Hekiganji Temple

Hekiganji ("Blue Cliff Temple") is a Soto Zen temple named after the *Blue Cliff Record*, a twelfth-century Chinese Chan (Zen) Buddhist text. This book changed the life of Kikuchi Tamekuni (1430–1488), the twentieth head of the Kikuchi clan, who is remembered for bringing about a blossoming of intellectual life in Kikuchi. He was an eager advocate of local culture and encouraged the scholarly and spiritual pursuits of samurai and townspeople.

Tamekuni retired as clan leader at the age of 36 and withdrew to a hermitage at the foot of a hill outside the castle town of Waifu. There he dedicated himself to his true passion: studying the *Blue Cliff Record*, a collection of koan (stories, statements, and questions) that was particularly influential among Japanese Zen scholars at the time. After Tamekuni's death, his retreat was turned into the Zen temple that became Hekiganji.

The temple grounds include a rock garden with a pond, reconstructed in 1996 in a style popular during the time of Tamekuni, as well as a monument to him that serves as a secondary tomb. Tamekuni's main grave is at Gyokushoji Temple in northern Kikuchi.