

## **Kairyuoji Temple**

Kairyuoji Temple was originally established in the Asuka period (552–645) to enshrine Bishamonten, a protective Buddhist deity. Fujiwara no Fuhito (659–720), a powerful member of the imperial court, built a residence here that encompassed the temple compound. In 731, his daughter, Empress Komyo (701–760), renamed the temple Kairyuoji, literally “Sea Dragon King Temple.”

An early temple narrative relates that the eighth-century Buddhist priest Genbo had an important part in shaping Kairyuoji’s history. Genbo traveled to Tang Dynasty China to study and acquire Buddhist sutra scrolls. On his return trip, his small fleet of ships sailed into a fierce storm. Genbo continuously chanted sutras, including the Sea Dragon King sutra, to see his ship to safety. He returned to Kairyuoji with his precious cargo of 5,000 sutra scrolls, became head priest, and established Japan’s first sutra-copying center. The temple was named after the Sea Dragon King sutra.

Since then, Kairyuoji has survived various periods of decline, sustaining damage during the Onin War (1467–1477), the Keicho Earthquake (1614), and the anti-Buddhist movement of the 1870s. Kairyuoji was most recently revived after World War II. Today, it houses a number of Important Cultural Properties, including the Statue of Eleven-Headed Kannon and the Five-Story Pagoda. Many visitors pray for safety as they cross the seas on their travels or to study abroad.