

Gojin-kosai: A Festival to Commemorate a Pardon

Every shrine in Japan has its own festival, and Hofu Tenmangu is no exception. The Gojin-kosai Festival has its roots in the origin story of Hofu Tenmangu. Tenjin, the god enshrined here, is the deified Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), an aristocratic administrator from the latter half of the ninth century who was exiled to Kyushu where he died, disgraced and unpardoned, in 903.

The Gojin-kosai Festival commemorates the events of the year 1004, when Emperor Ichijo finally issued a decree pardoning Michizane, 101 years after his death. The imperial messenger bearing the document arrived at Katsuma no Ura, the local harbor, now some distance inland after land reclamation. (This was the same harbor where Michizane had arrived when he came to Hofu in 901.) Every year, on the fourth Saturday in November, a boisterous crowd of thousands pulls a huge wheeled portable shrine housing Tenjin down the shrine steps to the site of the old harbor some 2.5 kilometers from the shrine. A ceremony takes place and the shrine is then pulled back again.

The festival is also known as the *badakabo-matsuri*, the naked monk festival, because many of the participants wear only a white loin cloth, their nakedness symbolizing the idea of serving the god in a pure and natural state.

Another reason for shrine festivals is that the gods can get weary responding to people's requests day in, day out, so when a crowd of believers take the god out of the shrine precincts and give his spirit a good shaking, it reinvigorates him and provides him with the energy to deal with another year's worth of prayers and requests from his human supplicants.