

Tombs of Kikuchi Tamekuni and Shigetomo

The tombs of Kikuchi Tamekuni (1430–1488) and his son Shigetomo (1449–1493) in the cemetery of Gyokushoji Temple stand as a reminder of a time when the Kikuchi clan successfully shifted its focus from political to cultural objectives.

When Tamekuni was made leader at age 15 after the death of his father, the Kikuchi clan's days of glory on the battlefield were long over, and even retaining its territory was proving challenging. Tamekuni chose to direct the clan's resources toward supporting local culture and providing education for samurai and townspeople, encouraging their intellectual and spiritual pursuits.

At age 36, Tamekuni retired as clan leader in favor of Shigetomo and dedicated himself to studying the *Blue Cliff Record*, a Chinese Chan (Zen) Buddhist text that was particularly influential among Japanese Zen scholars at the time. He also built Gyokushoji and planned for his own burial at the temple after his death.

Shigetomo continued his father's efforts to cultivate culture, and under his leadership Kikuchi became a regional hub for Buddhist and Confucian scholarship, where tea culture also flourished. Shigetomo built a hall dedicated to Confucius and commissioned images of the sage and his disciples to be placed in the building. A center of learning sprang up around this hall, and scholars traveled from as far away as Kyoto to discuss philosophy and religion in Kikuchi.