

The Jinkō Event: Tenjin's Grand Procession

The Jinkō Event (*jinkōshiki*) is the most important annual event at Dazaifu Tenmangū Shrine. The Shinto deity Tenjin, who is the deified spirit of the renowned scholar, poet, and administrator Sugawara Michizane (845–903), is carried in an imposing procession from the shrine's main sanctuary to the site of Michizane's former residence. The festival is held to honor Tenjin, pray for national prosperity, and give thanks for the autumn harvest.

The procession begins on the evening before the autumn equinox. Tenjin's spirit is ritually transferred into an ornate portable shrine called a *mikoshi*. Bearers shoulder the *mikoshi* before transferring it to an elaborately decorated cart to be pulled across the city. The procession is accompanied by hundreds of participants clothed in Heian period (794–late 12th century) attire and the drums and bells of traditional Shinto music. Following the same path the procession has taken for more than 900 years, the procession travels 2.5 kilometers over the course of three hours to Enokisha Shrine. The shrine is located on the former site of the Nankan, a government residence where Michizane lived during his final years.

Once at Enokisha Shrine, Tenjin is carried to a small shrine (*hokora*) behind the main hall. This shrine is dedicated to Jōmyōni, an elderly woman who once helped Michizane in a time of need. Michizane lived in poverty in Dazaifu, but legend tells that Jōmyōni brought him mochi rice cakes skewered on the branch of a plum tree. For her kindness, Tenjin visits Jōmyōni each year to express his thanks. Then he is carried back to Enokisha's main hall, where his *mikoshi* remains for the night. The following afternoon, the procession walks the course in reverse, returning Tenjin to his sanctuary at Dazaifu Tenmangū.

The Jinkō Event was initiated by Dazaifu's provisional governor-general in 1101 to mourn Michizane. Today, the festival captivates the entire city, and viewers crowd the streets to watch the spectacular procession. The festival also involves other sites around Dazaifu that are associated with Michizane, such as Mt. Tenpai, which Michizane once climbed to commune with the heavens. Before the procession begins, participants who will carry Tenjin's *mikoshi* collect purifying sand (*oshioi*) from a waterfall at the foot of the mountain. Fires lit on top of the mountain can be seen from Enokisha Shrine, where residents come to pray to Tenjin during his temporary stay.