

Ueno Tenjin Festival: En no Gyōja Procession

In front of the procession of *oni* is the *mikoshi* procession. *Mikoshi* are portable shrines that house a deity and are carried or pulled through the town during festivals.

The *oni* processions start with the Ōgohei, a tall center post supported by four poles and decorated with zig-zag strips of paper. The poles represent the five traditional Chinese elements: fire, water, wood, metal, and earth. The central column is white, and the four other columns are painted different colors in accordance with the direction they represent: green for the east, red for the south, yellow for the west, and black for the north.

Following the Ōgohei is the Akuma-oni, or the “Devil Spirit,” which leads the En no Gyōja procession. Wearing a Noh mask with a fearsome expression, it hides its snakelike body in a *kariginu*, a robe traditionally worn by nobles throughout the ninth to the twelfth centuries. Wearing replicas of ancient Noh masks, over a hundred participants march through the streets after the Akuma-oni. The main event of this procession is the costumed performer representing En no Gyōja (634–706), the legendary Japanese mystic said to have founded the syncretic religion of Shugendō.