

Sutra Repository

The Sutra Repository stores 768 sacred texts, but it is unlike any standard library. The building houses an eight-sided rotating structure with 96 drawers on each side. This is a reference to the Buddhist view of the natural order of things being like “the turning of the wheel of the law”—the “law” referred to being the words preached by Shakyamuni Buddha during his lifetime and recorded in sacred texts. Indeed, the structure in which the texts are stored in the Sutra Repository allows for a literal “turning of wheel of the law.” Physically rotating the structure is believed to generate good karma for the turner, increasing their chances of escaping the endless cycles of earthly rebirth in the next life.

The storage structure appears to have been turned little over the years, however, and the repository as a whole may seem slightly different from the rest of Ninnaji’s architecture. The building was constructed in the Edo period (1603–1868), when Zen Buddhism enjoyed widespread popularity. While Ninnaji has never been a Zen temple, the influence of Zen architecture can clearly be seen in this Shingon-school building.