

Sugawara no Michizane

Sugawara no Michizane (845–903) was a scholar and statesman who made his name serving the court in Kyoto but is also associated with what is now Kagawa Prefecture. Born into a family of nobles and scholars, he rose rapidly through the ranks of the court bureaucracy, and was appointed governor of Sanuki province (present-day Kagawa) in 886. Michizane ruled Sanuki from the provincial government offices, which were located in what is now the Fuchucho neighborhood in the city of Sakaide. Numerous places in this area still claim a connection to Michizane, who during his four-year term as governor is said to have had plenty of time to engage in his favorite pastime: writing poetry.

At the same time, Michizane endeared himself to the people of Sanuki during his tenure there. He became a local hero in 888, when the area was struck by an unprecedented drought. Seeking to end the people's suffering, Michizane ascended Mt. Kiyama to pray for rain, and the heavens answered his pleas. The overjoyed people danced wildly in front of his residence in Takinomiya, a settlement that is now part of the neighboring town of Ayagawa. This is considered the origin of a dancing ritual that is still performed in Takinomiya to thank Michizane and appeal for a plentiful harvest. Kiyama Shrine, the Shinto sanctuary built on the mountain site where Michizane is believed to have prayed, also remains, though it has been moved slightly from its original location.

After his return to Kyoto in 890, Michizane gained prominence at court during the reign of Emperor Uda (867–931), but ended up on the losing end of a power struggle. In the year 901 he was sent into de facto exile in Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's main islands. After Michizane's death in exile, Kyoto was struck repeatedly by disease and natural disasters. These calamities were attributed to the vengeful spirit of Michizane, whom the court quickly rehabilitated and honored by building a new shrine, Kitano Tenmangu. Tenmangu shrines, which honor Sugawara no Michizane as the patron deity of scholarship, are common throughout Japan. There are several such shrines in Sakaide, including Ushi no Koyama Tenjin, Ishii Tenmangu, and Kuroiwa Tenmangu.