

Kyozo Sutra Repository

This repository for Buddhist sutras was originally constructed in 1613 to house a sutra collection donated to Zojoji Temple by the first Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu (1543–1616). The powerful ruler spent over 10 years gathering the 18,309 volumes that make up three editions of the Buddhist cannon—one each from the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties of China, and one from the Korean kingdom of Goryeo (918–1392). The building was moved to its present location in 1802, where it was rebuilt in the *dozo-zukuri* style, with thick earthen walls finished in plaster to protect it from the fires that frequently swept through Edo.

The sutras were stored in a *rinzo*, a large, octagonal cabinet (approximately 6 meters high and 6 meters in diameter) that revolves on a central axis—a style that was introduced to Japan from China in the mid-thirteenth century. Worshippers use the beams at each corner to rotate the structure. Moving the cabinet in one full clockwise rotation is believed to be the equivalent of reciting all the sutras stored on the shelves inside. When literacy rates were low, *rinzo* allowed illiterate believers symbolically to receive the benefits of reading the sutras. Turning the cabinet is no longer permitted, as it is fragile, and the three collections of sutras, which are Important Cultural Properties, have been transferred to a more secure location.

A statue of the Chinese layman Fu Xi (497–569), who is credited with inventing rotating sutra cabinets, sits at the entrance of the repository, flanked by his two sons.