

Shogun Tree

The Shogun Tree is a giant *muku* tree (*Aphananthe aspera*) that is more than 600 years old. To the people of central Kikuchi, where it is located, this massive tree symbolizes Prince Kanenaga (also known as Kaneyoshi; 1329–1383), one of the most prominent figures in local history.

Kanenaga was the son of Emperor Godaigo (1288–1339), whose conflict with the Ashikaga shogunate led to a split in the imperial court. Godaigo's Southern Court and the Ashikaga-backed Northern Court fought for control of the country. Godaigo sent Kanenaga to Kyushu to build an alliance between the Southern Court and local warrior groups such as the Kikuchi clan.

Under the leadership of Kanenaga and his trusted general Kikuchi Takemitsu (1319–1373), the Southern alliance conquered all of Kyushu. Their control over the island proved fleeting, but as this period represents the height of the Kikuchi clan's political influence, Kanenaga remains a hero in local lore.

The Shogun Tree, named after Prince Kanenaga, is said to have been planted by Kanenaga himself or to have grown from a staff he stuck in the ground. The prince is enshrined as a deity at the nearby Kikuchi Shrine. Every year, on October 13, his spirit is ritually transferred to a small shrine beneath the tree's sprawling branches. A Matsubayashi performance, as witnessed by the prince during his lifetime, is then reenacted on a traditional stage opposite the tree. Spectators are not allowed to enter the area between the stage and the tree so as not to obstruct the prince's view.