

## **Banri Shuku Statue**

The oldest written record of Gero as a hot springs destination is attributed to the poet and Zen priest Banri Shuku (b. 1428). Banri named Gero (Gifu Prefecture), Arima (Hyogo Prefecture), and Kusatsu (Gunma Prefecture) as the greatest hot springs destinations in Japan in his travelogue *Baika Mujinzo*. This work bolstered the reputation of these towns and made them popular destinations for generations to come.

Banri was born in Omi Province, present-day Shiga Prefecture, next to Kyoto. He spent much of his life training in various temples in Kyoto, Japan's political and cultural center at the time, and is known as one of the great literary figures of his time. Banri later lived in Mino Province, in present-day southern Gifu. It is believed that he visited Gero during this time and experienced the restorative properties of the waters firsthand.

A statue was unveiled in his honor during the Gero Onsen Thanksgiving Festival on August 3, 2015. The statue faces the Gero City Tourism & Cultural Center, where visitors can obtain sightseeing information, rent bicycles, and enjoy a respite from their activities around town. Banri Shuku and Hayashi Razan, a Confucian scholar active in the seventeenth century, are both considered historical benefactors of Gero Onsen and are thus honored during the annual Onsen Thanksgiving Festival.