

Kikuchi Gozan: Dairinji Temple

Dairinji Temple was one of the most important religious institutions in the castle town of Waifu during the height of the Kikuchi clan's power. It was established by Kikuchi Takemitsu (1319–1373) in the middle of Waifu, on the site of an older temple, as part of Takemitsu's efforts to restore his clan's standing after a period of decline.

Takemitsu founded Dairinji and chose four other temples around the castle town—one in each cardinal direction—to make up the Kikuchi Gozan (Five Temples). The Kikuchi clan protected these temples, which were in turn expected to perform various administrative, supervisory, and religious duties for the clan.

In establishing the Gozan system, Takemitsu was drawing on 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 Zen 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 what motivated Takemitsu's introduction of the Gozan system to Kikuchi.

The Kikuchi clan flourished under Takemitsu, becoming the most powerful warrior group in Kyushu, and remained a significant political and cultural force into the late 1400s. Dairinji was moved to its current site, some distance north from the original location, following a destructive typhoon in 1755.