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The demonic countryside: beckoning early modern visitors through *oni* legend and ritual

CALEB CARTER

Abstract: This article explores the role of legends and rituals centered on *oni* (demons) as a mode of place-making in early modern Japan. Focusing on evidence from Shinano (present-day Nagano prefecture), it begins with medieval *oni* narratives centered on Mount Togakushi and then turns toward Edo period adaptations that ushered in a host of new sites. I argue that this type of engagement with popular narratives played a vital role in place-making strategies by fostering new modes of ritual, economy, and identity as well as connections with the rest of the country. My analysis focuses on a twofold process by which these developments took place: first, the creation of local legends inspired from well-known *oni* tales; and second, the implementation of Buddhist rituals that promoted the legends while simultaneously placating the malignant spirits they resurrected.

Keywords: Demons, *oni*, place-making, narrative, legend, Buddhist ritual

oni sudaku	*oni* converge
Togakushi no fumoto	at the base of Togakushi
soba no hana	like the blossoms of soba

Yosa Buson (ca. 1778–1783, poem no. 2571)[1]

> Deeply-loved places are not necessarily visible, either to ourselves or to others. Places can be made visible by a number of means: rivalry or conflict with other places, visual prominence, and the evocative power of art, architecture, ceremonials and rites. Human places become vividly real through dramatization. Yi-Fu Tuan (1977, 178)

It would seem counterintuitive to invent and perpetuate stories about the notorious figure of the *oni* (commonly translated as 'demon') in connection to one's own neighborhood in premodern Japan.[2] *Oni* were characterized in

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terms of disease, pollution, deceit, and barbarianism in stories and anecdotes (*setsuwa*) dating back to the late Heian period. As the lingering residue of these malevolent beings quietly settled onto a place, a stigma remained. For this reason, such narratives typically circulated outside of the places they implicated. Yet by the eighteenth century, a growing trend to unearth earlier demonic traces, and even create new sites of contact, took hold in various parts of the country. Ghoulish legends that had once been confined to a single locale spilled into other areas. New events and places were woven into older stories, Buddhist rituals arose in tandem, and aberrations in the landscape were reimagined as the topographic scars of legendary battles.

As the following pages suggest, the geographical expansion of *oni* tales exemplifies a key method of place-making in the landscape of early modern Japan. This examination builds from a growing body of research in the fields of Japanese religions and history on the social, economic, and institutional formation of specific sites during this time period.[3] As previous studies have shown, the creation and performance of stories linking famous monks, bodhisattvas, and kami to certain places served as a central component in this process.[4] Such activities cut across sectarian affiliation and clerical rank, ranging from village specialists to elite administrators.

Yet with *whom* and *what* these clerics cultivated such associations was not always so ostensibly divine. In the 'heterotopic' spaces of early modern Japan, even demonic elements, some temples wagered, could be mobilized as a potential draw to their grounds.[5] Central in these efforts were the production of legendary accounts and accompanying rituals that simultaneously promoted and pacified the summoned entity. The use of legends (as opposed to other genres of storytelling) in this development is noteworthy. As folklorists classify, legends are situated in precise spatial and temporal parameters, in contrast, for instance, to myths, which invoke abstract scales of space and time.[6] Centered on a particular time and place, legends act to authenticate seemingly unbelievable events and figures. The associations forged with the place, in the process, provoke sentiments such as fear, delight and intrigue for the listener, as the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) has noted. This emotional engagement alongside the blurring of fact and fiction heightened the immediacy and drama of demonic accounts, particularly when re-invoked by Buddhist clerics through ritualized spectacle. Eventually, some of these legends and performances were recorded in gazetteers and other forms of travel literature, thus broadening a given site's visibility beyond its immediate vicinity. This outcome contributed to an increasingly shared space of cultural exchange, consumption, and discourse in early modern Japan.

Evidence of these trends is particularly rich in Shinano. For reasons that include its distance from the capital, imposing mountains, and a number of mysterious origin accounts of certain sites, the province proved ripe terrain for



Figure 1 Narratives placing *oni* in Shinano began in the medieval period at Mount Togakushi and Suwa. Further legends expanded to new sites in the eighteenth century. Places discussed in this article are identified in the map.

medieval narratives of *oni*. The tales – once damning and macabre – resurfaced and diffused across the region in the eighteenth century at the behest of the residents themselves (Figure 1). In an interesting twist, their thrilling, if not morbid, plotlines of seduction, violence, and bloodshed transformed what was once a source of stigma and Otherness into an optimal medium in the development of identity, reputation and economy for a host of rural communities.

Medieval *oni* of the mountains

To understand the role of *oni* narratives in early modern Japan, it is worth noting a stark contrast with their medieval precedents. Namely, the early stories casted the habitats of *oni* as a spatial Other that stood at the fringes of civilization. This symbolic representation of place was generated by the idea of the *oni* itself, which traced back to continental influences. Chinese beliefs situated *oni* (Ch. *gǔi*) as ghosts and air-borne illnesses (Strickmann 2002, ch. 2). Buddhist notions of *karma* and *saṃsāra*, furthermore, held that their misshapen forms

were the resulting conditions of unwholesome actions undertaken in a previous life, not unlike the fate of hungry ghosts (*gaki*) in Buddhist cosmology. Cannibalistic and deceptive, *oni* presented a symbolic threat to medieval Japanese society in their alleged attempts to terrorize the capital, kidnap maidens, and dupe young men into perilous traps.

Oni were most often fabled to reside in the mountains. There they preyed on unsuspecting visitors or secluded themselves after raiding the capital. Stories told of mighty warriors who were dispatched by the court into these remote regions. Through spectacular force and divine assistance by the gods, they claimed victory over the barbaric entities, who in many ways, represented the mirror opposite of the just and civil rule projected by the court. As folklorists Komatsu Kazuhiko (e.g. 1997, 9–55) and Naitō Masatoshi (2009) have argued, this trope symbolically extended the sovereignty of the court over regions of the archipelago that otherwise lay beyond its reach. Power and wealth was increasingly shifting toward the religious and secular managers of regional estates (*shōen*) over the course of the medieval period. By presenting a strong and effective shogunate (that ostensibly represented the court), these imagined displays of conflict and conquest provided a counternarrative to the political and economic realities.

The well-known tale of an *oni* named the Shuten Dōji (literally, the 'sake-drinking lad') exemplifies this type of narrative.[7] After the daughter of a high-ranking nobleman is kidnapped by the Shuten Dōji, a cavalry of samurai led by the renowned Minamoto no Yorimitsu (a.k.a., Raikō; 948–1021) is dispatched to rescue her. In the oldest version of the tale, recorded in the early fourteenth century, they travel to the *oni*'s residence on the mountain of Ōeyama (approximately 100 km northwest of capital). In an elaborate plot, the warriors disguise themselves as *yamabushi* (mountain ascetics) and trick the Shuten Dōji and his companions into drinking a special type of sake poisonous only to *oni*. Upon defeating them, the warriors find numerous kidnapped women, some dead and mutilated, others still alive. Rescuing the women, they return to the capital in a show of military conquest over the barbaric threat. Mountains in premodern Japan were shrouded in an otherworldly air that lay beyond the parameters of civilization, but Ōeyama, in particular, was subjected to rumors and a heightened sense of mystery. The area was purportedly occupied by metal and mine workers versed in magic and spells, and a bakufu edict issued in 1239, moreover, had earlier targeted a gang of bandits camped out there. As Noriko Reider has suggested, the Shuten Dōji, as a dangerous threat to society, embodied these attitudes toward Ōeyama and its residents (Reider 2010, 42–51).

Despite their malicious behavior, however, *oni* could also embody a humanistic side. This anthropomorphism arose from the Buddhist logic that, like all living beings in the world, *oni* suffered, if not more so than humans in

their karmically deformed bodies. Michelle Li (2012) has argued that depictions of them showing a softer side may have evoked empathy among audiences. This empathy was tempered by the Buddhist law of impermanence, which offered the potential of awakening and liberation from suffering. In some cases, *oni* could even be deified into agents of protection and numinous efficacy. This task was left to Buddhist clerics, who ensured this transformation through ritualized action, as evident in the earliest origin account of the Togakushi mountains.

Mount Togakushi: demonized and deified

Within the medieval landscape of Shinano, the remote site of Mount Togakushi became notoriously associated with demonic entities in literature and storytelling. This dubious reputation traces back to its emergence as a primarily Tendai site (there was also one Shingon temple) from around the mid-twelfth century. Its clerics (*shuto*) collaborated with the Tendai monastic complex of Enryakuji (atop Mount Hiei) through their work as regional managers and tax collectors of agricultural estates in the surrounding valleys (Ihara 1997, 37–39).

Mount Togakushi stood in the northwest corner of Shinano, most commonly reached by a steep path ascending from the temple of Zenkōji to the southeast. For those arriving at its base, the foreboding ridgeline of precipitous cliffs (rising to 1,904 m) inspired associations with the divine and demonic. These ideas often overlapped, as apparent in the mountain's oldest etiological record, *Togakushiji ryakki* (A short record of the Togakushi temples) ([Stjh] Yoshioka and Nishigaki 1983, 372–374).[8] Recorded at Enryakuji, it tells of a legendary encounter in the year of 849 between a visiting ascetic and a nine-headed, single-tailed *oni* that resided in a cave on the mountain. The *oni* had inadvertently killed previous ascetics with its noxious vapors, but when it heard this itinerant chant the miraculous words of the *Lotus Sūtra*, it realized its own potential to reach awakening. Despite this, the ascetic concluded that the creature was a dangerous, karmic-ridden *oni* and must remain hidden in its cave from sight.

The ambiguities nested in this initial account guided future interpretations at the mountain and beyond. While the deadly nature of the *oni* made it unfit for human view, its reception of the *Lotus Sūtra* sowed the seed for its eventual deification. Indeed, the account ends by noting that a temple was erected in front of the *oni*'s cave for its enshrinement and propitiation. Its very designation as an *oni*, moreover, was tenuous, given that elements in the story recall the legend of a nine-headed dragon at Mount Tiantai (the center of Chinese Tiantai Buddhism). In the centuries that followed, the *oni*'s deification into a

numinous dragon figured prominently in the formation of the mountain's divine pantheon and purported efficacy.

Beyond the slopes of Togakushi, however, tales of a dangerous *oni* occupying the site took a divergent course. Less than a century after the initial account, demonic associations surfaced in a story from the mid-fourteenth century *Shintō shū* ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō 1970–1979, vol. 13, 249–253). Titled the *Suwa daimyōjin satsukie no koto* (Matters of the Fifth Month Festival of the Great Luminous Deity at Suwa), it provides, somewhat tangentially, an origin account for the Fifth Month Festival at Suwa, but the gist of the narrative mostly takes place in the Togakushi region. It tells of the courtier and poet Ariwara no Narihira (825–880) cunningly stealing a magical flute from an *oni* king in Shinano, named Kannara. He then presents the flute to the emperor. In revenge, Kannara raids the inner palace and absconds with two court ladies to his fortress in the Togakushi mountains. In response, the emperor dispatches a warrior named Mitsukiyo, who travels to Togakushi. Aided by two local deities (Atsuta of Suwa and the tutelary deity of the neighboring province of Owari), Mitsukiyo captures the *oni* at Asama, a peak situated roughly between Togakushi and Suwa.

The late-fourteenth-century war chronicle *Taiheiki* also briefly mentions an *oni* at Togakushi. In an account of two legendary swords known as Onimaru and Onikiri, the military commander Minamoto no Mitsunari (912–997; referred to as Tada no Mitsunari) obtains one of the swords and travels to Togakushi. There he uses it to kill an *oni* in an episode that gives rise to the sword's name Onikiri, or *oni*-slayer ([KBK] Furuya 1912, ch. 32).

Yet among the medieval narratives of *oni* at Mount Togakushi, it is the noh play *Momiji gari* (Pursuing Maple Leaves) by Kanze Nobumitsu (1435–1516) that made the greatest impact on subsequent developments.[9] At the center of the play is the military commander Taira no Koremochi (fl. late tenth century), who travels to Shinano to view the autumn foliage.[10] Deep in the Togakushi mountains, he comes across a gathering of noble women enjoying a banquet beneath the trees and is invited by them to join. After the meal, he falls asleep and dreams of the great bodhisattva Hachiman enlisting the spirit of the bodhisattva's nearby branch shrine (*massha no kami*) to come to his aid. The spirit warns Koremochi that he has just been seduced by an *oni* spirit (*onigami* or *kishin*) and then gives him a great sword. Koremochi awakens to find the women gone. In their place towers a ferocious *oni* with gleaming eyes and two horns protruding from its head. Immersed in flames and smoke, it leaps down from a cliff and attacks. Miraculously, the sword from Koremochi's dream lays by his side! He draws, and the two engage in a prolonged battle until he finally slays the oni ([Nkmt] Yokomichi and Omote 1963, 143–149).

Unlike the Togakushi account of conversion by the *Lotus Sūtra*, warrior tales like this one deploy court-sanctioned violence as a means to vanquish an

unwanted entity. While the latter trope incorporates military force, either can be read as a symbolic form of subjugation by a central authority (Enryakuji or the court). In the Edo period, local legends surrounding *Momiji gari* proliferated in Shinano. As the sources suggest, the symbolic distribution of power in these cases shifted toward the communities themselves. Embellishing and expanding upon the narrative, Buddhist clergy, followed by gazetteer and travel writers, cultivated a growing interest among the early modern populace to seek out and locate the material remnants of both *oni* and warrior in the region's geography.

Narrating *Momiji gari* into the early modern landscape

Tales of military engagement with *oni* such as those discussed above became a staple of the early modern imagination. Through the expanding circulation of commerce, money and ideas, new forms of theatre and performance, and a burgeoning print culture, medieval *oni* narratives were introduced to new audiences at all levels of society. The notoriety of the *oni* emerged out of a broader fascination with creatures of the strange and mysterious (*yōkai*). As Michael Dylan Foster (2008, ch. 2) notes, eighteenth-century encyclopedic works such as the *Wakan sansai zue* (1712) and the illustrated *yōkai* catalogues (1770s–1780s) of Toriyama Sekien (1712–1788) featured an ever-expanding spectrum of titillating monsters.

Within this context, *oni* appeared in new markets, artistic mediums, and modes of production. Harrowing tales in medieval noh plays were adapted to emergent forms of performance, as exemplified in the case of *Momiji gari*. A play bill designed by the woodblock artist Torii Kiyomasu I (fl. 1690s–1720s), for instance, featured Koremochi preparing to slay the *oni* (Figure 2). In 1715 the pre-eminent playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725) adapted the story to *ningyō jōruri* (puppet theatre). Both warrior and *oni*, moreover, became aestheticized in the ephemeral imagery of 'floating world' (*ukiyo*) woodblock prints. This representation, exemplified in one image by Okumura Masanobu (1686–1764) (Figure 3), distanced the narrative from its underlying themes of violence and brutality.[11] The effect was a softening of medieval depictions of *oni* in what Noriko Reider (2010, ch. 5) dubs the creature's 'de-demonization' in the early modern period. This shift from hostility and anguish into commodification may have been true in Edo, but *oni* were not rendered so innocuously in Shinano, as evidence below suggests.

The proliferation of visual and performative representations of *Momiji gari* and other *oni* narratives demonstrates a creative retooling of *yōkai* in Edo and other urban centers. Yet these stories went on the road too, influenced by a steady rise in sightseeing and pilgrimage from the mid-eighteenth century onward.[12] Evidence of this growth appears in the rise of travel itineraries



Figure 2 An early eighteenth-century play bill for *Momiji gari* by Torii Kiyomasu I. The garments of the warrior spell out the names of 'Taira' (right), 'no Koremochi' (upper left) and 'Momiji' (lower left) in *kana*. Harvard Art Museum.

(*dōchūki*) and commercial itinerary maps (*dōchūzu*) for broad swaths of the country (Iwahana 1992; Wigen 2010, 44–55). Shinano often featured prominently in these sources. Not only was it home to popular temple-shrine destinations such as Suwa, Zenkōji, and Togakushi, but it was also accessible via the major roadways. While the Nakasendō (one of Honshu's five principle highways) allowed for convenient passage across the lower half of the province, the North Country Road (*Hokkoku kaidō*) became a thoroughfare extending all the way to the Seto Inland Sea.



Figure 3 Modern impression from a woodblock featuring Momiji and Koremochi by Okumura Masanobu (1686–1764). The William S. and John T. Spaulding Collection, Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Increased mobility throughout country accelerated the oral and printed transmission of narratives. Under these circumstances, the connection an audience made with a performance in Edo did not always end simply after the show. The adventurous spirit might, indeed, seek out locales associated with the play, perhaps even the grounds where its events allegedly occurred. This pivot, while subtle, marked a transformation in the expression of *oni* narratives. Transcending the mere stage, they crossed into the realm of local legend, oral history, and ritual performance.

While the current study focuses on evidence from Shinano, the localization of such narratives was common in the Edo period. Outside of the province, legends surrounding *Momiji gari* appeared across Honshu.[13] Beyond *Momiji gari*, the story of the Shuten Dōji offers another example. Towns and villages sought to affiliate themselves with the *oni*, following Chikamatsu's adaptation, *Shuten dōji makurakotoba* (Shuten Dōji Pillow Words, 1708). Craftsmen in Ōtsu (just east of Kyoto) sold talismans of the Shuten Dōji to passersby on the Tōkaidō.[14] For those who ventured to the remote Ōeyama, moreover, a shrine known as the Onitake Inari Jinja, or 'Inari shrine of the *oni* peak', greeted them at the foot of the mountain.

In the case of *Momiji gari*, traces of both warrior and *oni* began to surface in the landscape of Shinano in the latter half of the Edo period, etched on stelae and projected onto topographical abnormalities. Buddhist clerics wedded this lore with ritual and chroniclers from outside of the province spared no ink in

the ever-expanding storyline. Given the centrality of Togakushi in the medieval *oni* tales of Shinano, it is no surprise that some of this activity unfolded at the mountain itself.

The oni *returns to Togakushi*

Mount Togakushi flourished in the Edo period, supported by both political and popular patronage. The complex of temples, cloisters, and shrines had been decimated amidst a series of battles between Uesugi Kenshin and Takeda Shingen between 1553 and 1564. Then, at the turn of the seventeenth century, a succession of military leaders, culminating with Tokugawa Ieyasu, rebuilt the major structures and allotted 1,000 *koku* to the temples in taxable agricultural estates.[15] This period of restoration was followed by Ieyasu's vermillion seal in 1611, which effectively removed the mountain and its temples from the authority of the *shugo* (provincial constable). Although Togakushi was already steeped in Tendai doctrine and ritual from its medieval links with Enryakuji, ties were reinstated in 1633 when it was formally brought into the Tendai institution. Appointed a direct branch (*jikimatsu*) of Kan'eiji in Edo (the new headquarters of the Tendai institution), the mountain was given oversight of all Tendai temples in Shinano and neighboring Echigo.

Beyond this political, institutional, and economic prowess, the clerics at Togakushi worked to raise the visibility of the mountain for potential patrons and travelers to the site. Fabled connections to the semi-legendary ascetic En no Gyōja (fl. late seventh century) appeared in its iconography and origin accounts as the mountain-based religion of Shugendō grew in the popular imagination. Deities from imperial mythology were drawn into its lore and placed at its temples (which had previously centered on buddhas, bodhisattvas, and its dragon deity). The physical mountain was even hailed as the boulder hurled from the Central Kingdom of Bountiful Reed Plains (Toyo Ashihara no Nakatsukuni) in the famous tale of Amaterasu's seclusion in a cave. Recently invented lineages of Shinto such as Reisō and Sannō Ichijitsu were also introduced under the site's chief administrator (*bettō*) Jōin in the 1720s (Carter 2017).

The incorporation of these beliefs, narratives, and deities played to the interests of a growing base of regular devotees and distant visitors to the site. In the first half of the Edo period, a network of Togakushi confraternities (*kō*) spread across Shinano, the neighboring provinces, and as far as the Kantō region. By the early nineteenth century, solo travelers were journeying from Edo, Kyoto, and Osaka in order to worship the mountain's deities. The increased traffic to the site was encouraged by the mountain's religious community. These developments were due to the collective efforts of the chief administrator, the clergy of the various cloisters, and the village *yamabushi* affiliated with the cloisters.

The use of storytelling often lay at the center of these efforts. A collection of 'miraculous incidents' (*reigenki*) about the mountain's nine-headed dragon offers one example. Compiled in the mid-nineteenth century, these stories reported miraculous events occurring throughout Shinano as a result of the wondrous powers of the dragon. Togakushi's clergy and *yamabushi* performed these tales on the road, most likely recalling them to their *kō* members and to new audiences as a means of proselytization (Miyata 1976). In turn, the entire community (clerical and lay) benefited from the revenue accrued from travel services (accommodations, food, horse stables, and luggage transport), sales of talisman (*ofuda*), ritual services, and entrance fees at the mountain's passageways (*sekisho*) (Furukawa 1997, 87). Under these circumstances, *oni* from the Togakushi's past surfaced on the landscape and in ritual life. As the mountain's clerics seem to have calculated, some travelers would come not only to pray to the mountain deities but also to encounter a bit of thrill through the increasingly demonic terrain.

Signs of this development first appear in reference works relaying connections between Togakushi and the characters of *Momiji gari* in the early eighteenth century. The *Wakan sansai zue*, for instance, included a brief biography of Taira no Koremochi in its two-page entry on Togakushi (Terajima 1712, vol. 2, no. 68, p. 1330). A passage on Koremochi recalls how the warrior entered the Togakushi mountains and slew a bewitching villain (*yōzoku*). For this reason, it states, he was revered thereafter at the site. Interestingly, the noh play from which the entry was inspired receives no mention, a reflection that the narrative had transformed from a staged performance piece into an alleged historical event at the mountain.

Poets and travel writers alike were also quick to cite emerging associations between *Momiji gari* and Mount Togakushi. Famed poet and painter Yosa Buson (1716–1784) dramatized Togakushi's *oni* affiliations in a *haikai* verse he composed during a mid-summer visit to the mountain (translated at the beginning of this article). In the poem, he likens the blossoms of the famous soba surrounding Togakushi to that of *oni* amassing below the mountain's slopes. The poet Ubukata Ujū (d. 1813) also mentions *oni* in his journey through Shinano in 1796. While staying at the Togakushi cloister of Tokuzen'in, he penned a verse that alludes to the 'ancient traces' (*kyūseki*) of *Momiji gari*. Musing that 'neither people nor *oni* were present at the time of the autumn foliage', he whimsically reflected on the degree of solitude he found while visiting the mountain (Yaba 1984, 124). The *Zenkōjidō meisho zue*, composed and illustrated by Toyoda Toshitada in 1843, was followed a half of a century later with another reference to *Momiji gari*. By this time, the *oni* had gained the name, Momiji, and Koremochi, the Yogo Shogun.[16] The gazetteer recounts their story alongside a two-page illustration that depicts Koremochi being wined and dined at a picturesque outdoor banquet. Hosted by two beautiful

women, the scene foreshadows the horrific transformation of these ladies into the figure of Momiji (Figure 4) ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō 1970–1979, vol. 21, 242, 257–259).

Such literary and visual allusions broadened the scope of Togakushi's demonic associations; however, it was the mountain's own clergy that seem to lay at the center of this development. Their efforts relied on the creation of legends and accompanying rituals. Travel writer Sugae Masumi (1754–1829) offers a glimpse into this process through an account of his visit to the mountain at the end of the seventh month of 1784. During his two-day stay, he walked to Okunoin, the temple originally associated with the nine-headed *oni*. Although it had since been reimagined as a dragon, ambiguity persisted around its ontology, as Masumi's account suggests. While at the temple, a senior cleric (*rōhōshi*) recounted the story of *Momiji gari*, embellishing details of the battle. In this version, the battle at Togakushi lasted three days, commencing on 9/7 and ending on 9/9. The cleric explained that in commemoration, the temple held an annual three-day memorial service for the spirits of Koremochi and Momiji. Coinciding with the autumn foliage, visitors were instructed to collect and offer fallen maple leaves (*momiji*) at the foot of the cave. In response, the cleric continued, the spirit of Momiji would arise that very night from the

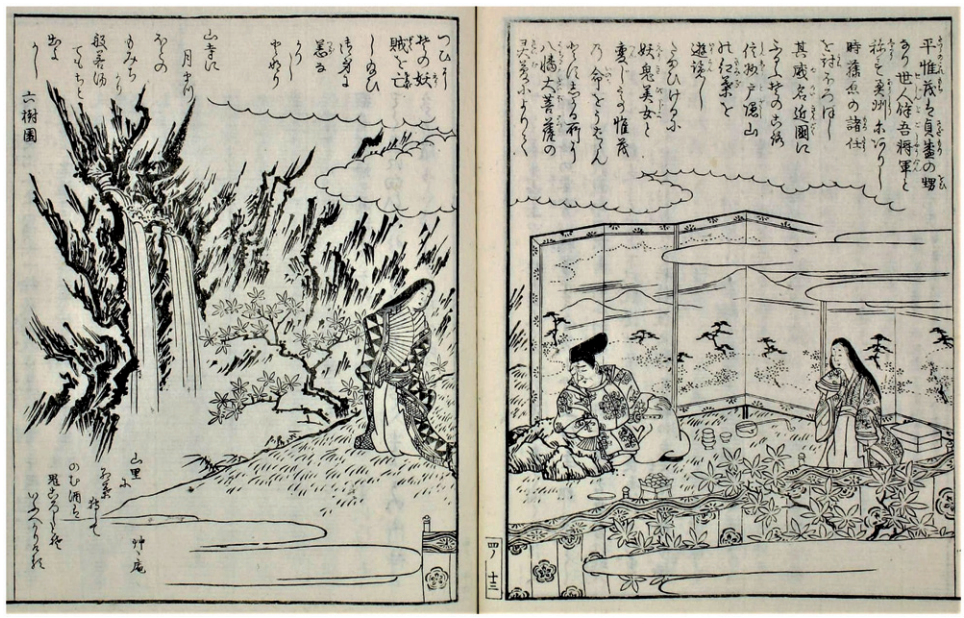


Figure 4 Koremochi unwittingly enjoying a banquet with beautiful women who will, soon after, assume their real form as the *oni* Momiji. Special Collections, Waseda University Library.

nearby seaside cliffs of Osaki (or Dragon 'Tail Hill') in Echigo (Sugae et al. 1965, 67–68).[17] As further evidence of rituals inspired by *Momiji gari*, the *Zenkōjidō meisho zue* mentions a battle re-enactment between Koremochi and Momiji performed by disciples of the mountain temples during a summer festival known as the *hashira matsu* (7/8–7/15) ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō 1970–1979, vol. 21, 256).

This series of annual ceremonies demonstrates the extent to which the temples at Togakushi incorporated the *oni* narrative into their ritual calendar. No doubt, the creative appropriation of a popular narrative served as one way to attract visitors to the site. But were these rituals conducted merely for the purpose of entertainment? While an increase in visitors certainly supported the financial well-being of the community, the rituals also reflect a broader pattern of spirit pacification (*chinkon*) in Japan. The longstanding belief in vengeful spirits (*onryō* or *goryō*), upset by a wrongful or unexpected death in their human lives, presented the constant possibility for illness, death, storms, and other calamities to be borne out through their grudges on the living world.[18] In response, Buddhist clerics oversaw a range of memorial services, festivals, and other methods of ritual placation.

The newly arrived (or rejuvenated) presence of an *oni* at Togakushi likewise needed to be accompanied by a measure of appeasement to offset the potential threat. In this sense, the offering of crimson maple leaves can be read as a gift of appeasement to Momiji. The clergy of Togakushi thereby cultivated the mountain's evolving demonic associations as a popular attraction so long as they could quell the existential threat. While the temples became the center stage for these legends and rituals, a broader pattern emerged in Shinano as other communities joined with their own lore and ritual.

Making ordinary places extraordinary

As a famous site, Togakushi held many appeals for its visitors. With or without its *oni*, the mountain would have still enjoyed wide patronage. For a number of lesser-known sites in the region, however, it was the narrative of *Momiji gari* that brought them into the public view. Sharing regional proximity to Togakushi, they beckoned travelers to drop in on the way to and from the mountain for additional contact with Momiji.

Two such communities lay to the south of Togakushi at the mountain of Arakura. By the early eighteenth century, connections to Momiji and Koremochi began to arise on its western flanks in the village of Kinasa. A passage in the *Shinpu tōki* (Chronicles of the Shinano Territory; 1724), for instance, explains that the toponym Kinasa, or 'village without *oni*' (鬼無里) referred to the fact that Momiji had been driven out by Koremochi ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō 1970–1979, vol. 6, 365). The village's name, which had earlier

been Minase 水無瀬 ('dry river'), reflects a shift in the identity of the community, one that now sought to affiliate itself with the narrative's spreading popularity.

Yet despite a certain positivism we might read in this new name (i.e. no *oni*), another legend from the *Shinpu tōki* was less cheery. Next to a cliff at the base of Arakura were boulders said to be the bones of Momiji's body. Identifying Momiji as a female *oni* (*kijo*), the passage suggests that her descendants continued to live in the mountains as *yamauba* (ogresses) ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō 1970–1979, vol. 6, 365). Perhaps as a possible safeguard, a wooden image of the bodhisattva Jizō was enshrined at the village's Sōtō Zen temple of Shōganji as the guardian deity for Momiji, according to a passage from the *Shinano kishō roku* (Recorded wonders of Shinano; 1834) ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō 1970–1979, vol. 13, 68). The selection of Jizō was apt for two reasons. From the medieval period onward, the bodhisattva became widely regarded as a savior of sentient beings in the lower realms of rebirth, which, by extension, would have applied to Momiji's damned existence as *oni*. In addition, Jizō was well known as a protector of travelers, an attribute that would not have gone unnoticed by visitors passing by the site.[19]

On the eastern flanks of Arakura, the village of Shigarami created its own legends expanding from the narrative of *Momiji gari*. One such legend appears in the *Shinano kishō roku* in regard to a battle between Momiji and Koremochi in the plains below Arakura.[20] The mountain's slopes were purported to be the site where Momiji (disguised as a noble lady) seduced Koremochi over a banquet. The gazetteer notes that traces of the event remain in two boulders at the base of the mountain: one alleged to be the cauldron used by Momiji and the other as the cauldron stand ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō 1970–1979, vol. 13, 68).

Similar to the cases at Togakushi and Kinasa, village clerics at Shigarami took measures to subdue this unsettling presence. The Sōtō Zen temple Daishōji conducted services in honor of Momiji and Koremochi, as evidenced by a mortuary tablet (*ihai*) dedicated to them in the Meiwa years (1764–1771). On the tablet was inscribed the posthumous titles 'Great Layman Koremochi' and the 'Great Zen nun Momiji of the Kamado Cliffs' (Miyazawa 1969, 117–118). The conferment of these titles was a common way for Zen clerics to elevate the recently deceased to a higher spiritual plane. While the practice was normally done at the behest of the descendants of a deceased parishioner, here it served as a means to subdue the lingering spirits of the *oni* and warrior. Momiji was singled out for special attention, receiving an ordination title (*kaimyō*) in the afterlife and thus transforming into a source of merit and good in the world. This soteriological intervention was conducted elsewhere in Shigarami as well. In front of the cauldron stones of Momiji stood a *torii* gate and a small shrine dedicated to the Luminous Cauldron Stand Deity (Kamado *myōjin*), representing a metamorphosis from *oni* to deity ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō

1970–1979, vol. 13, 68). In this sense, the act of ritual placation shifted a source of malignance into something closer to the divine, not unlike what had earlier taken place in the case of Togakushi's nine-headed *oni*.

One final example appears in the mountain hamlet of Bessho Onsen.[21] Lying just west of the North Country Road in the Chiisagata district, Bessho became a common stop for travelers on their way to Zenkōji and Togakushi in the latter half of the Edo period. Coupled with its enticing hot springs, a constellation of stories, sites, and divine associations with the *oni*-slayer Koremochi added one more source of attraction. As evidence of this multi-pronged endeavor, the *Shinpu tōki* recounts a legend in which Koremochi sought out the hot springs of Bessho after sustaining seventeen injuries in battle with Momiji. Despite the restorative powers of the springs, Koremochi died there, and his body was interred in a burial mound (*kofun*) (Figure 5). The passage closes by stating that the bodhisattva Kitamuki no Kannon was installed there in order to guard over the spirit of Koremochi ([Ssk] Shinano Shiryō 1970–1979, vol. 6, 365). This bodhisattva was a local manifestation of Kannon to the village's prestigious Tendai temple of Jōrakuji. Whether intentional or not, the bodhisattva's 'north-facing' (*kitamuki*) orientation was particularly apt for an *oni* narrative, given East Asian geomantic associations of evil with the northern direction. At the same time, its newfound role in the *Shinpu tōki* hints at the involvement of Jōrakuji's clerics in bringing the narrative of *Momiji gari* into their community.

The legend and landmark must have coalesced into an exciting visit to Bessho Onsen for the early modern traveler. One could arrive at the site to recall Koremochi's final moments, stand before his tomb, and then pray to Kitamuki no Kannon. While there, why not also take time to rejuvenate in its legendary hot springs, the very waters that soothed Koremochi's battle-inflicted wounds? Indeed, the clerics of Jōrakuji were probably aware of the currency of these associations in drawing travelers off the North Country Road. Later records reveal that the temple's clerics continued to tout their site's connection to Koremochi and Momiji in the late nineteenth century – activity which may have inspired an adaptation of *Momiji gari* into a widely successful book and kabuki play (Naitō 2009, 296).[22]

Conclusion

The employment of popular narratives by villages in the latter half of the Edo period constituted a significant mode of place-making in Japan's countryside. As reflected in the case of *oni* narratives in Shinano, communities led by their own Buddhist clerics invented new legends that expanded from a well-known story, contributing to, and benefiting from, what Mary Elisabeth Berry (2006, 217) has described as the cultural literacy of early modern Japan. By relying on



Figure 5 A miniature pagoda and various stelae were erected atop this Kofun-era burial mound at Bessho Onsen under the premise that it was the burial site of Koremochi (photograph by author).

a foundation of shared knowledge, they added new layers of meaning to their communities and raised their visibility beyond the immediate region. As these stories surfaced in regional gazetteers and other forms of travel literature, more visitors came, temples prospered, and local economies grew. What was once a stigmatic association now enabled the development of the early modern countryside and its shared ties with the rest of the country.

As a final note, place-making strategies involving *oni* narrative and ritual did not end in the Edo period. Today, communities across northern Honshu experiment with new practices, rituals, and festivals surrounding the *namahage*, a regional figure with its own demonic elements. These innovations have helped to expand tourism for often depressed local economies (Foster 2013). In the case of *Momiji gari*, various websites and popular books have surfaced in recent years. Through the use of these online and print publications, one can retrace the legends and rituals of both *oni* and warrior through the backroads of Nagano prefecture.[23] These activities suggest that the appeal of the demonic countryside may have emerged in the Edo period but continues down to the present.

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Notes

1. Yosa et al. (1992). All translations in this article are my own unless otherwise stated.
2. There are significant ontological differences between *oni* in Japan and demons of the Judeo-Christian traditions. In the former, their existence is governed by the laws of karma and reincarnation, making them subject to transformation (even deification in some cases), while demons of the latter categories are generally viewed in more stable terms as emanations of Satan. Given such discrepancies, I retain the Japanese term in most instances. For more background on *oni*, refer to Komatsu (2000, especially his *kaisetsu*, 457–474), Reider (2010, 1–29), and Foster (2015, 117–127).
3. Representative studies of early modern sites include Hur (2000), Thal (2005), and Hirasawa (2013). Allan Grapard's influential body of work has guided the broader study of Japan's religious sites. In the examination of how these places developed over time, the work of spatial theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and David Harvey are common points of reference.
4. As examples, see Miyazaki and Williams (2001) on the early modern creation of legends connecting the Tendai monk Ennin (794–864) and the bodhisattva Jizō to Mount Osore (Shimokita peninsula); Tsutsumi (2008) on the invention of accounts of religious founders (e.g. Hōnen, Shinran, and Nichiren) visiting temples in Edo; and Williams (2005, 72–77) on the crafting of legends that merged local kami worship with the Sōtō Zen temple of Daiyūzan Saijōji (Sagami Province).
5. Foucault and Miskowiec (1986).
6. See, for example, Bascom (1965, 4–5).
7. This tale has been discussed in depth by Komatsu (1997) and Reider (2010), who also provides an English translation (Reider 2010, 185–203).
8. The story is included in the *Asaba shō*, a voluminous compendium of early medieval iconography, ritual, and temple information compiled by the Tendai cleric Shōchō (1205–1282) at Enryakuji and completed in 1279.
9. *Momiji gari* has been translated into English by Weatherby (1959, 19–33). For a detailed analysis of the play, see Choo (2012, 55–67).
10. Koremochi was allegedly adopted by Taira no Sadamori and led a highly successful military career. In the centuries following his lifetime, wondrous accounts of his feats and

military appointments multiplied in the written sources, culminating with his role in *Momiji gari*.

11. Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839–1892) also created numerous woodblock depictions of Momiji and Koremochi later in the Meiji period.
12. I treat pilgrimage and sightseeing in the early modern era as overlapping categories. Most visitors to sacred sites were as concerned with numinous benefits as they were drawn by majestic vistas and forms of entertainment. The problems with these binaries have been discussed by French ethnographer Ellen Badone (2004). For representative works on pilgrimage and travel in the Edo period, see Shinno (2002), Ambros (2008), and Nenzi (2008).
13. Local accounts appeared at sites in Echigo (Niigata province), Mutsu (Aizu, Fukushima province), Etchū (Toyama province), Ōmi (Shiga province), Owari (Aichi prefecture), Kawachi (Osaka district), and Kyoto (Ochiai 2006, 1). Further research is necessary to determine the precise origins of each case.
14. Reider (2010, 93–94).
15. In the Edo period, one *koku* nominally represented the amount of land necessary to yield a year's supply of rice for one man.
16. Koremochi was allegedly Taira no Sadamori's fifteenth adopted son, and for this reason, he was referred to as the Yogo Shogun ('fifth' after 'exceeding' the number of ten) in the *Konjaku monogatari* (Kokushi daijiten, 1979, s.v., Taira no Sadamori).
17. Shugendō scholar Wakamori Tarō (1980, 407) discusses sources describing the nine-headed dragon's body as comprising the range of mountains that end at Osaki. It should be noted that Masumi visited Togakushi several months before the rituals he described and thus did not actually participate in them.
18. For a brief overview on spirit pacification in medieval Japan, see Kuroda (1996). For developments in the Edo period, see Tsutsumi (2008) and Williams (2005, 43–45). Plutschow (1996, ch. 4) has also discussed how many *matsuri* in Japan originated as a means of placating *onryō*.
19. For thorough treatment on the worship of Jizō in medieval and early modern Japan, see Glassman (2002).
20. Alternatively known as *Shinano kiku ichiran*.
21. While the text refers to the village as Bessho no Onsen, I use the present-day name, which omits the 'no'.
22. *Kitamukisan reigenki: Togakushisan kijo Momiji taiji no den* (Miraculous incidents at Kitamuki: an account of the expulsion of the female *oni* Momiji from Mount Togakushi) was first published in 1886 and reprinted in 1911 and 1936. In 1887 it was adapted for kabuki by Kawatake Mokuami (1816–1893), which inspired the first filming of a kabuki play in 1899 (released in 1903).
23. As one example, Takahashi Gosanjin, a Shinto priest and author of several such books, has designed a Google map identifying nearly thirty sites in Nagano prefecture that either have historical landmarks associated with *Momiji gari* or continue to have rituals and festivals related to the narrative: http://jyashin.net/evilshrine/gods/momiji_shrine/momiji_index.html (accessed 17 July 2018).

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