

Shokanji Temple

Shokanji Temple in central Kikuchi was the most important religious institution for the Kikuchi clan during the 1300s and 1400s, a period that marked the height of the clan's power and prosperity. The Rinzaï Zen temple was founded in 1344 by Kikuchi Takemitsu (1319–1373) immediately after he had been named the fifteenth head of the clan. Takemitsu is remembered as the most successful wartime Kikuchi leader; he was also an influential reformer.

Founding Shokanji was part of Takemitsu's efforts to establish his authority as leader. He went on to expand the clan's territory and influence until the alliance led by the Kikuchi controlled all of Kyushu. At home in the castle town of Waifu (now central Kikuchi), Takemitsu's reforms included creating the Kikuchi Gozan (Five Temples) system by placing five Zen temples in Waifu under his clan's protection. In return, these temples served the Kikuchi by performing various administrative and religious duties.

Shokanji was ranked above the Five Temples, a privileged position that allowed it to grow into one of the most influential temples in western Japan under the lordship of Takemitsu and his descendants. In the late 1300s the temple grounds included 14 halls, and the temple remained an important center for scholarship into the late 1400s.

Kikuchi Takemitsu was buried at Shokanji. His tomb was restored in the nineteenth century and is located near the main hall, in the opposite direction from the temple's modern-day cemetery.