

Prayers for Rain

Praying for rain has traditionally been central to spiritual practice on the Kikuchi Plain, where people have depended on rice farming for more than two millennia. Being at the mercy of the elements has given rise to a rich tapestry of rainmaking rituals, some of which are still conducted in Kikuchi today. Two of these are the Kawamatsuri (River Festival) and Amagoi Taiko (“rain drumming”), held annually before the height of summer, now usually on the same day, around July 20.

The Kawamatsuri takes place by the Goshi River south of central Kikuchi, near Sumiyoshi Hiyoshi Shrine. The festival was meant to appease the mischievous river sprites, imaginary creatures called *kappa*, which are believed to cause floods. Summer vegetables such as cucumber and eggplant, considered the *kappa*’s favorite foods, are mounted on *gohei* wands used in Shinto rituals and left on the riverbank for the creatures to enjoy.

The Kawamatsuri is followed by the Amagoi Taiko on the grounds of Sumiyoshi Hiyoshi Shrine, where participants beat on a large drum to mimic the sound of thunder. The tradition has its roots in a medieval legend that tells of a local lord who saved his people from drought by drumming so hard that the deities of the sky rewarded him with rain.