

Gifts from the Daimyo

Sugawara Michizane in his deified form as Tenjin garnered a wide following spanning all levels of society, from commoners to the nobility. The aristocracy held him in high regard and the treasures in the Dazaifu Tenmangu Museum are a testament to their devotion. It was common for high-ranking officials to make offerings to Tenjin. Some of these offerings were prepared to express gratitude, while others were presented to ask for good fortune in war or other endeavors.

Many of Japan's daimyo—the country's greatest feudal warlords—journeyed to Dazaifu Tenmangu to pray for success in battle. These lords dominated vast swaths of land from the tenth to mid-nineteenth century, before the country returned to centralized rule under the Meiji government.

The gifts displayed in the Dazaifu Tenmangu Museum include a suit of armor owned by the Oda family, a powerful daimyo lineage during the sixteenth century. The horns on the helmet symbolize a water buffalo. Fukuoka's first daimyo, Kuroda Nagamasa (1568–1623), donated a sword that bears his clan's distinctive wisteria crest. Not all the donated treasures relate to war. The Ouchi daimyo family, which ruled westernmost Honshu and at times parts of northern Kyushu between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, offered the exquisite lacquerware bowl.