

Namahage Museum: The Legend of the Five *Oni*

This story centers on five mischievous creatures brought to Oga by the Chinese Emperor Wu of Han (156–87 BCE). Dispatched to work as the monarch's retainers, these *oni* (ogre-like beings regarded as having divine qualities) labored tirelessly every day of the year except one, when they were allowed to enter the villages. They took full advantage of this opportunity, stealing crops, kidnapping residents' daughters, and causing all sorts of other trouble. Fed up with the creatures' malicious ways, the people decided to make a bet with the *oni*. They challenged the ogres to show their strength by building a 1,000-step stone staircase from the settlement to the mountainside Akagami Shrine in a single night. If they failed, they could never show their faces in the villages again.

The *oni* finished 999 of the steps well before sunrise, but then something unexpected happened: a local contrarian imitated the morning call of a rooster, tricking them into thinking they had lost the bet. They fled into the mountains and never came back. The villagers, worried that the thoroughgoing creatures would try to avenge this injustice, came up with a way to appease the mountains and their new inhabitants: once every year, local youngsters would dress up as *oni* and be treated to a feast.