

Ankokuji Temple

Ankokuji Temple is associated with some of the most difficult times in the history of the Kikuchi clan. The temple was established on the orders of Ashikaga Takauji (1305–1358), the founder and first shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate. In 1336, Takauji had emerged as the winner in a conflict between the imperial court and proponents of warrior rule, a civil war in which the Kikuchi clan had sided with the court but suffered a crushing defeat by Takauji's forces.

In 1339, with his rule secure, Takauji ordered a “temple for the Peace of the Country” (Ankokuji) to be built in every province to comfort the souls of his vanquished rivals and all those who had died in the wars that had followed the fall of the Kamakura shogunate, the previous warrior-led government. In the Kikuchi-governed Higo Province (present-day Kumamoto Prefecture), an existing temple called Jushoji was chosen and renamed Ankokuji.

More than a century later, the temple became the site of another tragedy for the Kikuchi clan. Kikuchi Masataka (1491–1509), a former leader of the clan who had been deposed by his retainers, attempted to retake his rightful position but was defeated in battle. Masataka retreated to Ankokuji, where he committed ritual suicide before the temple was burned down by his enemies.

Ankokuji was rebuilt in 1515, and its main hall—the only building on the grounds today—dates to that year. The tomb of Kikuchi Masataka is located at the foot of a hill some distance behind the hall.