterior features a wide variety of colorful sculptures depicting mainly animals and plants. These include creatures from Chinese and Indian mythology, such as guardian lions (*shishi*) and the phoenix (Ch. *fenghuang*; Jp. *ho-o*), as well as peonies and pine branches, long considered auspicious in Japan. Tremendous effort and expense were invested to link Ueno Toshogu to the splendor of Nikko Toshogu, the main Toshogu shrine and burial site of Tokugawa Ieyasu in what is now Tochigi Prefecture, north of Tokyo. At Ueno Toshogu, the common people of Edo (present-day Tokyo) who often could not afford the trip to Nikko could be encouraged to pray for the spirit of Ieyasu on appropriately striking premises. While the Ueno Toshogu shrine building is slightly smaller than its counterpart in Nikko, its beauty and state of preservation rival that of the sanctuary on which it was modeled. The building is now a designated Important Cultural Property.