

Zenshitsu (Zen Room)

Gangōji's Zenshitsu stands empty now, but for centuries it was occupied by monks who lived and studied at the temple. Like the **Gokurakudō**, the Zenshitsu was originally part of one of the temple's two massive dormitory buildings. The Zenshitsu was created by gradually remodeling a section of one building, a process that was begun in the late eleventh century and finished in 1244. Aspects of the building's present form, such as the open spaces in the brackets of the eaves, reflect the "Great Buddha Style" of temple architecture that was popular during that time. However, sections of the Zenshitsu were built by reusing lumber and roof tiles from Hōkōji Temple, the precursor to Gangōji, and these sections date back to 588.

When the Zenshitsu was in use as a dormitory, its interior was separated east-to-west into four units called *bō*. Each unit had a central door flanked by large, latticed windows that remain today. Each *bō* was subdivided into north, south, and central sections, and the north section was divided again into three bays, each of which was used by multiple monks. Under this arrangement, each monk had only a single tatami mat (just over 1.5 square meters) in which to sleep and study. It is thought that higher-ranking monks were granted slightly more living space, but in essence they lived austere lives. Today, the partitions have been removed, and the interior space is occupied only by rows of wooden columns.

The north and south faces of the building differ slightly. The south has wide, latticed windows to let in more light, allowing the monks to study indoors. In contrast, the north-facing side has much smaller windows, possibly to keep those sections warmer as a sleeping space. The central, darker area of the Zenshitsu is where the monks sat in meditation.