

Engyōji's Three Halls (Mitsu no Dō)

The Three Halls of Engyōji are a monument to the temple's rich history, its religious practices, and the generations of monks who have used the site for over a millennium. The Daikōdō (Great Lecture Hall) marks the complex's northern edge, facing the Jōgyōdō (Circumambulatory Hall) across a broad courtyard of white pebbles. The two-story Jikidō (Refectory) in the center, which resembles a long corridor, makes up the western edge of the Three Halls.

Built between the tenth and fifteenth centuries, each of the Three Halls fulfills an important role within life at the temple. The Daikōdō is a place of instruction that is used for lectures and debates. Following an architectural pattern common to temples of the Tendai sect, at the hall's center is a sunken chamber with a floor of packed earth. The building's principal image is the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who is flanked by two attendants: Monju, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom (right), and Fugen, the Bodhisattva of Right Conduct (left). The three gilded icons gaze serenely across the courtyard toward the stage in front of the Jōgyōdō.

The Jōgyōdō can be characterized as a place of ritual worship. On occasion, monks engage in a meditative practice called *jōgyō zanmai*. This practice entails repeatedly reciting a mantra while very slowly pacing around the hall's central icon, a large statue of Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light and Life. In some cases, this practice may be carried out continuously for as long as 90 consecutive days, with only short breaks for food and rest. Completing such an arduous practice is not only extremely difficult, but potentially dangerous, and *jōgyō zanmai* is only rarely performed by the monks at Engyōji.

The Jikidō, or Refectory, historically served as a residential space where monks slept and took their meals. Although construction of the building began in 1174 by request of Retired Emperor Goshirakawa (1127–1192), the Jikidō remained unfinished until 1963. Today, the first floor is used mainly by visitors as a space to practice the merit-accruing act of copying sutras. Various religious and cultural artifacts that shed light on Engyōji's long, rich history are exhibited on the second floor.

The excellent condition of the buildings and their U-shaped layout around a central courtyard make the Three Halls a favored location for television and film productions. They have appeared in several popular historical dramas, including one scene of the blockbuster film *The Last Samurai* (2003), starring Tom Cruise and Ken Watanabe.

All three halls are registered Important Cultural Properties.