

The Ii Family

RyotANJI Temple is the ancestral temple of the Ii family, a historically powerful Japanese family that traces its roots to the Hamamatsu area. Legend states that a baby found next to the well near the entrance of the temple in 1010 grew up to become Ii Tomoyasu (1010–1093), the first head of the Ii family and lord of Iinoya Castle.

Centuries later, during the period of civil war from the mid-fifteenth century to the early seventeenth century, the Ii family was in danger of destruction and losing their land. Ii Naotora (d. 1582), one of the last survivors of the crisis, was instrumental in saving her family. She ensured that the only male heir, her adopted son Ii Naomasa (1561–1602), allied himself with Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542–1616), the founder and first shogun of the Tokugawa shogunate that ruled Japan for over 250 years until 1867. Ii Naomasa became one of Ieyasu's top generals and was awarded the domain of Hikone (in modern-day Shiga Prefecture) after Ieyasu's final victory. Thereafter, the Ii family was based in Hikone, however, they still retained RyotANJI as their ancestral temple.

The Ii family continued to be influential in politics throughout the rule of the Tokugawa shogunate. Ii Naosuke (1815–1860), the penultimate lord of Hikone and a high-ranking official in the shogunate, was noted for his involvement in signing the Harris Treaty with the United States, which opened Japan to American trade after almost 250 years of near total isolation.