

Kegonji Temple

Kegonji Temple, also known as Suzumushi Temple, belongs to the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism. The word *suzumushi* is the Japanese name for the bell cricket, which is endemic to Japan. Thousands of these crickets are kept in the temple's reception hall, where visitors can listen to a sermon (in Japanese) while enjoying tea and sweets.

Kegonji Temple was founded in 1723 by the monk Hōtan (1659–1738) with the goal of reviving the Kegon sect, a Chinese school of Buddhism that was introduced to Japan during the Nara period (710–794). Teachings from this school have influenced both Esoteric and Zen Buddhist sects. Hōtan began his studies of Zen Buddhism in the Ōbaku sect before serving under the Zen Master Tetsugen (1630–1682). It was Tetsugen who suggested that Hōtan should focus on reviving the Kegon sect, although Hōtan continued to study Tendai and other Esoteric sects throughout the Kyoto-Osaka region before settling in Nara, where he mastered the teachings of the Kegon sect.

Hōtan eventually traveled to Edo in the early 1700s to deliver a lecture on the *Flower Garland Sutra*, a principal text of the Kegon sect, and to debate monks from other sects. After returning to Kyoto to establish Kegonji Temple, Hōtan continued his debates while producing several written works on the Kegon, Tendai, and Sanron sects. After Hōtan's death, subsequent heads of the temple practiced Zen Buddhism rather than Kegon Buddhism, but Kegonji officially operated under the Kegon sect until 1868, after which it was made a temple of the Rinzai sect.