

## **Tomb of Kikuchi Takeshige**

Kikuchi Takeshige (1307–1341) led the Kikuchi clan at a critical juncture in the clan's history and laid the foundations for its greatest period of prosperity.

Takeshige was made leader in 1333 under dramatic circumstances. After centuries of rule by the warrior class, tensions were brewing between the imperial court and the warrior-led Kamakura shogunate. The Kikuchi sided with the court. Seeking to push back against the power of the shogunate in Kyushu, Takeshige's father, Taketoki (1292–1333), assembled an alliance of local warrior groups and launched an assault on forces in Hakata (present-day Fukuoka) loyal to the shogunate. But just as the two sides were about to clash, several warlords in the alliance betrayed the Kikuchi.

Hopelessly outnumbered and facing certain death, Taketoki decided to go ahead with the attack, but sent his son home to rebuild the clan in his stead. The Kamakura shogunate was toppled only months later, and the victorious Emperor Godaigo (1288–1339) recognized Taketoki's bravery and loyalty posthumously by making Takeshige governor of Higo Province (present-day Kumamoto Prefecture).

While Takeshige remained in Kyoto to protect the emperor, he introduced reforms at home, including decision-making by consensus on key matters concerning the Kikuchi clan. This policy helped to unite the clan. Takeshige's decision to alter the clan's battlefield tactics by having warriors armed with spears attack in tight groups allowed the Kikuchi to fight several successful battles against enemies of the court.

Takeshige died of illness at 34, soon after the Kikuchi had been forced to submit to the rule of a new warrior-led government, the Ashikaga shogunate. The reforms carried out during Takeshige's leadership, however, later allowed his younger brother Takemitsu (1319–1373) to transform the clan into the most powerful warrior group in Kyushu.

Takeshige's tomb, rebuilt in 1816, stands in a small grove surrounded by rice fields between the hillside where Tofukuji Temple is located and the Kikuchi River. The base of the headstone is in the shape of a creature with the features of a turtle and a snake that was considered auspicious in Chinese mythology.