

Manshūji Temple

According to legend, Manshūji Temple was founded after the military commander Taira no Kiyomori (1118–1181) was saved from a storm by repeatedly chanting the name of Amida Buddha. To express his gratitude, Kiyomori enshrined a statue of the eleven-headed manifestation of Kannon, an emanation of Amida Buddha, and that shrine eventually became Manshūji Temple. Oddly, according to temple records, the Kannon-dō hall was erected in 1718, centuries after Kiyomori's death. After the hall was built, a bell tower, temple kitchen (*kuri*), and stone steps were added to the complex, and in 1751, the Hiroshima domain officially licensed Manshūji as a Buddhist temple of the Shingon school.

The temple grounds also include the tombstone of haiku poet Kurita Chodō (1749–1814) and a stone monument inscribed with a poem by haiku master Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694). The presence of these monuments is a testament to the culture of haiku poetry that flourished in Mitarai during the Edo period (1603–1867) and that was furthered by interactions with poets from the Ryūkyū Kingdom (now Okinawa Prefecture). Ryūkyū became a vassal state of Japan after the Satsuma domain invaded in 1609, and throughout the Edo period, it paid tribute to the Tokugawa shogunate by sending groups of distinguished scholars, artists, and poets to the shogunate in Edo (now Tokyo). On their way there, these delegations sometimes passed through Mitarai. The amicable relationship that developed between the Ryūkyūans and the community of Mitarai is immortalized in an artistic temple nameplate that was presented to Manshūji by a delegation in 1806 and which is now preserved in the Kannon-dō hall.

The stone wall surrounding Manshūji Temple was built in the mid-eighteenth century. Although there is no clear record of its origins, the location and structure of the wall suggest that it was likely a naval defense, as it is situated on what was once Mitarai's coastline and was built by fitting stones of various sizes together. This technique, called *midarekizuki* (literally, "random construction"), was commonly used to build military structures during the Warring States period (1467–1568). The most popular theory on the origin of the wall is that Katō Kiyomasa (1562–1611), a general and cousin of warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598), built it as a frontline defense during Hideyoshi's Shikoku campaign in 1585. Due to the wall's unusually large scale and the size of the stones used to construct it, the wall was designated a Tangible Cultural Property by the city of Kure in 1999.