

Kikuchi Gozan: Nanpukuji Temple

In the medieval period, the site of Nanpukuji Temple was on the southern outskirts of the castle town of Waifu, near the Furuike fort used by the Kikuchi clan to keep watch over the region. The temple's strategic location may have played a role when Kikuchi Takemitsu (1319–1373) chose Nanpukuji as one of the Kikuchi Gozan (Five Temples), a group of Zen temples that enjoyed the protection of the Kikuchi clan in exchange for performing various administrative and religious duties. Except for one central temple, each of the Gozan oversaw one of the four points of the compass, and Nanpukuji was charged with supervision of the south.

Establishing the Gozan system was one of the many reforms Takemitsu implemented to restore the Kikuchi clan's standing after a period of political decline. By giving these five temples special status, Takemitsu was following a tradition that began in China during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279) and was brought to Japan by the Kamakura shogunate (1185–1333). The purpose of the Kamakura Gozan system was both to promote Zen, the school of Buddhism favored by the Kamakura shoguns, and to incorporate its temples into the government bureaucracy, thereby strengthening the shogunate's control over the country and its people. The twin objectives of religious virtue and administrative benefits were also the motivations for Takemitsu's introduction of the Gozan system to Kikuchi.

The principal object of worship at Nanpukuji today is a sixteenth-century wooden statue of Yakushi, the Buddha of medicine and healing.