

## The Rat as Daikokuten's Messenger and Attendant

Zhong Yijiang, Religion & Culture Forum, June 2012

- [Month without the Gods: Shinto and Authority in Early Modern Japan](#)
- [See Invited Responses to Yijiang Zhong's Month Without Gods](#)
- [The Origins of Modern Shinto \(by Yijiang Zhong, 2016\)](#)

Quote from Month without the Gods, pp. 40-43: "**Nariai Ukyō, active 19th century.** A second kind of association Nariai organized is the Mouse Association (Kinoene kō 甲子講). How and when the image of the mouse became connected to Okuninushi and the Izumo Shrine is an open historical question. In the entry "Daikokuten shinko," The Comprehensive Dictionary of Japanese History (Nihonshi daijiten) posits that the connection originated from the mythological narratives in The Chronicle of Japan and Record of Ancient Matters where a mouse served as the messenger for Okuninushi. In the entry "Kōshimachi" or the Kōshi Festival which is a festival devoted to Mahākāla, the dictionary holds that Daikoku/ Mahākāla is from the north direction and north corresponds to mouse, first of the twelve zodiac animals. It is interesting to note that Nariai simply cited tradition as the reason for his naming of the association as the Mouse Association. The founding statement gives a standard introduction to the power of Okuninushi, first in creating the land then blessing people with good fortune, money and business prosperity. The building of the Izumo Shrine, the statement continues, and the appointment of Amenohohi as its priest by the Sun Goddess is based on the fact that Okuninushi is now the ruler of the divine affairs, which is carried out in the Month with the Gods when blessing of all humans and marriage decisions are metered out. "It is an age-old custom that praying to the images of Okuninushi on the days of kōshi can lead to avoidance of disasters, good fortune and the realization of all wishes. The Kitajima kokuso in particular hopes the blessing power of Okuninushi reach Osaka; therefore I am setting up the Mouse Association." (Yijiang fails to give any dates for Nariai's life, and says "the period of Nariai's life needs further research.")

**Link also to JHTI** <http://supercluster.cias.kyoto-u.ac.jp/berkeley/jhti/>

### QUICK OVERVIEW OF RAT'S LINK TO DAIKOKUTEN IN JAPAN

- Bishamon (Kubera) and Daikokuten (Mahākāla) and Shōten (Gaṇeśa) are all associated with a rat messenger. All three hail from the Hindu pantheon and were later adopted in the Buddhist fold.
- Mongoose (associated with Bishamon / Kubera) was not indigenous to China or Japan; it was therefore replaced by the rat
- Rat is Zodiac animal guarding the north; it represents midnight until two (two hours of extreme blackness)
- Bishamon (Kubera) and Daikokuten (Mahākāla) are guardians of the north; Bishamon is known as the "Black Warrior," Daikokuten as the "Great Black One;" Daikokuten is especially the guardian of the northeast corner, the so-called "demon gate" or *kimon* 鬼門, where demons gather and enter the human world; Daikokuten is thus the "guardian par excellence"
- Japanese monk Shunmyō (淳祐 (890-953) describes Daikokuten holding a large bag on his shoulder -- a bag the color of "rat hair" (somō-jiki 鼠毛色); this strange 10th C. reference to the rat predates the 14th C. appearance of Daikokuten atop rice bales; by the 10<sup>th</sup> C., the rat-related Gaṇeśa rose to great popularity in India
- By the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the rat appears in Japanese Buddhist artwork in association with the [12 Generals of Yakushi Nyorai](#) (Medicine Buddha)
- In the Muromachi era, the anonymous work *Daikokutenmai* 大黒天舞 describes rat-like creatures who accompany Daikokuten
- Around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Daikokuten's link to the rat filters down to common lore and popular art
- Around the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ōkuninushi (main kami of Izumo Shrine) is aggressively conflated with Daikokuten; Ōkuninushi's link to the rat / mouse (recorded in 7<sup>th</sup>-century *Nihon Shoki* & *Kojiki*) is also aggressively popularized
- **SPECULATION.** The "traveling preachers" of Izumo Shrine were the catalysts in linking Daikokuten to the rat; their strategy of conflating Ōkuninushi (and rat attendant) with Daikokuten "leaked" over; art of Daikokuten and rat appear for the first time
- By at least the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the custom of offering forked radishes to Daikokuten was established; the radish and rat are emblems of Gaṇeśa; the radish custom is still practiced today
- By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Daikokuten is worshipped monthly on the day of Kōshi (day of the rat) – see Kitagawa Morisada's *Morisada Mankou* 1853).