Meteorology and Myth: The Thunderstorm and Tornado Deities of Japan

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Raijin 雷神 is a Shinto god of thunderstorms and lightning. He is usually depicted as beating on a drum to create thunder. Persistent rumbling of thunder is common during thunderstorm advance. Gust fronts and roll clouds will create a series of thunder shockwaves. Raijin and his lightning are often red in color.

Fujin 風神 is a wind god of ancient Shinto legend, although his image likely of Buddhist origin. He is the cause of violent wind storms. Cyclones, whirlwind storms, monsoon winds and tornadoes and waterspouts are all weather hazards characteristic of Japan's climate.

Fujin is depicted as a demon with green skin. Tornadoes are demonic in their destruction and should be feared, but why is he green? Japan is a verdant green country. A tornado or strong dust devil (whirlwind) would pick up the local vegetation. Trees, leaves, rice plants, etc. could be drawn into the ascending, rotating debris field of its cyclonic system (in contrast to the dirt-brown tornadoes of America's dusty plains). Perhaps his color is observed because of the "green sky" effect (produced by complex atmospheric scattering), which often precedes tornadoes.

Fujin carries a bag of wind. The bag may represent the funnel shaped cloud. Some tornadoes and waterspouts tilt horizontally, similar to how Fujin carries his wind bag. The winds from Fujin's bag "allowed the sun to shine". This may derive from the strong and persistent Asian summer monsoon. These winds come from the east, along with the rising eastern sun. Also - the east winds of cyclones are usually the most destructive.

It may sound fitting, but Fujin is NOT the origin of the famous Tornado "F-Scale." (now EF scale)

The Fujita scale is named after the late Theodore Fujita, preeminent expert on tornadoes and thunderstorms.

This research is one part of a larger investigation into "Meteorology and Myth." This poster is based on a paper presented at the Southeastern Association of American Geographers conference 12/28/2018.

References available upon request. See the full presentation PDF linked on my academic blog site with this QR code.