

Yakushidō (Honjidō) (Important Cultural Property)

The Yakushidō has associations with both Shinto and Buddhism. It is the largest structure within the grounds of Tōshōgū Shrine, yet it is part of Rinnōji Temple. Its central deity, Yakushi Nyorai (Buddha of Healing), is considered to be the *honji*, or “true form,” of the deified spirit of Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616), the first Tokugawa shogun. This gave this building its alternate name of Honjidō (Hall of the True Form).

The structure was built in 1636 and restored after a fire in 1961. Further renovations were carried out in 2013.

Twelve Heavenly Generals of Yakushi Nyorai

The 12 generals that serve and protect Yakushi Nyorai were originally Hindu deities that were incorporated into Buddhism as protective warriors. They represent the Twelve Vows of Yakushi Nyorai—a series of covenants made by Yakushi Nyorai to aid all sentient beings. Each general wears one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac in his crown. Behind each crown is the Buddhist wheel of life, representing the cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Singing Dragon

The large dragon on the ceiling of the Yakushidō is a restoration created by the artist Katayama Nanpū (1887–1980). The original was painted by Kanō Yasunobu (1614–1685), a renowned master of the Kanō school of painting, but it was lost in a fire in 1961. The acoustics of the building give the dragon its name: a clap directly under the dragon’s head will echo throughout the sanctuary for several seconds.

Inner Sanctuary of the Yakushidō (Important Cultural Property)

The altar of the Yakushidō extends along the length of the back wall. In the center is Yakushi Nyorai, enshrined in an opulent structure with a curved-gable roof. His attendants, Nikkō (Bodhisattva of Sunlight) and Gakkō (Bodhisattva of Moonlight) stand on either side. Nikkō holds a staff topped with a red disc representing the sun, and Gakkō holds a staff topped with a white disc representing the moon. Six of the Twelve Heavenly Generals stand along either side of the main altar.