

Saishoji Temple

Saishoji is a medieval Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land) Buddhist sanctuary located just west of central Omori. The oldest building on its grounds is the sizable main hall, the inner part of which dates to 1739, but Saishoji is more famous for its distinctive sutra repository. Storing the temple's sacred texts, this structure is decorated with *kote-e*, or plaster relief pictures, an art form that flourished in the Iwami region from the Meiji era (1868–1912) to the late 1930s, in the years before World War II. *Kote-e* were often used to decorate both temple buildings and the homes and storehouses of rich merchants. They usually featured auspicious imagery such as dragons, which were believed to drive away fire and evil spirits, and rabbits, which symbolized fertility and success in business. The popularity of Iwami plasterwork reached as far as Tokyo and Osaka, and artisans from the region were hired to decorate structures such as the National Diet Building and the residence of the crown prince.

The *kote-e* at Saishoji are the work of Matsuura Eikichi (1858–1927), considered one of the greatest masters of plaster art. Created after the artist turned 60 in 1918, the images include the mythological bird sometimes referred to as the Chinese phoenix (*ho-o*; Chinese: *fenghuang*); peonies, considered the “king of flowers” in Chinese mythology; and chrysanthemums, after the flower that adorns the imperial family crest and is a symbol of the state, depicted on everything from the Japanese passport to the 50-yen coin. Matsuura was a native of Nima, a town on the Sea of Japan coast near Iwami Ginzan. His illustrious career included assignments in Tokyo, Osaka, Fukuoka, and several cities in Korea, which was a Japanese colony at the time. His grave is in the Saishoji cemetery.