

## **Faith in Tenjin**

Sugawara Michizane (845–903) died in exile in Dazaifu, but his spirit lives on. After his death, Michizane was deified under the name Tenjin, and was worshipped as the deity of learning, culture, and the arts. Michizane amassed a considerable following after his death, especially among the ordinary people, who learned about him through scrolls, paintings, and sculptures.

Depictions of Michizane as Tenjin vary considerably. Some images remain close to the physical appearance of the historical figure seated in a scholarly position, while others cast Michizane with a fierce countenance, perhaps due to the initial notion that Tenjin, his deified spirit, was responsible for the natural disasters that occurred after his death. Other images were adapted to follow the prevailing styles of the time. As the concept of Zen became more widely known, images of Michizane changed accordingly. One illustration emerged of Michizane wearing a traditional Chinese headdress and robes and holding the blossoming branch of a plum tree.

Followers of the shrines dedicated to Tenjin have grown in number over the centuries, and Dazaifu Tenmangu stands at the head of over 12,000 Tenjin shrines in Japan.