



## *Yamauba* and *Oni*-Women

### Devouring and Helping *Yamauba* are Two Sides of the Same Coin

A *yamauba* (mountain witch) is often portrayed as a mountain-dwelling old woman with a taste for human flesh. The appellation *yamauba* came into existence in the medieval period. The *yamauba*'s predecessors are *oni*-like (demon-like) as well as mountain-deity-like beings. A *yamauba* herself is considered a type of *oni*, and *yamauba* and *oni*-woman are often used interchangeably in various texts. Although malevolent *yamauba* in such folktales as *Kuwazu nyōbō* (The Wife Who Didn't Eat), *Ushikata to yamauba* (Ox-Cart Puller and Mountain Witch), and *Sanmai no ofuda* (The Three Lucky Charms) are contrasted with the benevolent *yamauba* that appear in *Ubakawa* (Old Woman's Skin), *Komebuku Awabuku* (Komebuku and Awabuku), and *Hanayo no hime* (Blossom Princess), there is a complementary relationship between the good and evil *yamauba*. Their stories possess a complementary narrative format as well, and the duality of the *yamauba* is simply two sides of the same coin. This article also addresses how and why the *yamauba*'s traits came into being. While the Noh play *Yamanba* ("Yamauba") is an indispensable text in understanding the medieval *yamauba* and beyond, I also consider the Noh play *Kurozuka* (Black Mound) a critical text in the formation of the *yamauba*'s image.

Keywords: *yamaubaoni*—*oni*-woman—*mukashibanashi*—Noh—duality

A *yamauba* (also *yamanba* or *yamamba*), often translated as “mountain witch,” is an enigmatic woman living in the mountains.<sup>1</sup> The Baba Yaga of Russian folklore can be considered as a Western counterpart of the *yamauba* figure.<sup>2</sup> To many contemporary Japanese, the word *yamauba* conjures up the image of an ugly old woman who lives in the mountains and devours humans. The distinctive features of the *yamauba* are that she is often said to 1) be an anthropophagous woman living in the mountains, and 2) possess the duality of good and evil, bringing death and destruction as well as wealth and fertility (see Takashima 2014, 116; Murakami 2000, 345).

Yanagita Kunio writes that the *yamauba* described in *setsuwa* (myths, legends, folktales, anecdotes, and the like)<sup>3</sup> are atrocious and cannibalistic like *oni*-women (female demons, ogres, or monsters), and they are cruelly punished, but when *yamauba* are talked about as local beings in legends—for instance, when a villager says “a *yamauba* was living in a certain mountain a long time ago”—they are thought of fondly by the villagers, and one usually cannot relate these *yamauba* to fearful monsters (Yanagita 1978, 248; Yanagita 2014, 167). That the *yamauba* possess a good side, such as a mountain deity helping human beings, and an evil side, such as *oni*-women, is especially evident in *mukashibanashi* (old tales or folktales) (SNKBZ 58:565).

When one looks at these characteristics, however, one notices that it is actually the *yamauba*'s most conspicuous trait, anthropophagy, that is the evil part of her duality. Because her cannibalism is by far her most famous or notorious trait, it stands by itself. This article discusses such traits and how the opposing dual characteristics can be reconciled. Special attention is paid to the *yamauba* versus *oni* or *oni*-women paradigm, because I believe the man-eating destructive *yamauba* and the helping, gift-giving *yamauba* are two sides of the same coin, and that the complementary nature of good and evil exists through the intermediary of *oni*. Further, this article addresses how and why the *yamauba*'s traits came into being and what makes the *yamauba* distinct from *oni*-women. While the Noh play *Yamanba* (“Yamauba,” early fifteenth century) is an indispensable text for understanding the medieval *yamauba* and beyond, I also consider the Noh play *Kurozuka* (Black Mound, mid-fifteenth century) a critical text in the formation of the *yamauba*'s image.

## YAMAUBA VERSUS ONI AND ONI-WOMEN

The first appearance of the term *yamauba* in literary materials occurred in the Muromachi period (1336–1573) (Komatsu 2000, 428; Orikuchi 2000, 300). Prior to that, the enigmatic witch-like female one encountered in the mountains was described as an *oni* or *oni*-woman. Komatsu Kazuhiko explains that supernatural deities worshipped by Japanese are known as *kami*, while those that are not worshipped are called *yōkai* (weird or mysterious creatures), and the *yōkai* with a strong negative association are known as *oni* (1979, 337). Likewise, Michael Dylan Foster writes that when malicious emotions, intentions, or actions are “antisociety and antimoral” they are associated with *oni* (2015, 118).

It is no surprise that such an abhorrent antisocial act as cannibalism is considered an *oni*'s major trait (see Reider 2010, 14–29). An *oni* can eat a person in a single gulp, and the phrase “oni hitokuchi” (“*oni* in one gulp”) more than suggests the *oni*'s cannibalistic inclinations (see Gorai 1984). The sixth episode of *Ise monogatari* (Tales of Ise, ca. 945) tells of a man who falls hopelessly in love with a woman well above his social status. The man decides to elope with her. One night as they are running away a severe thunderstorm forces them to shelter in a ruined storehouse near the Akuta River. The man stands on guard at the entrance of the shelter, but the lady is eaten by an *oni* in one gulp (SNKBZ 12:117–18; McCullough 1968, 72–73). Stories of the *oni*'s cannibalism are frequently recorded in Japan's official history, too. According to *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (True Records of Three Generations in Japan, 901), on the seventeenth of the eighth month of 887 three beautiful women walking near Butokuden, one of the buildings in the imperial palace compound, see a good-looking man under a pine tree. The man approaches one of the women and begins talking with her. When the remaining two women look back in the direction of the pine tree, they are horrified to see the dismembered woman, limbs strewn on the ground, her head missing. At the time, people believed that an *oni* transformed into the handsome man and ate the woman (for a text of the episode, see Fujiwara et al. 1941, 464). In the story titled *Sanseru onna minamiyamashina ni yuki oni ni aite nigetaru koto* (How A Woman with Child Went to South Yamashina, Encountered An *Oni*, and Escaped) of *Konjaku monogatari* (Tales of Times Now Past, ca. 1120), a seemingly kind old woman in the mountains turns out to be an *oni* who attempted to eat a newborn baby. As the appellation *yamauba* was not yet coined in the twelfth century, any anthropophagous being regardless of sex was simply called an *oni*. I believe that the *yamauba* inherited this anthropophagous nature of the *oni* when the term *yamauba* emerged.

Although there are many overlapping qualities between the *yamauba* and *oni*-woman, they are not exactly the same. Michael Dylan Foster explains:

The word *yamamba* (or *yamauba*) does not seem to appear in Japanese texts until the Muromachi period; before that, such witchlike women were generally portrayed as female oni. ... That said, it is important not to conflate all female demon figures. The female oni is often characterized by her jealous rage – in fact, this rage is sometimes the very thing that turns a regular woman into a demon in the first place. This is, for example, one characteristic of the demonic

female *hannya* mask used in many a Noh play. Akin to male oni, the female oni is distinguished by horns sprouting from her head. In contrast, most descriptions of yamamba do not include horns; nor generally is her monstrousness attributed to jealousy or sexual passion. (2015, 147)

It is quite true though, that in a number of folktales *oni*-women do not express jealousy or anger. The *yamauba* portrayed in *Hanayo no hime* (Blossom Princess, ca. late sixteenth or early seventeenth century) has horns on her head, and so have *yamauba* in some other literary works. I would say that the major differences are that the *yamauba*'s topos is the mountains (Mizuta 2002, 13), whereas a female *oni* does not require any mountainous setting—it could be a field, village, city, or palace. Further, *yamauba* are always female whereas an *oni*-woman, on the other hand, could be a transformed male *oni*. This requires one to consider an *oni*'s gender.

In ancient times *oni* were invisible. In early Onmyōdō (the way of yin-yang),<sup>4</sup> the word *oni* referred specifically to invisible evil spirits that caused human infirmity (Komatsu 1999, 3). Takahashi Masaaki identifies an *oni* as a deity that causes epidemics (1992, 4), while Kumasegawa Kyōko interprets *oni* as an individual and/or societal shadow (1989, 204). The character to express *oni* in Chinese (鬼) means invisible soul or spirit of the dead, both ancestral and evil. According to *Wamyō ruijushō* (ca. 930s), the first Japanese-language dictionary, the word *oni* is explained as a corruption of the reading of the character *on* (隠, hiding), “hiding behind things, not wishing to appear... a soul or spirit of the dead” (Takahashi 1992, 41).<sup>5</sup> Peter Knecht notes that the expression *kokoro no oni* (“*oni* in one’s heart”), used in Heian (794–1185) court literature, shows one aspect of the multifaceted *oni*:

In this case the oni serves to give concrete form to an otherwise hard to express and invisible disposition in one’s mind, namely the dark and evil side of one’s heart, such as evil or mischievous thoughts and feelings toward fellow humans. This kind of oni is said to hide in a dark corner of the heart and to be difficult to control. However, in consequence of an impetus from outside it may be thrown into consciousness and its noxious nature may show itself. (2010, xv)

Thus, *oni*, an invisible entity, was not particularly related to any gender, and I assume the Japanese associated the negative qualities they attributed to *oni*—rage, murderous thoughts and actions, cold-bloodedness, etc.,—without any specific gender, until they were manifested in a character.

But now *oni* are popularly portrayed as masculine. I believe that this assumption regarding gender comes primarily from the pictorial representation of *onis*' appearance. More often than not, *oni* are depicted with muscular bodies and are scantily clad, wearing a loincloth of fresh tiger skin. Their bare chest is without breasts. *Oni* are hairy and customarily portrayed with one or more horns protruding from their scalps. They sometimes have a third eye in the center of their forehead, and they vary in skin color, most commonly black, red, blue, or yellow. They often have large mouths with conspicuous canine teeth.

According to Hayashi Shizuyo, who studied the sex of *oni* in the series *Yomigatari* (Reading Aloud [Old Tales], 2004–05; hereafter *Yomigatari*)<sup>6</sup>, in the majority of cases the images of *oni* that appear in *Yomigatari* are male, and when

female *oni* appear in these stories they all appear with an age signifier such as *oni-baba*, *oni-banba*, or *oni-basa* (all meaning old *oni*-woman or *oni*-hag) (2012, 78). Hayashi notes that all the age signifiers indicate oldness and no such signifiers are attached to male *oni*. One reason, Hayashi surmises, that all the *oni*-women in *Yomigatari* are described as old could be that when a woman becomes old, her appearance might resemble a frightening (male) *oni* (2012, 79). Further, while the word *oni* stands by itself without any suffix when referring to a male image, when an *oni* is female the word “woman” or “female” is added, as seen in the examples *oni*-woman or *oni*-baba. In other words, as female-*oni* or *oni*-woman suggests, in order for the creature to be perceived as female for sure, one has to add the term woman or female to the appellation *oni*. This usage may be compared to the use of the word “man” when referring to mankind as a whole. In the aforementioned story titled *Sanseru onna minamiyamashina ni yuki oni ni aite nigetaru koto of Konjaku monogatari-shū*, the old woman was written simply as an *oni*—not an *oni*-woman. A female *oni* could be a male *oni* transformed—as often appears in literary sources. Compared with the ambiguous gender of *oni* or *oni*-women, *yamauba* are and have always been female.

#### CANNIBALISM: THE DESTRUCTIVE SIDE OF YAMAUBA DUALITY

Cannibalism, a major representative image of the *yamauba*, is the demonic side of their dual nature. The witch in “Hansel and Gretel,” a fairytale of German origin, is perhaps a Western counterpart. Cannibalism is probably the strongest element connecting the *yamauba* to *oni*, or one may say the strongest element continuing from the *oni* to *yamauba*. Indeed, in folktales where the *yamauba* is perceived as a man-eater, the appellations *oni-baba* or *oni* are used interchangeably with *yamauba* for the main character. Since the cannibalistic *yamauba* character is almost always found in folktales, I list below the three major folktale story types in which cannibalistic *yamauba* appear and examine which name—*yamauba*, *oni-baba*, or *oni*—is most often used for the anthropophagous character. For the statistics about the use of names in these stories, I have used Seki Keigo’s *Nihon mukashibanashi taisei* (Complete Works of Japanese Folktales, hereafter NMT, 1978–80).

#### *Kuwazu nyōbō* (*The Wife Who Doesn’t Eat*)

The folktale *Kuwazu nyōbō*, which exists all over Japan, is often used as an exemplar of the human-eating *yamauba* (Yanagita 1971, 113–17; NMT 6:182–225; Mayer 1986, 110–14; Seki 1966, 45). The story opens with the mutterings of a man to himself (in some versions he mutters to a friend) about how he wants a wife who does not eat. Soon after he utters this wishful thinking, a beautiful young woman appears at his house and declares that since she does not eat, she would like to be his wife. The man takes her in, and she becomes his wife. But this seemingly ideal woman turns out to be a monstrous woman who has a second mouth at the back of her head. While she does not eat anything when the man is at home, as soon as he goes out she prepares food for herself and eats ravenously with this mouth on the back of her head. When the man finds out the truth, she reveals her true *yam-*

*au*ba appearance. She throws him into a tub, carries the tub on her head, and runs toward the mountains. The man narrowly escapes from the *yamauba* and hides himself in mugwort and iris. The *yamauba* looks for the man and finds him. But she cannot reach him, saying that mugwort and iris are poisonous to her. The man then throws mugwort and iris at the *yamauba* whereupon she dies. It is understood that this story was widely known by the early modern period. In *Kokon hyakumonogatari hyōban* (An Evaluation of One Hundred Strange and Weird Tales of Past and Present, 1686)<sup>7</sup> written by Yamaoka Genrin (1631–72), a well-known intellectual of his day, his student asks: “people say, ‘a yamauba takes human life, and there are stories about a yamauba transforming herself into a wife.’ Is she a real woman?” (Yamaoka 1993, 46). The story must have roused the seventeenth-century urban folks’ curiosity.



Figure: *Kuwazu nyōbō* (*Futakuchi onna*) from *Tōsanjin yawa*.  
Courtesy of the Iwase Bunko Library of Nishio City

Although *Kuwazu nyōbō* is the representative story depicting *yamauba*, *oni* appear as the main character of a story more frequently than *yamauba*. *Oni* appear in twenty-eight stories of this type, while *yamauba* appear in eighteen. Nine stories feature an *oni-baba* as the protagonist. Therefore, there are thirty-seven stories in which the anthropophagous character is an *oni* (either *oni* or *oni-baba*), in contrast to eighteen where the character is a *yamauba*.

*Kuwazu nyōbō* is fascinating in that the seemingly ideal wife becomes demonic after her husband sees her secret, i.e., her unsightly appearance, reminding one of the story of Izanagi encountering Izanami in the nether land: In Japan's creation myth in the *Kojiki* (Ancient Matters, compiled in 712), after the death of Izanami, the female creator of Japan, Izanagi, her husband and male counterpart, misses her so much that he goes to the underworld to retrieve her. But Izanami says that she has already eaten the food from that realm, implying that it would be difficult for her to return easily to the living world. The food produced in the other world has the power to make one stay in that world, so she tells him to wait and not to look. The taboo against looking is a familiar folkloric motif—unable to resist temptation, a protagonist often breaks a promise not to look. Izanagi breaks his promise, and when he looks at Izanami she is ugly, with maggots squirming and eight thunder deities growing around her entire body. Izanami is furious because he broke the promise/taboo and looked at her changed appearance; she attacks him, saying that he has caused her “undying shame.” Terrified, Izanagi quickly makes his way back to this world, whereupon Izanami dispatches Yomotsu-shikome (literally, “ugly woman in the underworld”) from the underworld to avenge her shame (SNKBZ I:45–47; Philippi 1969, 61–64).

Citing eighteenth-century Japanese Nativist scholar Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), Ishibashi Gaha considers Yomotsu-shikome as an origin of the Japanese *oni* (1998, 4). This precursor of Japanese *oni* was a female born from a goddess who felt shame when her unsightly appearance was revealed and who attacked her husband without concern for her own appearance (i.e., shamelessly). Although it is not described in the folktales, the wife who does not eat may have felt undying shame when she found out that her husband saw her unsightly form. If so, this wife-*yamauba* shares the same ancestor as the *oni*. After all, a major root of the *yamauba* are *oni*. Indeed, Yamagami Izumo asserts that from the mythological point of view, Izanami is the prototype of *yamauba* duality, and the *yamauba* was developed and dramatized from this prototype (2000, 383; see also Hulvey 2000).

While the folktale of *Kuwazu nyōbō* teaches moral lessons such as “be careful what you wish for” or “appearances can be deceptive,” Fujishiro Yumiko connects the protagonist of *Kuwazu nyōbō*, who is an ideal wife in front of her husband but who turns out to have a hidden enormous appetite, with an eating disorder, especially bulimia nervosa (2015, 55–63). Bulimia nervosa is characterized by a cycle of binge eating and compensatory self-induced vomiting. At any given point in time, 1% of young women have bulimia nervosa (National Eating Disorders Association 2017). On the other hand, Yamaguchi Motoko finds the *yamauba* figure of *Kuwazu nyōbō* in many young female patients of anorexia nervosa, an eating disorder characterized by weight loss, fear of gaining weight, and food restriction

(2009, 85–88). This folktale encompasses the underlying desire of women to look beautiful in the public eye—to look pleasant and agreeable to men more than to women perhaps—and be accepted by the public—both men and women, but again perhaps men in particular. Pressure on the female to make her appearance acceptable to the male seems to be reflected in the tale.

*Ushikata to yamauba (Ox-Cart Puller and Yamauba)*

Another famous folktale that underscores the cannibalistic aspect of *yamauba* is *Ushikata to yamauba*. In this tale, a *yamauba* attempts to devour anything she can obtain. Unlike the protagonist of *Kuwazu nyōbō*, who tries to hide her large appetite from her husband, from the very beginning of the story the *yamauba* in *Ushikata to yamauba* attempts to openly devour anything she can obtain. The *yamauba* first approaches a young man who is carrying fish in his ox-cart on his way back to his village. She demands fish from the young man and then demands the ox. After devouring the ox, she sets her sights on eating the man. He flees from her and soon comes upon a lone house in the woods that turns out to be the *yamauba*'s dwelling. But with the help of a young woman who lives there, he vanquishes the *yamauba* (NMT 6:158–81; Yanagita 1971, 109–13; Mayer 1986, 107–10; Seki 1966, 44).

According to *Nihon mukashibanashi taisei*, forty-seven stories of this type feature the *yamauba* as a devouring character, compared to twenty with *oni-baba*. The *oni* accounts for twelve stories. Here again, the terms *yamauba* and *oni-baba* or *oni* are used interchangeably.

The *yamauba* in both *Kuwazu nyōbō* and *Ushikata to yamauba* has an enormous appetite. Meera Viswanathan writes, “The figure of a man-eating female demon is peculiar neither to Japan nor to premodern narratives. . . . The delineation of these ravenous figures suggests an overarching preoccupation with the danger posed by female consumption as well as the need to defuse the threat, leading us to question whether the provenance of such man-eaters, ironically, is rather in the realm of male anxieties about castration than simply in female notions of resistance” (1996, 242–43). This appetite could also imply memories of famine in villages. In one *Kuwazu nyōbō* story from Okayama prefecture, a peasant wants a wife but, because of the continuous famine, he wishes for a wife who eats nothing (NMT 6:197). The enormous appetite could also suggest a suppressed female desire for a plethora of food. Appetite is a fundamental biological desire, but in Japan, too great an appetite—especially for women—is frowned upon in public or private, in villages or cities. The *yamauba* who chases after her prey without shame or concern with appearances spurns standard societal expectations.

*Sanmai no ofuda (The Three Magic Charms)*

Another famous story about a human-eating character is *Sanmai no ofuda*. The old *bonze* (Buddhist monk) in a mountain temple drives his mischievous novice away from the temple to teach him a lesson. Before the boy leaves, the *bonze* gives him three charms that will protect the boy in case of dire need. The novice leaves the temple and starts to pick nuts on the mountain, where an old woman appears and

invites him to her house. During the night the novice sees the woman transforming into a monstrous shape, and she tries to eat him. He escapes from her house using the magic charms; each time the novice uses a charm, it delays the *yamauba* in her chase, but the *yamauba* eventually reaches the temple. When she is about to enter the temple the *bonze* shuts the gate, crushing and killing the *yamauba*. In some stories, when the *yamauba* reaches the temple, she demands that the *bonze* hand over the novice, and the *bonze* challenges the *yamauba* to a disguise contest. She scoffs at the challenge and turns into a bean, whereupon the master eats the bean-*yamauba* (NMT 6:132–54; Seki 1966, 43).

Among the stories of this type, thirty-six stories have an *oni-baba* for the anthropophagous character compared to *yamauba* in fourteen stories, old woman in thirteen stories, and *oni* in eleven stories. I should note that in the story printed in Yanagita's *Nippon no mukashibanashi kaiteiban*, the cannibalistic being is called *yamauba* until the very end, when it suddenly changes to *oni-baba* (1960, 67). In this particular tale, collected from Akita prefecture, the *yamauba* pretends to be the novice's aunt and invites him to her house. In spite of the old *bonze's* warning, the novice goes to the woman's house. The aunt tells the novice to sleep in bed until she fixes a feast for him. He follows her instructions but after a while he peeks into her room, where he finds his aunt has turned into a *yamauba*, who sharpens her butcher's knife beside a big boiling kettle. He barely escapes with the charms. Back at the mountain temple, the *bonze* challenges the *yamauba* who comes after the novice to a shape-shifting contest. The *yamauba* changes into bean-paste whereupon the *bonze* eats her. But the *yamauba* inside the *bonze's* stomach hurts him so badly he breaks wind, and out comes the *yamauba*. She then goes back to the mountain (1960, 65–67; English translation in Yanagita 1966, 58–60). The interchangeability between *yamauba* and *oni* is remarkable.

This pattern of the novice throwing a charm, and each charm delaying the *yamauba's* chase after him until he barely reaches the safe zone, parallels Izanagi's escape from the underworld mentioned earlier. To make it back to this world, Izanagi throws his personal belongings to delay his chasers, Yomotsu-shikome and the thunder gods. First, he unties the black vine securing his hair and throws it down, whereupon it immediately bears grapes. While Yomotsu-shikome eats the grapes, Izanagi continues his run. When Yomotsu-shikome is catching up with him, Izanagi throws his comb, which turns into bamboo shoots. While Yomotsu-shikome eats the bamboo shoots, he runs. Again, the roots of the *yamauba* can be found in Yomotsu-shikome or Izanami, who is also a root of the *oni*.

#### HELPER AND FORTUNE GIVER: THE POSITIVE SIDE OF YAMAUBA DUALITY

While the terrifying aspect of the *yamauba* is highlighted in the aforementioned stories, she can also be a helper and can bring good fortune, like Frau Holle of the Brothers Grimm. This is the positive side of *yamauba* duality. The *yamauba's* positive side may also have come from the *oni's* nature as a bringer of wealth. The *oni* can be a bringer of fortune, through prized tools such as a wish-granting mallet that can produce any material (see Antoni 1991; Reider 2010). But when

she is a helper of human beings or bringing good fortune to humans, none of the *oni*-related appellations—*oni-baba*, *oni*-woman, or *oni*—are used to describe her. Even so, the *yamauba* is not entirely disconnected from the *oni*. She often lives in an *oni*'s house. The following two types of stories, *Komebuku Awabuku* and *Ubakawa*, are frequently cited as exemplar stories to foreground the positive side of the *yamauba*.

*Komebuku Awabuku (Komebuku and Awabuku)*

*Komebuku Awabuku* is a stepdaughter story. In *Komebuku Awabuku* the mother gives a bag with holes to her stepdaughter, named Komebuku, and a good bag to her real daughter, named Awabuku, and sends them to the mountains to fill their bags with chestnuts. The sun sets, and the two daughters lose their way. They find a house in the mountains that turns out to be a *yamauba*'s house. The *yamauba* reluctantly lets them in. She tells them to hide because it is an *oni*'s residence, thereby saving their lives from the *oni*. She also asks them to take huge lice off her head. Komebuku takes off the lice, but Awabuku does not. When they leave the house, she gives Komebuku a treasure box and Awabuku some roasted beans. The mother takes Awabuku to a theatrical play and has the stepdaughter stay at home to perform tasks such as carrying water. But with the help of a traveling priest and a sparrow, she finishes the tasks and goes to the play. A young man who sees Komebuku at the play proposes marriage to her. Her stepmother tries to procure him for her real daughter, but the young man marries the stepdaughter. The real daughter wants to be married, and her mother goes to seek a suitor, carrying her daughter in a mortar. They fall into a stream and turn into mud snails (NMT 5:86–III; Seki 1966, III; Mayer 1986, 44–46).

Among stories of the *Komebuku Awabuku* type printed in NMT, seventeen stories designate a *yamauba* as the character who gives treasures and clothes to the good child. Seven of the stories state that the helper is an old woman; in four of these seven, the old woman lives in an *oni*'s house and hides the sisters from the *oni*. The terms *oni-baba* or *oni* are not used to describe this helper. It should be noted that in giving good fortune, the *yamauba* is not indiscriminate. She is selective, giving treasures only to those who deserve them. She tests the character with some chores first. If one is good to the *yamauba*, the *yamauba* rewards him or her accordingly. This selective behavior on the part of the *yamauba* satisfies the audience's sense of justice.

*Ubakawa (Old Woman's Skin)*

The *Ubakawa*-type stories are also stepdaughter stories. A stepmother hates her stepdaughter and drives her away. The heroine, who is to be married to a serpent bridegroom, flees from him. The girl finds a solitary house in the mountains in which an old woman lives. The old woman says it is an *oni*'s house and hides the heroine from the *oni*. This old woman, a *yamauba*, takes pity on her and gives her an *ubakawa* (literally “an old woman's skin”), which makes the wearer appear dirty or old. The girl wears the *ubakawa* and is employed in a rich man's house as an old kitchen maid. The rich man's son catches a glimpse of her in her natural form,

when she is in her room alone. He becomes sick. A fortune-teller tells the rich man that his son's illness is caused by his love for a certain woman in his house. All the women in the house are taken before the son one by one to offer tea or medicine to him. When he sees the heroine in the *ubakawa*, he smiles at her and takes a drink from the cup she offers him. She takes off the *ubakawa* and becomes the son's wife (Mayer 1986, 48–49; NMT 5:173–87; Seki 1966, 114–15).

Among the stories of the *Ubakawa* type, the old woman turns out to be a frog saved by the heroine's father in eighteen stories. Only two stories designate the helper as a *yamauba*. Again, the terms *oni-baba* or *oni* are not used for the helper. In many stories, as in *Komubuku Awabuku*, the helper lives in an *oni*'s house, but she is not considered an *oni* herself. She is simply referred to as an old woman who lives in an *oni*'s residence.

#### DEVOURING AND HELPING YAMAUBA: TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

While terrifying *yamauba* in such folktales as *Kuwazu nyōbō* are often contrasted with the helping *yamauba* that appear in *Ubakawa* and *Komebuku Awabuku*, they are actually two sides of the same coin, not only through their connection with the *oni* but also through their complementary narrative format. In all three of the frightening tales, it is the *yamauba* who seeks out and approaches her prey in the open—somewhere outside her house—and thus she is proactive. In *Kuwazu nyōbō*, the *yamauba* appears in front of the man outside his house, saying specifically that she wants to be his wife because she does not eat. The *yamauba* in *Ushikata to yamauba* first talks to the ox-cart puller who is on his way back to his village. In *Sanmai no ofuda* the *yamauba* shows up before the acolyte on a mountain, introducing herself as the novice's aunt.

On the other hand, in both *Komebuku Awabuku* and *Ubakawa* it is the daughter (or daughters) that approach the *yamauba*, who is in her own private space—her own house in the mountains. The girl who loses her way seeks a night's lodging at a lone house, a *yamauba*'s residence. Inside the house, the *yamauba* responds to the girl's request; thus the *yamauba* is reactive. While the anthropophagous *yamauba* tries to eat humans, the helping *yamauba* saves the main character from the devouring co-habitant *oni*. The cannibalistic *yamauba* is one side of the coin and the helping *yamauba* is the other side.

One interpretation of this finding is that the *yamauba* is benevolent as long as she stays in her house in the mountains, but she becomes an evil *oni* when she becomes proactive and ventures out to seek more food or to take food away from men. One of the major reasons for the mixture of *yamauba*, *oni*, and *oni*-women lies in the *yamauba*'s *oni* roots, but the influence of patriarchy, in particular the Confucian-style patriarchy imported from China, is certainly perceivable. The appearance of the term *yamauba* in the Muromachi period corresponds to the time of the spreading of the patriarchal household system and the declining status of women.

The helping side of *yamauba* seems more prevalent in other areas of literature such as *otogizōshi* (companion tales), performing arts, and in many legends. It is

important to note that even when she is helpful, the *yamauba*'s association with *oni* is still strong and she is often visually portrayed as *oni*-like, as explained below.

#### OTOGIZŌSHI, HANAYO NO HIME (BLOSSOM PRINCESS)

*Hanayo no hime*, an *otogizōshi* tale, is known for its strong folkloric elements associated with *Komebuku Awabuku*, *Ukakawa*, and other folk tales (see Reider 2016, essay 6). The *yamauba* character is a helper just like the *yamauba* in *Komebuku Awabuku* and *Ukakawa*, and the narrative pattern is the same: The *yamauba* of *Hanayo no hime* lives in a cave deep in the mountains, and the good heroine Blossom Princess, who is treated cruelly by her stepmother, comes to the *yamauba*'s dwelling at night. The *yamauba*'s cave is also an *oni*'s residence, and she tells the heroine that her husband is an *oni*. She hides Blossom Princess from her *oni*-husband so that the princess is not eaten. The *yamauba* gives Blossom Princess directions about where to go and treasures that save her at a critical moment.

The *yamauba* never calls herself an *oni*, and while the narrator does not call her an *oni* either, she is treated like an *oni* by the main characters (and by the author[s] and readers). A popular belief dictates that a religious service should be held for the departed souls of one's ancestors so that these ancestors will protect their descendants. On the other hand, unattended souls are thought to roam in this world to do harm to people as *oni*. Takahashi Mariko notes that the *yamauba* in *Hanayo no hime* is considered an *oni* who does not have anyone who prays for her and can only rest in peace for the first time after a memorial service is held for her by the family of Blossom Princess (1975, 30; see also Yanagita 1988).

It is significant that the *yamauba*'s physical features resemble an *oni*; the *yamauba* is "fearful-looking." Blossom Princess reacts tearfully when she first meets the *yamauba* precisely because of the *yamauba*'s terrifying appearance. The *yamauba* had "a square face. Her eyes were sunk deep into her head but still her eyeballs protruded. She had a big mouth, and the fangs from her lower jaw almost touched the edges of her nose. That nose resembled a bird's beak and her forehead was wrinkled up; her hair looked as though she had recently worn a bowl on her head. ... On her skull were fourteen or fifteen small horn-like bumps" (Yokoyama and Matsumoto 1982, 530–31; Reider 2016, 181, 183). Blossom Princess believes from her appearance that the *yamauba* is an *oni*. It is the *yamauba*'s *oni*-like appearance, and the cannibalism that is associated with *oni*, that make the princess feel hopeless and in despair. One may say the narrator or the persona of the author(s), and by extension the readers of that time, equated *yamauba* with *oni* or with an *oni*-like appearance.

#### THE NOH PLAY *YAMANBA*: A STARTING POINT

The reaction of Blossom Princess when she first sees the *yamauba*—fear and despair—is exactly the same as that of the entertainer named Hyakuma Yamanba in the Noh play *Yamanba* (SNKBZ 59:564–82; Bethe and Brazell 1998, 207–25), one of the earliest texts that uses the term *yamauba* (*yamanba*). The text reveals

a helping (and self-reflective) *yamauba* in spite of her scary looks and shows how deeply the image of *yamauba* is interwoven with that of *oni*. Indeed, I believe this Noh text, whose authorship is generally attributed to Zeami (1363–1443), is a fundamental and extremely influential literary text in creating the image of *yamauba*.

The synopsis of the play goes as follows: In the first act, Hyakuma Yamanba (hereafter Hyakuma), an entertainer who became famous in the capital by impersonating a *yamanba* dance, is traveling to Zenkōji temple with her attendants. On their way through the mountains, the sky suddenly becomes as dark as night and Yamanba (the *mae-shite* or protagonist of the first act; I use Yamanba with capital “Y” in this form when referring to the protagonist) appears disguised as an old woman. Yamanba in the first act is proactive, approaching Hyakuma’s troupe in an open space. She offers them lodging for the night and requests that Hyakuma perform the *yamanba* song. Yamanba thinks that Hyakuma should pay tribute to her, as the source of the entertainer’s fame from her eponymous song, and pray for Yamanba’s salvation with the song and dance.<sup>8</sup> Saying that she is Yamanba she disappears, marking the end of the first act. During the interlude, daylight returns. Hyakuma’s attendant asks a villager of the place what a *yamanba* is, but he has no clue. In the second act, Yamanba (the *nochi-shite* or protagonist of the second act wearing a *yamanba* mask) appears at night in her true form. Yamanba dances, describing her mountain rounds in every season, invisibly helping humans, and she disappears.

#### *Yamanba’s Oni Image*

When Hyakuma sees Yamanba in her true form, she can see “a thicket of snowy brambles for hair, with eyes that sparkle like stars, and a face that’s painted red—, a demon gargoyle crouching at the eaves” (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 218; SNKBZ 59:576). Hyakuma is petrified that she will be devoured like the lady in the aforementioned *Ise monogatari*. The terrifying appearance of Yamanba causes Hyakuma to view Yamanba as an *oni* who devours humans, as in this old story. The Noh *yamanba* mask and wig worn by the lead actor correspond to this description. *Yamanba* was the fourth most frequently performed piece during the period between 1429 and 1600 (Nose 1938, 1314). Its popularity suggests that the visual image of the *yamauba* it portrays could very well have influenced the general image of the *yamauba* in the medieval period (1185–1600).<sup>9</sup>

From the villager’s nonsensical talk about the origins of *yamanba* it is apparent that no one knew exactly what a *yamauba* looked like at this time. When asked by Yamanba whether Hyakuma’s attendant has any idea what the true *yamanba* is like, he speculates, based on Hyakuma’s dance, that *yamanba* is “a demoness [*kijo*] dwelling in the mountains.” This is perhaps how Hyakuma, the narrator, and people at the time thought of *yamauba*—as in the case of the *yamauba* in *Hanayo no hime*. In response, Yamanba asks, “Isn’t a demoness a female demon [*onna no oni*]? Well, whether demon or human, if you’re talking about a woman who lives in the mountains, doesn’t that fit my situation?” The chorus sings, “bound to fate, clouds of delusion, like bits of dust, mount up to become Yamamba,” who is “a demoness in form” [*kijo ga arisama*] (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 213, 225; SNKBZ 59:570, 581). Yamanba’s intense thoughts to manifest herself in a tangible form

cause her to appear in the form of an *oni*-woman. Yamanba never calls herself an *oni*-woman, though she resembles one. While Yamanba is resigned to being called an *oni*-woman, she emphasizes the fact that her relationship with nature and her residence in the mountains are more important than her imagined or associated status.

The Noh play *Yamanba* is layered with and shrouded in religious and philosophical subtexts such as “good and evil are not two; right and wrong are the same” (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 207). The core concept of the play is the transcendental philosophy of non-dualism epitomized in the *Hannya shingyō* (*Heart Sutra*), perhaps the best-known Buddhist text. From the viewpoint of the statement that “form is nothing other than emptiness, emptiness is nothing other than form” (*shikisoku zekū, kūsoke zeshiki*), the existence of buddhas, human beings, and *yamauba* is miniscule within the vastness of time and space (Baba 1988, 284–85). The protagonist sings, “Let the vibrant strains of your music and dance serve as a Buddhist sacrament for then I, too, will escape from transmigration and return to the blessed state of enlightenment” (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 213; SNKBZ 59:571). This *yamauba*, created perhaps by Zeami using the philosophy of contemporary intellectuals and the zeitgeist, is a seeker of enlightenment and would wander the mountains until her delusions ceased to exist, in order to escape the wheel of reincarnation.

Wakita Haruko comments that the Noh play *Yamanba* is crisp and has the feel of deep mountain valleys; the protagonist is a mountain spirit and reflects what a city dweller would consider as the incarnation of a mountain spirit (2002, 45). Wakita notes that elements of Yanagita’s theory of the *yamauba*’s origins discussed earlier naturally existed in the medieval period as well, and that some of these elements became the basis of the Noh play *Yamanba*. From the diction of the play, Wakita interprets Yamanba as an *oni*-spirit (*reiki*), a creature that a human becomes after death. Yamanba’s painful mountain rounds resemble the karma of human beings, who reincarnate through the six realms. Yamanba thinks that she will be able to escape from the rounds of reincarnation and go to a better place if Hyakuma performs a memorial service for her by means of her memorable dance (Wakita 2002, 46). Yamanba encompasses the spirits of the dead in the mountains, which is similar to the *yamauba* character in *Hanayo no hime* and is in tune with the concept that contemporary Japanese had about mountains. Monica Bethe and Karen Brazell describe, “Yamamba is depicted wandering through the hills, communing with nature, and savoring the beauty of the changing seasons; indeed she might be seen as Nature itself” (1978, 8–9).

### *Yamanba Helping Humans*

Yamanba cares about her image and tries to counter her dark image by stressing her positive side—for example, she helps humans with carrying wood and weaving. Yamanba recites: “At other times, where weaving girls work looms, she enters the window, a warbler in willows winding threads, or she places herself in spinning sheds to help humans, and yet women whisper – it is an invisible demon they see” (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 223; SNKBZ 59:580). Yamanba laments that she only tries to help people (*hito o tasukuru waza o nomi*), but people say that they can-

not see her because she is an invisible *oni*, referring to the preface of *Kokinshū* (A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern), which states that poetry “stirs the feelings of deities and demons invisible to the eye” (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 223n25; SNKBZ II:17).

The folk belief that *yamauba* took part in weaving and spinning may have already existed and been reflected in the Noh play, or it is also possible that the *yamauba*'s association with weaving originated in the play *Yamanba* in order to give a positive impression of *yamauba*. In either case, I speculate that this image was strengthened through another Noh text titled *Kurozuka*.

#### THE NOH PLAY KUROZUKA (ADACHIGAHARA):

##### THE CROSSROADS OF YAMAUBA AND ONI-WOMEN

While *Yamanba* laments her image as an *oni*, the main character of the Noh play entitled *Kurozuka* is a full-fledged *oni*-woman possessing all the elements of *yamauba* described above. The play appears with different titles; it is called *Kurozuka* by the Hōshō, Konparu, Kongō, and Kita schools of Noh, and is known as *Adachigahara* (Adachi Moor) by the Kanze school. The playwright is not known, but according to Baba Akiko, it could be either Konparu Zenchiku (1405–70), Zeami's son-in-law who inherited Zeami's subtle and allusive style, or Zeami himself (1988, 258).

Although the term *yamauba* does not appear, I believe *Kurozuka* is a critical text in that it stands at the crux of the *yamauba*, *oni*-women, and *oni* paradigm. The kind and helpful image of *yamauba* described in *Komebuku Awabuku*, *Ukakawa*, and *Hanayo no hime* is revealed in the woman played by the protagonist of the first act. The *oni*-woman performed by the protagonist in the second act, who chases after the *yamabushi* (mountain ascetics or practitioners of Shugendō), corresponds to the anthropophagous *yamauba* who runs after her prey in *Kuwazu nyōbō*, *Ushikata to yamauba*, and *Sanmai no ofuda*. *Kurozuka*, reflecting various elements from the Noh play *Yamanba*, represents a crossroads where the elements and images of *yamauba* and *oni*-women are jumbled together and are simultaneously disseminated, influencing various genres.

The synopsis of *Kurozuka* is as follows: In the first act, a party of *yamabushi* ask for a night's lodging at a lone house in Adachigahara (SNKBZ 59:459–73; SNKBT 57:502–3; Shimazaki and Comee 2012, 307–35).<sup>10</sup> The owner of the house, an *oni*-woman in the form of an old woman, reluctantly accedes to their request. The chief *yamabushi* notices a spinning wheel in her hut and asks the old woman what it is. Requested by the priest to demonstrate how it works, she starts to turn the spinning wheel. She then tells the *yamabushi* group not to look in one room of her house and leaves for the mountain to get firewood for them. During the interlude, the *yamabushi*'s servant cannot resist the temptation to look, opens the door, and finds piles of corpses inside. The party realizes that they are staying in the *oni*'s house that is rumored to exist in the region. In the second act, as the troupe of *yamabushi* flee the *oni*-woman's house, the *oni*-woman—now with her

true appearance—runs after them, only to be chased away by the power of the *yamabushi*'s incantation.

*Kurozuka (Adachigahara), Oni, and Women*

The title of the play, *Kurozuka* or *Adachigahara*, is the name of a place in present-day Fukushima prefecture in northern Japan. The place name and its association with *oni* comes from a poem written by Taira no Kanemori (?–990), one of the Thirty-Six Great Poets and a member of the imperial family who became a subject of the state around 950 (Matsuoka 1998, 85):

<i>Michinoku no</i>	In Michinoku
<i>Adachi no hara no</i>	On the moors of Adachi
<i>Kurozuka ni</i>	Within the Black Mound
<i>Oni komoreri to</i>	Some demons live in hiding
<i>Iu wa makoto ka</i>	They say, but can this be true?

(Shimazaki and Comee 2012, 301)

This poem appears in the fifty-eighth tale of the *Yamato monogatari* (Tales of Yamato, ca. mid-tenth century) (SNKBZ 12:290–91; Tahara 1980, 31–33). Kanemori sent this poem to the daughters of the son of Prince Sadamoto (?–910), the third son of Emperor Seiwa. The same poem also appears as number 559 in the *Shūi wakashū* or *Shūishū* (A Collection of Rescued Japanese Poetry, ca. 1005), and according to *Shūishū*, the poem was sent to the sisters of Minamoto no Shigeyuki (?–1000), another great poet and a grandson of Prince Sadamoto (SNKBT 7:160; Fujiwara 1995, 1:136). In either case, the young women, the granddaughters of imperial prince Sadamoto, were living in *Kurozuka* of *Adachi Moor* in *Michinoku Province*. In the poem, Kanemori playfully refers to the daughters as *oni*.

An example of describing a woman as an *oni* also appears in the “Broom Tree” chapter of *Genji monogatari* (The Tale of Genji, ca. 1010). When the Aide of Ceremonial (Tō Shikibu no jō) talks about an educated woman with whom he once had a love affair, the Secretary Captain (Tō no Chūjō) comments, “There cannot be such a woman! You might as well have made friends with a demon (*oni*). It is too weird!” (Murasaki 2001, 34; SNKBZ 20:88). Baba Akiko points out the maxim expressed in the story *Mushi mezuru himegimi* (The Lady Who Admired Vermin), which appears in *Tsutsumi chūnagon monogatari* (The Riverside Counselor’s Stories, mid-eleventh to early twelfth century): “Devils [*oni*] and women are better invisible to the eyes of mankind” (Backus 1985, 55; SNKBZ 17:409). As mentioned earlier, in the ancient period, *oni* were thought of as invisible. Baba writes that Taira no Kanemori addressed Minamoto no Shigeyuki’s sisters as *oni* with affection, lament, and the resignation of those—like Kanemori himself—who were not supposed to be hidden or buried by society if the time was right (1988, 27). Here there is no suggestion of anthropophagy being attached to the ladies.

For the almost 500 years between the time this poem was composed and the appearance of *Kurozuka*, no legends of *oni*-women in *Adachigahara* existed in the history of literature (Matsuoka 1998, 83). Rendering a woman as a real *oni* in *Kurozuka* was an ingenious use of what was originally a love poem.

*Two Sides of the Oni-Woman*

In the first act of *Kurozuka*, the old woman is in an isolated house. She sits in her house minding her own business, like a helping *yamauba*. This house has a room that is replete with corpses. The house is undoubtedly an *oni*'s house. Then the *yamabushi* party, who are considered good characters like the young heroines of *Komebuku Awabuku*, *Ubakawa*, and *Hanayo no hime*, unexpectedly visit her dwelling and asks for a night's shelter. The woman is reluctant but lets them in—just like the helping *yamauba*. While not giving a material treasure to the *yamabushi* troupe to help in their plight, the woman is obliging enough to entertain her guests with her spinning wheel and does try to give some comfort by making a fire to warm them on a cold night. The *yamabushi*'s servant repeatedly calls her a kind woman; she goes to the mountains to collect some wood. The acts of carrying wood and spinning have a connection with Yamanba in the Noh play, who sings, “sometimes when a woodsman rests beside a mountain path beneath the blossoms, she shoulders his heavy burden and, with the moon, comes out the mountain going with him to the village below” (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 222; SNKBZ 59:579). Yamanba's efforts to help the villagers—woodsmen and weavers—thus seem to be reflected in the acts of the woman in *Kurozuka*.

As the woman leaves for the mountain—the *yamauba*'s trope—she tells the *yamabushi* group not to look in one room, and they promise that they will not. As so often happens in the folkloric “taboo” motif, this promise is broken. The *yamabushi*'s servant cannot resist the temptation to look, and there he finds human bones and skulls, rotten corpses bloated and streaming with pus and blood. The group of *yamabushi* immediately leaves the *oni*'s den. This “taboo” motif is similar to *Kuwazu nyōbō*, in which the woman's husband discovers the secret of the unsightly gargantuan mouth on the back of her head, and the novice in *Sanmai no ofuda*, who clandestinely looks in the room where his aunt reveals her terrifying *yamauba* appearance.

In the second act, realizing the traveling monks have broken their promise and seen the unsightly corpses, the woman, now an *oni*-woman (the protagonist of the second act wears a *hannya* [or *prajñā* in Sanskrit] wisdom mask or a *shikami* scowling mask), chases fiercely after them, like the *yamauba* in *Kuwazu nyōbō*, *Ushikata to yamauba*, and *Sanmai no ofuda*. The *hannya* mask with two sharp horns and a large mouth represents a jealous female demon and the *shikami* mask with a snarling mouth without horns represents an evil [masculine] demon to be defeated. With a *hannya* or *shikami* mask, the *oni*-woman reveals her true form. Unlike Yomotsu-shikome, who is dispatched by Izanami on her behalf, this *oni*-woman is an independent agent acting on her own. The chase of the *oni*-woman of *Kurozuka*, however, ends in her defeat—just like the cannibalistic *yamauba* of folktales. The *oni*-woman of *Kurozuka* is a prototype of the cannibalistic, chasing *yamauba*.

There are only three Noh plays in which the protagonist wears a *hannya* mask: *Aoi no ue* (Lady Aoi), *Dōjōji* (Dōjōji Temple), and *Kurozuka*, which are called the three *oni*-woman plays. A *hannya* mask expresses a woman's resentment and fierce obsession (The-Noh.com, 2016[?]). Although it has an angry expression with two sharp horns, a wide mouth open from ear to ear, and glaring gilt eyes, “we see a

trace of heart-breaking sadness hover over it, especially when the wearer hangs its head a little” (Shimazaki and Comee 2012, 302; see also Takemoto 2000, 5). Extraordinary anger, grudges, and jealousy were believed to transform women into *oni*. Michelle Osterfeld Li writes: “The shift toward *oni* who evoke sympathy occurs mainly in the medieval period (circa 1185–1600), when their potential for spiritual growth is considered. Even as they remain dangerous monsters, the reasons why they became *oni* and their potential for change start to matter” (2012, 173). The protagonists in *Aoi no ue* and *Dōjōji* are human in the beginning and turn into *oni*-women because of strong feelings of jealousy and resentment, but the woman in *Kurozuka* is an *oni* from the beginning. That is, the woman in the first act is not human but an *oni* in human form (Oda 1986, 81; Shimazaki and Comee 2012, 302). The fact that *Kurozuka*’s protagonist in the second act wears a *hannya* mask is, however, understandable when one considers the human, sympathetic aspect of the woman in the first act.

### *Yamanba in Kurozuka*

The shadow of the Noh play *Yamanba* can be seen throughout *Kurozuka*. This can first be seen in an allusion to the sixth episode of the *Tales of Ise*, used for its image of a cannibalistic *oni*. As mentioned earlier, in the play *Yamanba* Hyakuma fears she will be eaten by Yamanba like the lady in the sixth episode of *Tales of Ise*. In *Kurozuka*, as the protagonist *oni*-woman chases after the *yamabushi* group, she describes her own actions by citing a famous passage from the *Tales of Ise* in which an *oni* eats a lady in one gulp:

<i>Narukami inazuma tenchi ni michite</i>	Thunder and lightning fill both heaven and earth
<i>Sora kaki kumoru ame no yo no</i>	The sky is overcast, black as a rainy night,
<i>Oni hitokuchi ni kuwan tote</i>	The fiend comes to swallow the victims in one gulp
<i>Ayumi yoru ashioto</i>	The sound of its approaching footsteps,
<i>Furiaguru tecchō no ikioi</i>	My iron wand lifted high to strike with mighty force.
(SNKBZ 59:471)	(Shimazaki and Comee 2012, 329–30)

The woman accumulates human bones, skulls, and so on in a bedroom, but no explanation is given as to why she keeps these skeletons in her house. But from this association with the *oni* in the *Tales of Ise*, and because *oni* are generally known to eat humans, perhaps she was going to eat the *yamabushi*.

Considering the fact that Hyakuma is an entertainer and entertains Yamanba with her dance in the second act, and that the *oni*-woman in the first act of *Kurozuka* entertains the *yamabushi*, one may say that the *oni*-woman of *Kurozuka* acts like a mirror image of Hyakuma.

A second connection between *Kurozuka* and *Yamanba* is that both the *oni*-woman of *Kurozuka* and Hyakuma in *Yamanba* express a strong sense of shame in relation to *oni*. In *Yamanba*, Hyakuma feels that it would be shameful for her to be known as a woman who has been eaten by an *oni*. She sings:

*Ukiyogatari mo hazukashi ya* To become the subject of a woeful tale told  
throughout the world—how shameful!  
(SNKBZ 59:576–77) (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 219)

The *oni*-woman in *Kurozuka* feels an intense shame that her secret, her true life and demonic appearance, have been exposed to the *yamabushi*:

*Kurozuka ni kakure sumishi mo* Her abode, the Black Mound, the secret  
hiding place,  
*Asama ni narinu* has now been exposed.  
*asamashi ya* “Oh, how disgraceful!  
*Hazukashi no waga sugata ya* is the sight of me!”  
(SNKBZ 59:473) (Shimazaki and Comee 2012, 334)

Baba Akiko has an insightful statement: “There is a word *funshi*, dying from indignation. But rather than dying from a fit of anger, wouldn’t a person die from an internal struggle of *chijoku*, shame and disgrace, that simmer in the shadow of anger?” (1988, 197). Baba’s comment refers to the Rokujō Haven’s emotional state toward Aoi, Genji’s formal wife, in *The Tale of Genji*. I feel that shame and disgrace are shared by Hyakuma and the woman in *Kurozuka*. Hyakuma dreads the fact that she will die soon, but it is an infinite shame and disgrace if it becomes known to the public that she was eaten by an *oni*. The woman in *Kurozuka* feels undying shame and disgrace that her appearance and activities are exposed. This shame and disgrace were the reasons that Izanami dispatched Yomotsu-shikome to kill Izanagi.

The third connection between *Kurozuka* and *Yamamba* is the *yamanba*’s weaving and the image of her turning a spinning wheel. While *Yamanba* of the Noh play sings that she winds threads and places herself in spinning sheds, no prop for weaving appears on the Noh stage. A spinning wheel becomes a major prop in the Noh play *Kurozuka*—one of the only two props on the bare Noh stage—and the spinning wheel becomes the protagonist’s own tool. At the request of the chief *yamabushi*, the woman of *Kurozuka* starts to turn the spinning wheel. She spins the string with a song of longing for the past. Komatsu Kazuhiko states: “An element of spinning is often found in the *yamanba* narratives that start to appear during the medieval period. I cannot help thinking that the image of ‘a *yamanba* turning a spinning wheel’ is projected on the *oni* of Adachigahara” (2004, 51). I believe the image of “a *yamanba* turning a spinning wheel” is not only projected but also strengthened through the *oni*-woman. I speculate that *Kurozuka* helped disseminate the visual image of *yamauba*’s association with strings—or at least her spinning wheel.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article I have studied one of the major characteristics of *yamauba*, her duality, through some representative folktales, *otogizōshi*, and Noh texts. Although the malevolent *yamauba* and the benevolent *yamauba* look incompatible with each other, they are two sides of the same coin, and these stories possess a complementary narrative format.

In folktales, the term *yamauba* is interchangeable with the term *oni*-woman when her evil and cannibalistic side is highlighted, especially when both cannibalism and mountains appear as two major factors in one story. The character tends to be called *oni*-woman rather than *yamauba* when the character feels strongly shameful of her appearance or action, and her emotional intensity is the predominant feeling of the story. While this cannibalistic, evil *yamauba* is destined to be defeated by a socially approved personage, be it a priest, husband, or other man, she may have her ancient roots in Yomotsu-shikome, and her strong image as a frightening yet pathetic figure seems to owe much to the woman in *Kurozuka*. When the *yamauba*'s positive side—helping, giving good fortune and fertility—is accentuated, only the term *yamauba* is used. In spite of her terrifying appearance (a demoness in form), the character Yamanba as portrayed by Zeami is a self-reflective, nature-loving creature who is only demonic in appearance. Like the *yamauba* in *Hanayo no hime* or any *yamauba* in folktales, the mountains are the place where her life is sustained. Mountains and her association with nature are what make the *yamauba* distinct from *oni*-women. After all, the topos of *yamauba* is the mountains. The mixture of the usage of *yamauba*, *oni*-woman, and *oni* probably originates in *yamauba*'s root in *oni*, but the interchangeability of *yamauba* and *oni*-woman in the proactive behavior of *yamauba* indicates the influence of patriarchy, where men tried to confine women to the private sector. The major characteristics of a *yamauba* are that she 1) lives in the mountains and 2) brings death and destruction as well as wealth and fertility, possessing the duality of good and evil.

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#### NOTES

1. Financial support from the Japan-United States Friendship Commission and the Northeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies, as well as the Committee of Faculty Research from Miami University, made the research in this article possible. A draft of this article was presented at the 21st Annual Asian Studies Conference, Japan, in 2017. I would like to thank Suzy Cincone for her proofreading, and the editors of *Asian Ethnology*, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments.
2. Many Japanese use the terms *yamauba*, *yamanba*, and *yamamba* interchangeably. Some dictionaries, however, make the distinction that the pronunciation *yamauba* often seems to be used for the legendary or folkloric figure, whereas the nasalized forms *yamanba* or *yamamba* are used in the texts for performing arts such as Noh and Kabuki.
3. *Setsuwa*, a Japanese literary genre, broadly consists of myths, legends, folktales, and anecdotes. In the narrow sense of the term, they are “short Japanese tales that depict extraordi-

nary events, illustrate basic Buddhist principles or, less frequently, other Asian religious and philosophical teachings, and transmit cultural and historical knowledge. These narratives were compiled from roughly the ninth through mid-fourteenth centuries in collections such as *Konjaku monogatari-shū*" (Li 2009, 1). *Setsuma* are now often considered to have an oral origin and are secondhand stories. They are presented as true, or at least as possibly true, and are short. Also see Eubanks (2011, 8–11), especially for an explanation about Buddhist *setsuma* literature.

4. Regarding the translation of Onmyōdō as “the way of yin-yang” and the spelling of Onmyōdō without italics and with a capital O, I have followed Hayek and Hayashi 2013, 3. Onmyōdō is an eclectic practice whose roots are found in the theory of the cosmic duality of yin and yang and the five elements or phases (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth). With the theory of yin and yang and the five elements formed in ancient China at its core, Onmyōdō adapted elements from the Buddhist astrology of the *Xiyaojing* (Jp. Sukuyōkyō) and indigenous Japanese *kami* worship. The appellation Onmyōdō was formed in Japan between the tenth and eleventh centuries. See Hayek and Hayashi 2013, 1–18.

5. For the origins of the *oni*, see Reider 2010, 2–14.

6. *Yomigatari*, published from 2004 to 2005, have forty-seven volumes altogether. Hayashi notes that *Yomigatari* were edited from the collections of old tales in various regions that were first published around 1974 for the purpose of making the tales easy for children to understand. Various prefectural education-related organizations participated in the creation of *Yomigatari* for practical and educational use by children (Hayashi 2012, 69).

7. *Hyakumonogatari hyōban* was compiled by either a student or the eldest son of Yamaoka Genrin and was printed fourteen years after Genrin's death. The work is in the form of a question and answer session between Genrin and his students.

8. “It was widely believed during the medieval period that song and dance, as well as other arts, could function as a means to salvation” (Bethe and Brazell 1998, 213).

9. Japan's medieval age is usually taken to mean 1185–1600. See Farris 2006, 114.

10. Shimazaki and Comee's translation is preceded by a wonderful introduction of this play.

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- SNKBT *Shin nihon koten bungaku taikai* [New complete works of classical Japanese literature]. 1989–2005. 100 vols., plus five *bekkan* and Index. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.
- SNKBZ *Shinpen Nihon koten bungaku zenshū* [Newly compiled complete works of classical Japanese literature]. 1994–2002. 88 vols. Tokyo: Shōgakukan.
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