

The Oni of Kunisaki

Illustrated by
Gaku Nakagawa



*Oni have lived in the mountains of Kunisaki
for as long as anyone can remember.
Once a year they go to the village
at the foot of the mountain.*

One winter day,
Taro came to Kunisaki
to visit his grandmother.





"Taro have you ever seen the oni?"

"What are oni?"

"They live in caves in the mountains."

"Do they really exist?"



"The oni of Kunisaki can build ninety-nine steps out of stone in one night. They can also break large boulders in two with their backs."

"Grandma, are you sure that they really exist?"

"Tomorrow we have a festival and you can meet some oni there."



Late that night, Taro was sound asleep in his bed.
Suddenly, he opened his eyes.
Standing before him was a boy he had never seen before.

"Who are you?"

"I am Taro-ten."

"I am going to take you to see the oni."

Taro-ten spun around suddenly
and made a tornado!





When Taro opened his eyes,
he was flying through the night sky.

He looked down and saw a group of monks
running over a narrow stone arch.
They looked very serious.

"The arch is so thin!
It looks like it could break any minute!"

"That is part of the monks' training."

Taro-ten suddenly spun around again
and made another tornado.





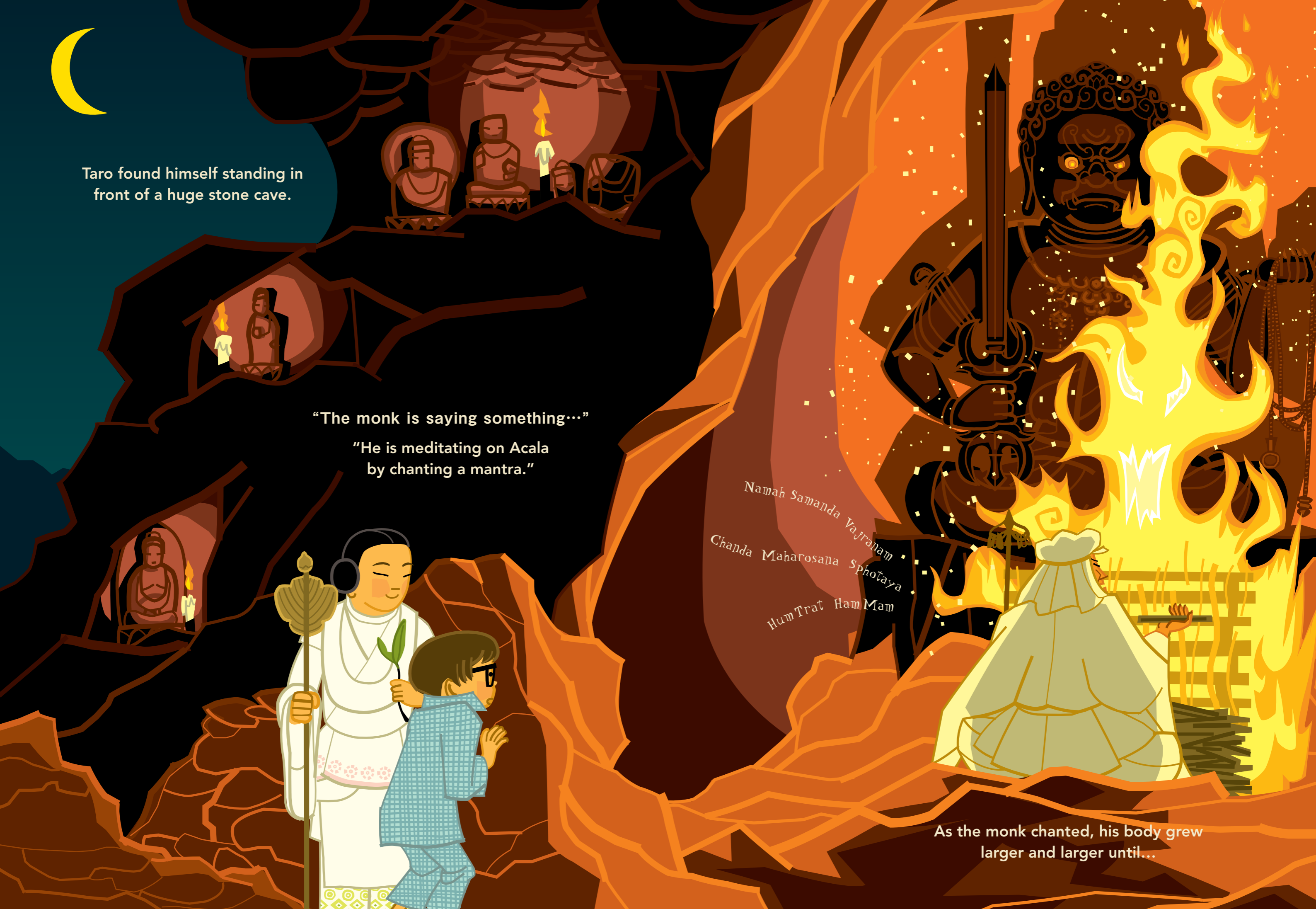
Taro found himself standing in front of a huge stone cave.

"The monk is saying something..."

"He is meditating on Acala by chanting a mantra."

Namah Samanta Vajranam
Chanda Maharosana Sphoṭaya
HumTrat HamMam

As the monk chanted, his body grew larger and larger until...





**"He turned into
an oni!"**

Taro was very scared and closed
his eyes tightly.

Slowly he opened his eyes.
Taro was back in his bed
in his grandmother's house.

"That was scary!
I thought the oni was
going to get me!"



The next day was the Oni Festival.
Taro went to the festival
with his grandmother.

BAM!

The men smashed
two burning logs together.

"The fire is really hot!"
"Watch out for the sparks!"



Taro went to the temple hall. Two men dressed as oni appeared and started to dance as they chanted loudly.



"ŌNI WA YŌ."
"RAISHO WA YŌ."

"ŌNI WA YŌ."
"RAISHO WA YŌ."

"Is that the oni
I saw yesterday?"

The two men continued dancing for awhile
and then rushed out of the temple.

They were heading for...

Taro's grandmother's house!
The house was filled with relatives and neighbors having a party.
"After the oni visit us,
everyone is happy for an entire year and gets along well.
Today we welcome the oni to the village."

"Taro, go stand next to the oni."



The party lasted until dawn.
Taro fell asleep sometime before then...



*Oni have come to the festival in Kunisaki every year
for as long as anyone can remember.
Spring follows soon after that.*

*Oni still live in
the mountains of Kunisaki, even today.
Next year, and the next, and even the next,
they will bring spring to the village.*



The end

The Encyclopedia of Oni of Kunisaki



What is oni ?

The Japanese word "oni" is often translated as "demon" in English. In this book, we decided to use the word untranslated. Because there are all kinds of different oni in Japan, from pretty scary monsters to friendly creatures that are deeply connected with local communities. In Kunisaki, oni is regarded as something akin to ancestral souls that bring happiness to people, and this is why we admire and respect them.



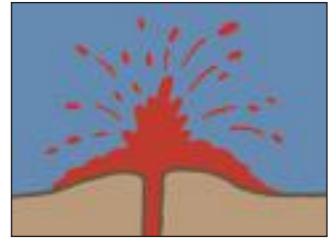
The nature and folklore of Kunisaki

The stony mountains of Kunisaki where oni lives

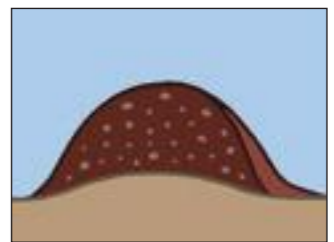
A long, long time ago, Kunisaki was a remote village far from the imperial capital of Japan, Kyo. Back then, the villagers believed and feared that terrifying oni lived beyond the jagged edge of the stony mountains and huge rocks. The giant cliffs, which were so steep that no one could hope to scale them, had deadly caves where they believed oni lurked.

How were these unusual-looking rock mountains formed?

The mountains of the Kunisaki Peninsula are remnants of volcanic activity that ended a round 150 million years ago. Millions of years of erosion wore the rocks down to their current shape.



There was a period of intense volcanic activity about 150 million years ago. Thick, sticky lava erupted from volcanos.



Viscous lava won't flow easily, so it slowly oozed from volcanos' openings and piled upon themselves. Over time, massive, rounded, dome-shaped mountains were built of alternating layers of lava flows and volcanic ash.



The weaker areas of rocks consisting primarily of volcanic ash were eroded by rain and wind, creating the high, jagged peaks that we see today.



Caves and pits of various sizes occurred where volcanic rocks slid off the surface, and the exposed areas were worn away by erosion, growing deeper and bigger over time.

Oni in Kunisaki folklore

Kunisaki is home to the otherworldly scenery of mountains and rocks packed with bizarre folktales and legends. Here you can visit many sites steeped in folklore.

1 A stone staircase made by the oni

Tashibu Hirano, Bungotakada (▶ P39- ②)

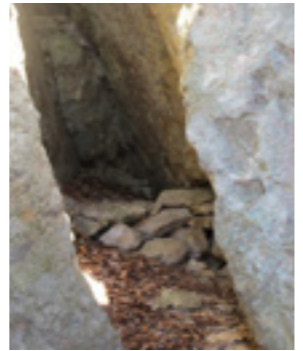
Once upon a time, there was red oni who came to the village of Tashibu to eat people. Gongen-sama*, the guardian deity of the village, told the oni if he could build a stone staircase of a hundred steps by dawn, he would be allowed to eat the villagers. The oni accepted the offer and quickly installed 99 steps. Gongen-sama was shocked to see that, so he imitated a rooster's crow to startle him. The red oni was so surprised that he ran away with the 100th step on his shoulder.



2 The castle of the oni

Ebisu, Bungotakada (▶ P39- ⑬)

Over 700 years ago, there lived a master swordsmith named Ki no Yukihiro who served the 82nd emperor of Japan, Gotoba. After leaving the emperor's service, Yukihiro went back to his hometown, Ebisu and continued to work alone in a grotto. When he was pounding away on a red-hot blade of steel, his face would turn red. He looked so powerful and formidable, local people came to call him the oni deity (Kishin Dayu) and his house the castle of the oni (Onigajō.) There is a similar legend in Kiko, Kunisaki City.



3 The bridge and path made by oni

Futagoji Temple, Kunisaki (▶ P39- ⑳)

Once there was a Buddhist monk named Sentokubō at a temple called Futagoji. He was such a strong man. One day, he brought a single gigantic rock from the mountains and built a bridge over a stream running through the grounds of the temple. There was also a rock cliff blocking a path to the mountain top. To clear the way, he shoved his back against the cliff's wall, making a ravine that cut the cliff into two halves. Because of his superhuman strength, people called him oni. The rock bridge became known as "the bridge of the oni" (Onibashi,) and the path through the ravine as "the path of the oni" (Oni no sewari.)



4 The crazy oni of Iwatoji Temple

Iwatoji Temple, Kunisaki (▶ P39- ⑯)

Long ago, there lived a Buddhist monk named Ichinobō at a temple called Iwatoji in the Imi region. One day, he put on a mask of oni and suddenly turned into crazy oni (araoni.) He has gone completely off his head. He ran past a boundary stone, which supposed to stop oni, to the far end of the village and died right there. When he died, the mask flew off and bit into a rock at Gongsasaki Head. Since then, the oni mask of Iwatoji Temple was nowhere to be found, and it is said that Gongsasaki Head would be lit up with a ghostly flame on the night of Shujō oni, a traditional festival celebrated in January.



* Who is Gongen-sama? Meaning "incarnation," Gongen-sama was believed to be the manifestation of Buddha in the form of a deity to save people. About one thousand years ago, this concept was developed from the widespread belief that the true nature of all Japanese gods was Buddha; this struck a chord with the masses at that time.

Mineiri: a pilgrimage to the den of oni

In the Medieval period, monks in Kunisaki were so deeply in awe of supernatural forces and vehemence of oni that they considered them as incarnations of deities. They head for the mountains to go on a pilgrimage through Daimasyo, where they believed oni lived, to obtain supernatural powers. This pilgrimage is called Mineiri, which means “entering the mountains.” They began building temples here and there on the Kunisaki Peninsula, which had been feared as the den of oni and no one had dared to go near. Gradually more and more people came to settle in the area, and villages formed.

◀ Participants of the pilgrimage in 2010. Mineiri is a long-lasting tradition in Kunisaki. Pilgrims walk mountain trails while chanting Buddhist mantras* throughout their journey.

▼ A monk praying in a grotto.

Namah
Samanda
Vajranam
Chanda
Maharosana
Sphotaya
Hum Trat
Ham Mam

* **What is a mantra?** A mantra is a sequence of sacred words in Sanskrit believed to have spiritual efficacy or magical power.

What do you do during the pilgrimage?

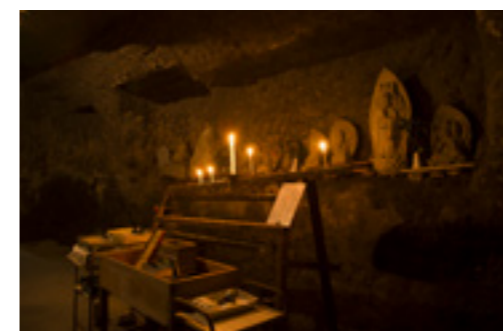
Mineiri is a pilgrimage following the footsteps of Ninmon Bodhisattva*. Most pilgrims walk approximately 160 km in four days, covering almost the entire peninsula. There are many dangerous spots along the trail. Participants have to jump between enormous rocks and cross a bridge over a deep canyon. Monks would run at speed throughout the arduous and perilous trek in the hope of obtaining supernatural power of oni. Another important purpose of the pilgrimage is to give blessings for local people they meet along the way and pray for their good health and protection from harm.



▲ **Mumyōbashi Bridge**
It is said that as long as your mind is pure, you won't fall off from this stone bridge situated high up in the mountains. The picture shows the Nakayama Senkyō Valley. (▶ P39-①)

What is in these grottos?

Hollows in large rocks and stone cliffs are called iwaya, which means “a grotto.” People believed that oni lived in grottos. Back in the day, monks would stay the night in a grotto, place a statue of Buddha and pray.



▲ Grottoes were developed into mountain temples. The one pictured here has been passed down for generations and is still used today as the inner sanctuary (okunoin.)

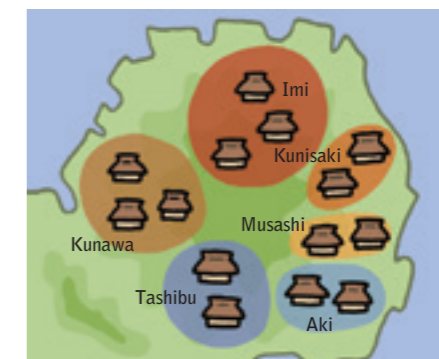
* **Who is Ninmon Bodhisattva?** The legend says that Hachiman, which refers to the syncretic divinity of archery and war, transformed into Ninmon Bodhisattva.

Pilgrim outfit



Their iconic uniform includes a white robe, which represents physical and spiritual purity. It is also a burial garment, symbolizing the wearer's purity of soul and the transformation of the previous self into a higher self as a result of the pilgrimage.

Rokugo manzan



It is said that approximately 1300 years ago, Ninmon Bodhisattva established the first temple on the Kunisaki Peninsula for spiritual training. After a while, more temples were built in the area, and they came to be collectively called Rokugo manzan. Rokugo means “six regions,” which refer to the former regions of Kunawa, Tashibu, Imi, Kunisaki, Musashi, and Aki.

The one night of the year
that you can meet oni

Shujō onie

Shujō onie

Shujō onie is an annual festival used to be celebrated at more than twenty temples in the Rokugo manzan area from the seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, but it is now only held at three locations: Tennenji Temple on the west side of the peninsula, Jōbutsuji Temple and Iwatoji Temple on the east side. Let's have a look at what happens at Iwatoji Temple on the night of the festival.

START!

Let's see the main events of the festival.



Kōdō at Iwatoji Temple

Kōdō is a temple hall where monks gather to study and chant sutras. The one at Iwatoji Temple was built about two hundred years ago, and is used as the main stage for Shujō onie.



A purification ritual from 18:00 (Kōritori)

In the freezing cold, taireshi (for explanation see the top right corner) immerse themselves in the ice-cold river running through the grounds of the temple to purify their bodies. hundred years ago, and is used as the main stage for Shujō onie.



A torch lighting ceremony from 19:30 (Taiage)

A large torch made of cedar timbers tied with spilt bamboo is lit. A group of taireshi carries it up to the main gate of the temple and offers it to Buddha.



A dance ritual performed by the monks around 22:00 (Kōzui)

Two monks with sticks (kōzui) perform a spirited ritual of dancing and chanting Buddhist scriptures to purify the space.



around 22:30 (Onibashiri)

In the temple's grotto, two monks transform themselves into saiharaioni and shizumeoni. Taireshi carries them on their backs to the hall. Standing next to taireshi, oni jumps and violently swings torches around, while singing at the top of their voice.

A dance ritual performed by the monks around 22:00 (Suzuoni)

Two monks with handheld bells (suzu) and paper streamers used in a Shinto ceremony turn into suzuoni and perform a dance ritual to invite oni into the temple hall.

GOAL!

The festival finally ends as dawn approaches.



Everyone goes back to the hall around 03:00

After oni is done the rounds in the village, they go back to the temple to make one last racket. In the end, taireshi holds oni down and put some special rice cakes in their mouths. Oni quiets down and goes back to monks.

This is performed only at Iwatoji Temple and Jyōbutsuji Temple.



Oni visits local houses around 0:00

Oni runs out of the temple with taireshi. They go to the village and visit local houses. They offer sticks of incense at small home alters and recite Buddhist scriptures. When they are done, they will join the villagers for refreshments.

The timetable of Shujō onie at Iwatoji Temple

- Daytime service from 15:00
Monks recite Buddhist scriptures in the hall.
- A dinner at the main building from 17:00 (Otoki)
Monks and participants eat dinner together.
- A purification ritual from 18:00 (Kōritori)
Taireshi purifies their bodies.
- A prayer for the success of the event at the main building from 19:00 (Sakazuki no gi)
People gather to pray for the success of Shujō onie.
- A torch lighting ceremony from 19:30 (Taiage)
Taireshi offers a big torch (ōdai) to the god of the temple.
- Night service at the temple hall from 20:30
Monks recite Buddhist scriptures.
- A dance ritual at the temple hall from 22:00 (Tachiyaku)
Monks purify the space and invite oni in the hall.
- Oni makes a round in the village from 22:30 (Onibashiri)
Oni comes in the temple hall, dances and hits spectators with the torch, goes out the temple, visits local homes, goes back to the hall and then turns back into monks.

The protagonists of the festival

Shujō onie is created in collaboration with the monks of the respective temples and locals alike. Monks and local people both play important roles in the festival.



Taireshi

Taireshi is one of the important roles played by local people during the festival. A group of taireshi escorts oni to and from the temple hall and carries a big torch.

Suzuoni

It is said that suzuoni represents Buddha's mercy. Suzuoni invites oni to enter the hall. It is played by two monks wearing masks of an old man and an old woman.



Oni

Suzuoni invites oni in the hall and taireshi carries them on their backs to a grotto to the temple hall. There are three different kinds of oni for the festival: saiharaioni, araoni, and shizumeoni. Depending on the location of the festival, different oni may appear.

A blessing ceremony around 23:00 (Kajikitō)

Kajikitō means incantations and prayers. Oni performs incantations by hitting spectators' shoulders and backs lightly with their torches.

* Onio local people call Shujō onie as "Onio" or "Oniyo."

Oni in Kunisaki

In Kunisaki, oni became popular among locals as they were considered to be incarnations of deities and Buddha. People believed that oni brought them happiness and protected them from harm. Let's have a look at what kind of oni you can expect to see at Shujō onie, Kunisaki's New Year's festival in which people pray for luck, happiness and protection from bad luck.

What does oni look like?

The oni that appears in Shujō onie has a unique appearance. Let's take a closer look.

A sword
A piece of equipment used by oni which symbolizes wisdom.



A wooden mallet
A piece of equipment used by oni which symbolizes wealth.

Wisteria vines
Oni's torso, arms, and legs are tied with vines of white wisteria at twelve different places respectively, with a large, single bell tied to his back. This is done to weaken the power of oni.

An ax
A piece of equipment used by oni which symbolizes the bountiful nature of the mountains.



An oni mask
The oni mask worn in Shujō onie

The hair
The oni mask used in Shujō onie has a mass of untamed hair made from blades of Japanese sweet flag grass (oniassya.)

Straw sandals
Oni is considered to be a holy being, so they are not supposed to walk on the ground.



A wooden statue of Acala at Makiōdō Temple (▶ P39- ③) with a sword in his right hand and a flaming nimbus behind.

A torch
Oni has a torch in his left hand. During the performance, oni dances around wildly and lightly hit the audience with the torch to pray for their good health.

"Hōren shōyo, sora onniwa yo."

"ōni wa yō, raisho wa yō."

Check this out!

Is the oni in Shujō onie the same as Acala?

The oni appears in Shujō onie is considered to be incarnations of Ninmon Bodhisattva or Acala, which is a fierce Buddhist deity who is believed to protect and help the faithful achieve enlightenment with the power to defeat all evils and bring happiness to all. He has a sword of wisdom in the right hand, which is the same as the one the oni has. There is often an Acala statue inside caves and grottoes in the mountains on the Kunisaki Peninsula where people believed oni lived. Generally, Acala is depicted in an angry face, whereas in Kunisaki, people have been on friendly terms with oni, so Acala statues have more benign, gentle and rounded facial features.

Masks of various oni worn at Shujō onie



Long ago, when many temples in Rokugo manzan celebrated this festival, each community had its unique oni masks.

Food offerings to oni.

Local temples and villagers prepare a special meal for oni to eat during Shujō onie.



The traditional snack for the festival (Oni no mezamashi)

These spicy grilled rice cakes are loaded with hot chili and soybean paste sauce served on bamboo skewers. A favorite late-night snack to keep you awake during the festival.



The meal for oni

For Shujō onie, villagers welcome oni-sama* into their homes and provide a feast for them. They usually serve authentic Japanese dishes, such as stewed vegetables or beans, a clear broth, sashimi, sushi rolls, and sake.

The power of oni to bring happiness to people

In Kunisaki, oni is believed to be incarnations of deities and Buddha who demonstrate their spiritual power by rituals. At Shujō onie, oni gives the audience the blessings of good health and protection from evil forces (kajikitō.)



At Shujō onie, oni lightly hits the audience on their backs with a torch to give the blessings of good health and protection from evil forces.



This painting, titled Ōshiohumi emaki, resides in the collection of Kasugajinja (▶ P39- ②). It depicts a parade of people praying for rain led by oni.

* Local people call the oni that appears in Shujō onie "oni-sama" to express their respect and affection for them.

Different varieties of oni in Japan

鬼, which is pronounced “guī,” is the general Chinese term for ghost. The Chinese character was adopted in Japanese to refer to oni. In ancient China, guī only meant “the soul of the dead.” The term has evolved over time to describe objects of dread, such as ghost and monster. On the other hand, it is said that oni had existed in Japan even before the term was adopted in Japanese. Now let’s take a look at the rich variety of oni in Japan, emerged from a complex interplay of factors including the sensitivity and emotional life of the ancient Japanese, historical background, recurring natural disasters and epidemics, and people’s relationship to Buddhism.

What is oni in Japan?

The term oni refers to several different types of supernatural beings.

1

Horrifying demons related to Buddhism

They are typically rendered as hideous, gigantic ogre-like creatures with one or more horns atop their heads, with sharp claws and canine teeth, wearing tiger-skin loincloths and carrying spiked iron clubs. They typically appear in various folktales and traditional rituals such as Setsubun, a spring ritual to drive away bad luck. Demons in the Buddhist hell, evil spirits, and benevolent deities are included in this category.

2

Deities and supernatural phenomena

This category includes various types of nature spirits that live deep in the mountains such as legendary creatures, supernatural monsters, spirits and demons in Japanese folklore, wrathful deities in Buddhism, and mountain gods.

3

Ancestral spirits

In Japan, there is a belief that when someone dies, their soul returns to the mountains to join the realm of deities, and ancestral spirits protect their descendants and visit them on New Year’s Day and during the Bon festival in summer. Because they are invisible, they are called “onu” or “on,” which means “hidden,” and this overtime became “oni”

Oni from different parts of Japan

Every region of Japan has a wealth of folklore and traditions associated with oni.

Tengu

(reordered all over the country)

One of the most well-known creatures of Japanese folklore, tengu is considered to live deep in the mountains. They are red-faced, long-nosed and winged, dressed like Japanese mountain ascetic hermits and carrying pilgrim’s staffs, large war swords, and feather fans. They can transform themselves into oni or humans. The one pictured here is a giant head of tengu in front of the Kurama Station, Kyoto.



Prison guards

(reordered all over the country)

People believed that oni served the King of Death in the Buddhist hell, working as hell-wardens who dutifully inflict an assortment of gruesome tortures upon the wrongdoers. The one pictured here is a statue of a hell-warden at the entrance to hot spring baths in Beppu, Oita.

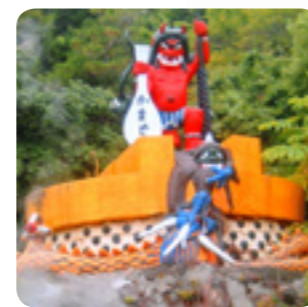


Image courtesy of Oita Prefectural Tourism Association



Oni that appears in Shujō onie, Oita

A New Year’s festival celebrated at temples on the Kunisaki Peninsula, Oita to drive out evil spirits. Oni performs a ritual and gives blessings to the audience.



Image courtesy of Okinawa Convention & Visitors Bureau

Pāntu

on the Miyako Island, Okinawa

Pāntu refers to demons that appear in a festival. They are covered in mud from head to toe, wrapped around with vines and wearing masks. They run around the village and smear mud on villagers to ward off evil spirits and misfortunes.

The word “oni” has many different usages.

- To describe something big: i.e. oni yanma (jumbo dragonfly) and oni hitode (large starfish.)
- To describe someone brave: i.e. oni shogun (lion-hearted general)
- To describe someone ruthless: i.e. oni kenji (cold-hearted prosecutor)
- To describe someone working with great concentration and effort: i.e. shigoto no oni (a demon for work)

Namahage from Northeast Japan

Namahage appears in a mid-January festival on the Oga Peninsula, Akita. They are considered as deities who come to scare children in their homes to bring good luck and make them behave.



Image courtesy of Akita Tourism Federation

Shuten dōji in the Kinki region

Shuten dōji is the leader of a gang of oni which caused chaos in ancient Kyoto, stealing treasures and kidnapping noble virgins. According to legend, he was killed by the hero Minamoto no Yoritomo. It is said that one of his retainers, Sakata no Kintoki, was the model of the famous folk hero, Kintarō.



Image courtesy of Art Research Center, Ritsumeikan University

Oni has been deeply embedded in the psyche of Japanese people from ancient times to the present. Even now, we are inclined to believe they exist.

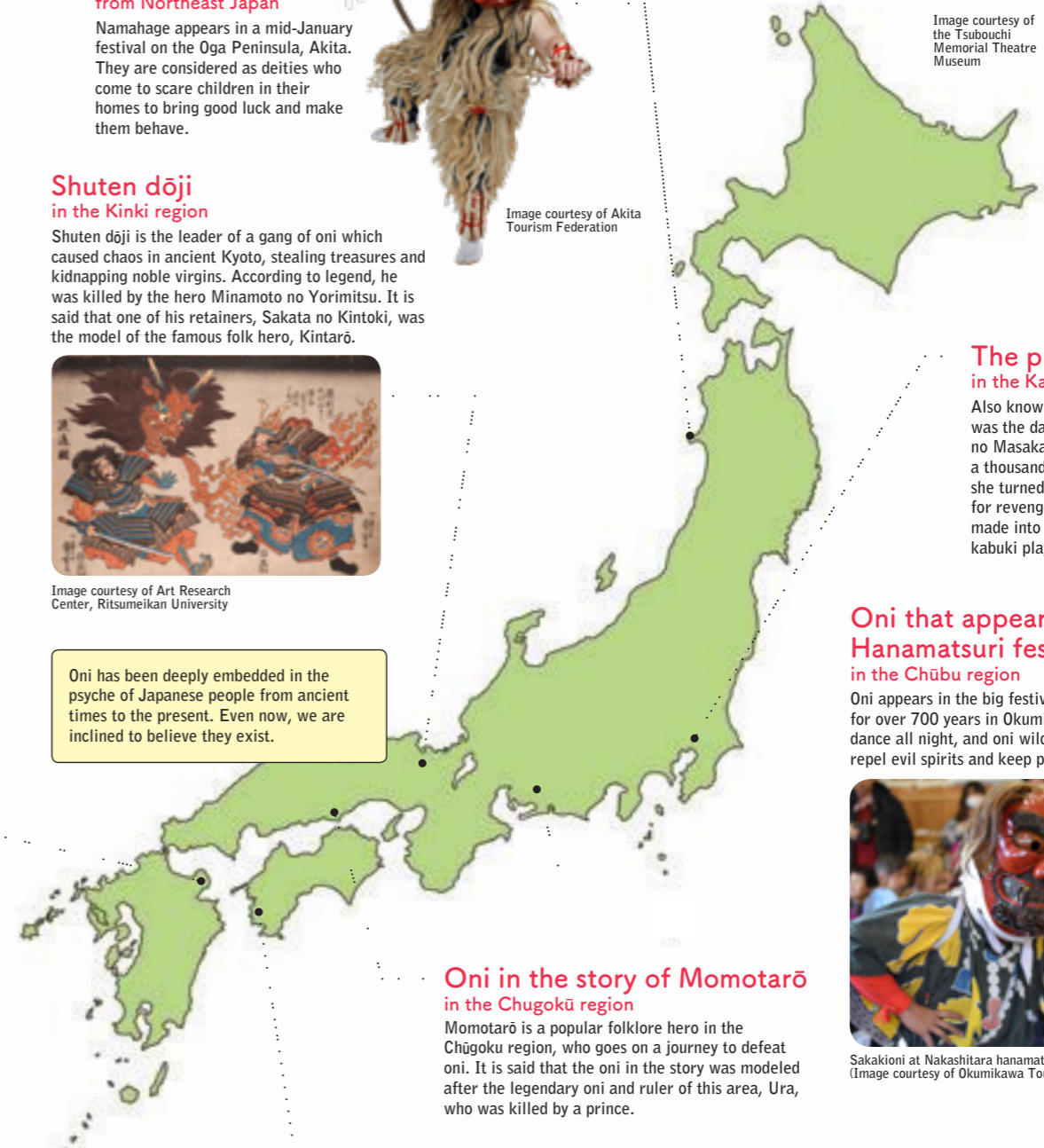
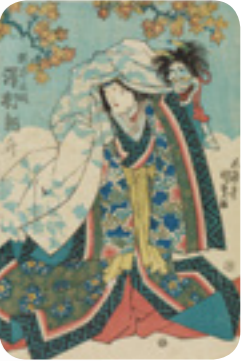


Image courtesy of the Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum



The princess Takiyasha in the Kanto region

Also known as Takiyasha the Witch, she was the daughter of the warlord Taira no Masakado who was decapitated over a thousand years ago. Legend has it that she turned to sorcery to satisfy her thirst for revenge. Her ghost stories were made into ukiyo-e woodblock prints and kabuki plays.

Oni that appears in the Hanamatsuri festival in the Chūbu region

Oni appears in the big festival which has been celebrated for over 700 years in Okumikawa, Aichi. Villagers and oni dance all night, and oni wildly beats bonfires with axes to repel evil spirits and keep people safe.



Sakakioni at Nakashitara hanamatsuri festival, Tōeichō, Aichi (Image courtesy of Okumikawa Tourism Association)

Oni in the story of Momotarō in the Chūgokū region

Momotarō is a popular folklore hero in the Chūgoku region, who goes on a journey to defeat oni. It is said that the oni in the story was modeled after the legendary oni and ruler of this area, Ura, who was killed by a prince.

Oni in the world!

There are varied and diverse folklore and mythology surrounding supernatural, monstrous creatures in various places in the world. For example, in Europe, there is a variety of unique traditions that have survived to the present day. Especially in carnivals, you may be surprised to find masked figures that look just like oni.



Tschaggättä are carnival figures typical to the Lötschental region in the southern part of Switzerland. Clad in goat or sheep skin and hiding behind impressive carved wooden masks, villagers frighten passersby and play pranks. The way they roam through the valley reminds us of Japanese oni

* Names contain “oni”: oni itomakiei (Manta birostris—the largest ray in the world); oni azami (Cirsium borealinipponense—thistle bearing sharp thorns); and oni yuri (Lilium lancifolium—its bright orange flowers look like red oni.)

Protecting our heritage for present and future generations

The enduring quest of Mineiri, the power of people's imagination that conceived oni, and their commitment to continue the tradition of Shujō onie: all these are evidence of our ancestors' lives that has formed our historical and cultural identity. Kunisaki's rich and fascinating heritage can be seen not only in temples and statues but also in its nature and landscapes, which impact on and shape people's lives and lifestyles.

Kunisaki's cultural assets



Spectacular green rice fields of Tashibunoshou Osaki, Bungotakada

Local farmers have maintained the traditional landscape of rice fields for centuries. Steeped in beauty and history, these narrow lanes and waterways remain well protected to this day.

(▶ P39-④)



A picture of the village of Tashibunoshou Osaki

It is said that this painting was of Tashibunoshou Osaki in 1689. Even now, there are still rice paddies of various shapes and sizes made to fit into the landscape. Reminiscent of life hundreds of years ago, it is designated as an Important Cultural Landscape for its outstanding cultural and scenic value in a national context.



The natural woodland of Monjuyaba

Monjuyaba is known for breathtaking scenery consisting of ancient giant trees such as Zelkova serrata, Castanopsis sieboldii, Japanese blue oak and cedar. It is designated as National Site of Scenic Beauty.

(▶ P39-⑰)



Magaibutsu—Buddhist figures carved into the rock face

In East and Southeast Asia, there is a number of giant relief sculpture of Buddha and his acolytes carved into rock faces, with the Ajanta Caves in India being one of the most famous. Made more than a thousand years ago, this is the oldest relief sculpture in Japan. Oita Prefecture and especially Kunisaki are well known for their rock-cut Buddhist cave monuments.

Kumano magaibutsu

(▶ P39-②)

This is the biggest and oldest site of Buddhist relief sculptures in Oita, situated beside the road from Taizōji Temple to Kumanojinja Shrine. In the picture here, you see Mahavairocana on the right and Acala on the left, carved into the cliff. The Acala relief stands over eight meters tall (26ft.)



Iwatoji Temple (▶ P39-⑱)

The Kunisakitō Pagoda

On the Kunisaki Peninsula, you can expect to find an array of stone religious monuments, such as a pagoda which is a tiered tower made of stone or other material to enshrine sutras or serve as a tomb. The one at Iwatoji Temple is designated as an Important Cultural Property.



Ebisu satokagura

Kagura: theatrical dance of Shinto boasting more than three hundred years of history

Kagura refers to sacred songs and dances performed in worship to guardian deities that protect the land and the sea. It serves a number of purposes, such as purifying a space, ensuring a bountiful harvest or catch, and warding off illness.

A cultural map of Kunisaki Penninsula

The Kunisaki Penninsula is home to so much natural beauty and cultural heritage. Rich with history and folklore, it takes us on a journey to the ancient and medieval world. There are many lovingly preserved stone buildings and monuments in Kunisaki, and they provide the historic character and ambiance of the place.



1 Usajingū Shrine

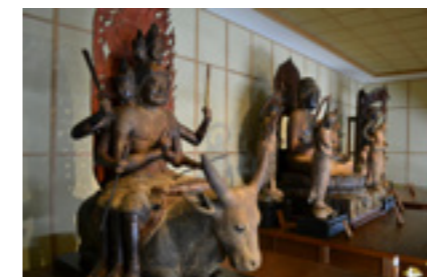
It is the headquarters of all the Hachimangū shrines, which are most frequently dedicated to three deities: Hachiman the Emperor Ōjin, his mother the Empress Jingū, and the goddess Hime no ōkami.



2 The stone stairs made by oni / Kumano magaibutsu

3 Makiōdō Temple

The temple houses nine Buddhist statues, including Amitābha, Yamāntaka, and the nation's biggest wooden statue of standing Acara.



4 Tashibunoshou

5 Fukiji ōdō

This is the oldest remaining wooden building in Kyushu, built in the 12th century. It is one of the three most famous temple halls that enshrines a statue of Amitābha.



6 Chōanji Temple and the Tarō tenzō Statue



Tarō tenzō is a statue of a child that is considered to be an incarnation of Acara. Practitioners engaged in the Mineiri pilgrimage believe that this statue watches over and protect them.

7 Kishiro

8 Tennenji Temple



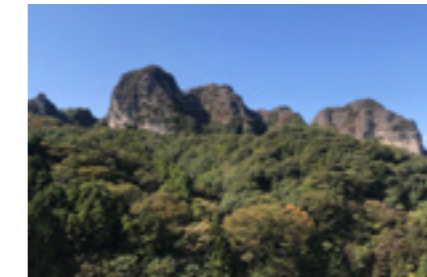
One of the Rokugo manzan temples. It was carved out from a massive boulder by the Nagaiwayagawa River.

9 Tennenji yaba and the Mumyōbashi Bridge

10 Mudōji yaba

11 Nakayama senkyo a.k.a. the Ebisudani Valley

This valley is known for its fantastic landscape characterized by 50 meters high rock cliffs.



12 Rokushojinja Shrine

Six different kami are enshrined here. Gakuniwajinja Shrine is known as "otabisho," where kami stays during their trips between places, and a scared dance ritual called Ebisu kagura is performed.



13 Onigajō

14 The Ōfudōiwaya Grotto

This grotto is located on the path where Mineiri pilgrims walk. From here, you can enjoy a breathtaking view of big rocks and boulders.



15 Itsutsuji fudōson

This grotto is dedicated to Acara. Legend has it that Ninmon Bodhisattva trained in here.



16 Iwatoji Temple and Kunisakitō Pagoda

17 Monjusenji Temple, Monju yaba and the natural forest

18 Jōbutsuji Temple

This temple is home to Shujō onie, a traditional festival designated as Important Intangible Cultural Property.



19 Maruonoji Temple

Here, children celebrate Kodomo onie, a festival performed by children only.

20 Futagoji Temple

One of the Rokugo manzan temples. It is located halfway up the Futagoyama mountain in the middle of the Kunisaki Peninsula.



21 The Kasugajinja Shrine and Ōshiokumi emaki