

The Establishment of an Enduring City from the Perspective of “Sakuteiki”

Naokata Okajima, Minami Kyushu University, Japan

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Abstract

From the Asuka to Heian Period, the location of Japan’s capital city has changed several times throughout history. In this study, we provide an overview of these transitions and reveal how the planning of these cities referred to ancient Chinese concepts. Heian-kyo, meaning “tranquility and peace capital,” was a city established using concepts found in the Chinese Zodiac and also the “Sakuteiki,” which is the oldest Japanese theory on the creation of a garden. This paper first reviewed Mizuno’s (2008) interpretation of direction and time concepts in ancient Chinese philosophy—especially “Ki-mon,” the entrance of the *Oni* (i.e., demons). This paper assumes that God’s furious side and people’s unhappy thoughts produce *Oni*. As an installation of a shrine, which worshiped the God and a temple which studied human nature sincerely were established before Heian-kyo construction in the northeast direction. An analysis of *Sakuteiki*’s and the Bible’s descriptions indicates that the Existence of *Oni* was not always considered evil; the *Oni* was considered an indicator of God’s emotion. It was thought that, if its warnings were noticed, it would lead to happiness. We explain how the city planners carefully selected construction locations to avoid activating negative *Oni* energy.

Keywords: Heian Period, Yin-Yang, city, garden, location, Heian-kyo, Sakuteiki

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Introduction

Tokyo is now Japan's *de facto* capital. The Japanese capital city has long been thought to be determined by where the Emperor lives. Prior to 1868, the Emperor dwelled in the Kyoto District of Japan, upholding a tradition established 1084 years ago. During this Imperial reign from the Kyoto District, two cities were built: Nagaoka-kyo, the Imperial Court from 784 to 794, and Heian-kyo, whose dominance spanned multiple generations, from 794 to 1869.

In March 1868, Emperor Meiji declared the Charter Oath from Kyoto Imperial Palace, which enacted Japan's transition toward a modern democratic country. Following this proclamation, the Emperor relocated to Tokyo in October of that same year (The Meiji Shrine, 2008). This historic event marked the first departure of the emperor from the old capital in 1074 years. In this respect, Heian-kyo endured as the Imperial seat for the longest period of time in Japanese history. As such, we will focus on this city and its legacy.

We will examine the founding of Heian-kyo and its endurance by using a theory recorded in *Sakuteiki*, the oldest Japanese book on creating gardens.

First, we will illustrate the background of both Heian-kyo and *Sakuteiki*. Next, we will extract a theory provided in *Sakuteiki* to examine if it efficiently explains elements of the city's construction. Theories introduced in *Sakuteiki* contain best practices and prohibitions. These have often been dismissed as irrational superstition. However, after meticulous investigation of ancient Chinese traditional methods, Mizuno (2014) suggests these practices do, in fact, have a rational basis. She backs this claim with her findings, which describe how spatial direction in *Sakuteiki* also corresponds to the temporal understandings prevalent in ancient China—ideas that were later transmitted to Japan.

Mizuno suggests that this interpretation opens up the gardening theory for use as a basis for the planning of broader areas. From this, she hypothesizes that the gardening theory may have influenced the shape of the northeast Tsukiji Fence of the Imperial Palace and the placement of Enryaku Temple (Mizuno, 2016). This paper uses Mizuno's interpretation to illustrate how the theory of *Sakuteiki* was applied to city formation and provides an introduction to her ideas for an English-speaking audience. Available data and folklore will also be collated, and the final result will be presented in a map form to further substantiate her theories.

Through this exploration of Mizuno's theories, we hope to demonstrate the effectiveness of Heian-kyo's construction by taking into account the canceling of negative elements, especially those of spirits known as Oni, entering into the city. We will also show how *Sakuteiki*'s prohibition on setting stones can be compared with western Biblical passages to demonstrate a more universal basis for these ideas. In so doing, we will fill the gap between the general legend and the explanation *Sakuteiki* provides and come to a better geographic and cross-cultural understanding of this cancelling method.

Background

Brief history before Heian-kyo. The first Japanese major capital city was built in Fujiwara-kyo, now known as Asuka district. Since then, the capital city has been relocated four times (Kawajiri, 2011). Figure 1 shows these historical locations over the centuries prior to Heian-kyo's foundation.

In Figure 1, cities used for longer than a year are connected with an arrow line. Some were used for very brief periods during tumultuous times when family dynasties quarreled over the location. However, once formed in the 8th century, Heian-kyo seems to have become rooted for posterity.

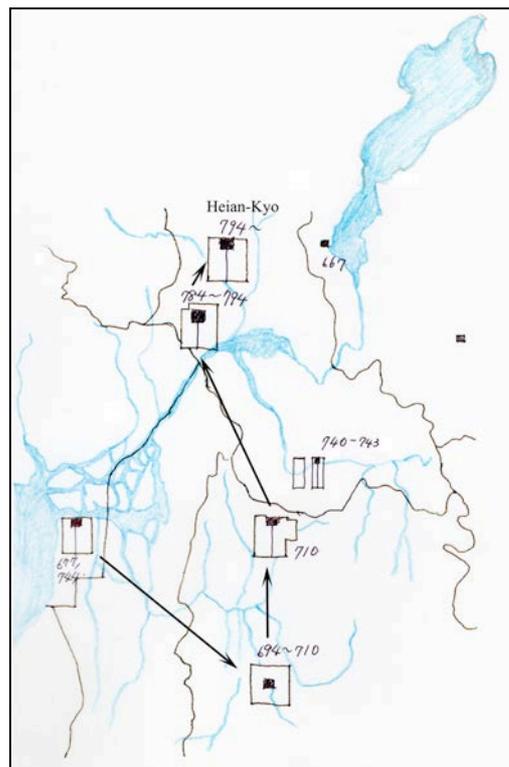


Figure 1: The capital city transition before Heian-kyo.

Reproduction from a series of Japanese ancient history books (Kawajiri, 2011). The location of the Imperial palace and the administrative body is indicated with a black square. The numbers indicate the year.

Description of *Sakuteiki*. *Sakuteiki*, or “Records of Garden Making,” describes the methods for making artificial scenery in dwelling spaces. The text illustrates the appropriate way to place stones, make mountains, create ponds, islands, waterfalls, and streams, and to plant trees. The first scroll mainly explains proper practice, while the second scroll describes prohibitions.

Sakuteiki was originally written in the early 12th century (Hida, 2014). Composed roughly 300 years after Heian-kyo was built, the book itself could not have been the source of the city's planning. However, formal gardening practices in Japan date back

to the early 7th century (Ono, 2009). *Sakuteiki* preserved these ancient techniques as a collection of two scrolls.

Originally written as a guidebook to the contemporary aristocrats' ideal dwelling space, the recording of these teachings was completed during a time of political upheaval. The early 12th century marked the end of the dominance of the aristocrat class and the rise of samurai in the Kanto District. Given the political climate, the word *kuden*, or secret teachings, appears throughout the text, hinting at the motivation to preserve these oral teachings as the centers of power shifted. Because of this secrecy, we believe that, while *Sakuteiki* was created long after the completion of Heian-kyo (794-1192), it contains practices from an older era that were in regular use by the aristocracy prior to and after the city's founding.

Extracted Principals. In the age of *Sakuteiki*, placing stones not only referred to the literal human activity but the construction of gardens. Every prohibition in *Sakuteiki* about placing stones has been enumerated by Okajima (Okajima, 2017). Adhering to these prohibition guidelines provides an effective method for people to cancel out negative influences. (For our purposes, we have extracted passages where the Bible relates a similar scene, as detailed in later sections of this study.) The English translation of *Sakuteiki* by Takei and Keane was used in this exercise (Takei & Keane, 2008).

PART	ENGLISH DESCRIPTION	LINE NUMBER OF <i>Sakuteiki</i> TANAKA (1990)
Overall description	“Regarding the placement of stones, there are many taboos. If so much as one of these taboos is violated, the master of the household will fall ill and eventually die, and his land will fall into desolation and become the abode of devils.”	503-506
1	“The taboos are as follows: Using a stone that once stood upright in a reclining manner or using a reclining stone as a standing stone. If this is done, that stone will definitely become a phantom stone and be cursed.”	507-510
2	“A stone that is 1.2 to 1.5 meters tall should not be placed in the northeasterly direction. This will become a phantom stone. Since it would become a landmark to aid the entry of evil spirits, people will not be able to live there for long. However, if a Buddhist Trinity is placed in the southwest, there will be no curse; neither will devils be able to enter.”	514-518
3	“Also, do not set a stone that is more than 1.5 meters tall in the northeast, as this will allow devils to enter from the devil's gate. (complement of Part 2)”	570-573

Table 1: Extracted prohibition statements from *Sakuteiki*.

From two of the descriptions (Part 2 and Part 3), we notice that there are mentions of “devil” and that, if a stone taller than 1.5 meters is set in a northeasterly direction, it becomes a “devil’s” gate. The original Japanese word for “devil” here is 魔縁 *ma-en* in Part 2 and 鬼 *oni* in Part 3, but both seem to refer to a similar concept. We cannot understand this way of thinking about “devil” through contemporary definitions. In Japanese, there is no equivalent for “devil,” so we must find an appropriate English translation.

According to the English dictionary, “devil” means “the most powerful evil spirit in Christianity; SATAN” (Longman, 1995). In the Bible, there is the well-known story of Job, a person on the brink of death because of Satan’s influence (Job 1:6 New Jerusalem Bible). However, especially in the Old Testament, people were often slain by the Lord as well. We must then confront the two faces of the Lord: a merciful side and a furious side.

In ancient Japan, if a person died holding a severe grudge, their soul could cause evil phenomena in this world. Such a phenomenon seemed to correlate with the *Oni*’s arrival. *Oni* then contains both the furious side of the Lord’s character and the cause for negative feelings produced in human beings suffering from misfortune. Since “devil” does not seem to include both of these internal and external aspects of evil, hereafter, even if the proper English translation describes *Oni* as “devil,” we will use the original word, *Oni*.¹

Another interpretation important to the ideas presented here is Mizuno’s explanation of the Part 2 and Part 3 *Sakuteiki* descriptions (Mizuno, 2014). She points out that ancient Chinese beliefs were applied to these prohibitions, and a brief explanation of her claim is necessary. In *Sakuteiki*, the North, South, East, and West directions are depicted by animals matching those of the ancient Chinese Zodiac. For example, in Part 2, northeast is originally written as the 丑寅 *ox-tiger* direction.

This paragraph is summarized from information available online² as follows. Directions, as indicated by animal names from the 十二生肖 or the Chinese zodiac, had been in use since the Qin Dynasty (B.C.E. 778-206). Before the animal names were provided, there were twelve elements called 十二支 or Earthly Branches, which were said to be of very ancient origin in China. There were also ten elements called 天干, 十干 or Heavenly Stems from the Shang Dynasty (B.C.E. 1600-1046). An image of the ancient Chinese Zodiac is shown in Figure 2.

¹ There are more phenomena that the ancient Japanese connected with an *Oni*’s existence (Baba, 1988). Here, we provide a simplification.

² Retrieved from:

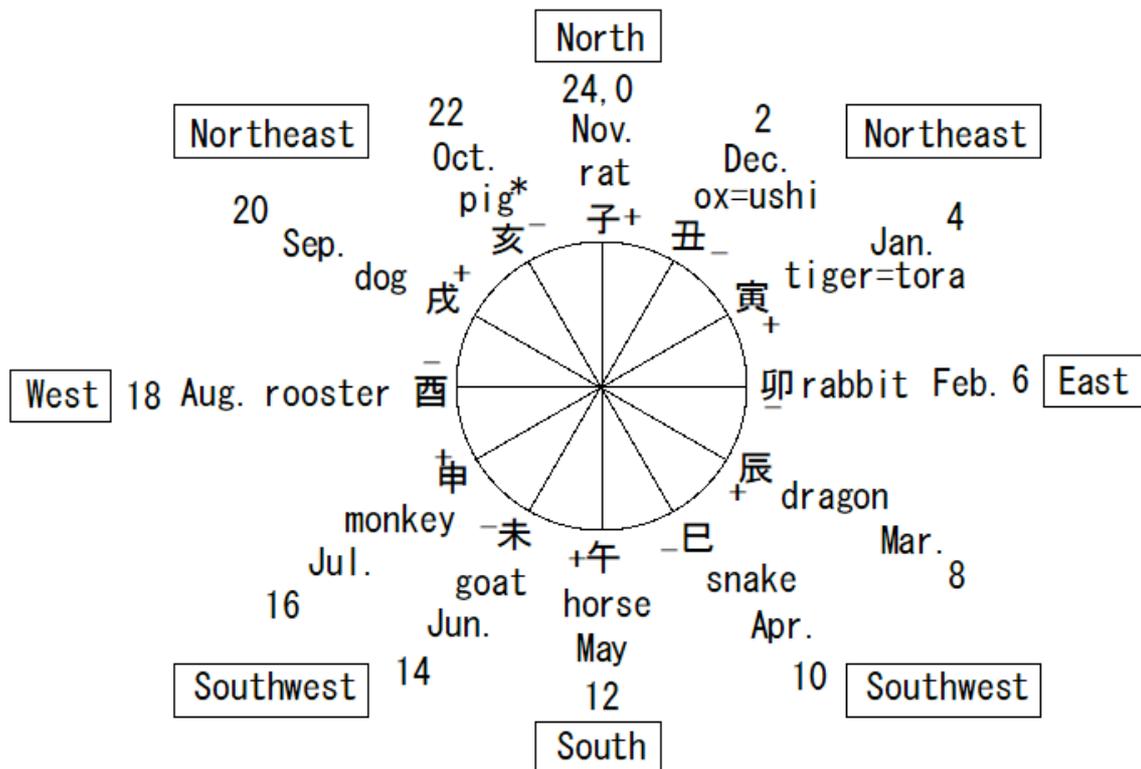
<https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E7%94%9F%E8%82%96>

<https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%8D%81%E4%BA%8C%E6%94%AF>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earthly_Branches



Figure 2: The twelve signs of the Chinese Zodiac: Carving from the Kushida Shrine in Japan. Image by J. Halun (2010). Reprinted from Wikipedia. Retrieved from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chinese_Zodiac_carvings_on_ceiling_of_Kushida_Shrine,_Fukuoka.jpg. Image modified and used under Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International, 3.0 Unported, 2.5 Generic, 2.0 Generic, and 1.0 Generic license.



* The Chinese Pig became Boar in Japan.

Chinese Earthly Branches (+-) → Chinese Zodiac in English (=Japanese)
 → Month → Hours → Direction

Figure 3: Graphic interpretation of the Ancient Chinese Zodiac System. Image created by author based on image by Yoshino [1983].

In Figure 3, we offer a graphic representation of the same Chinese Zodiac based on the work of both Mizuno (2014, 2016) and Yoshino (1983). We have added several suggested meanings, and this information is described from the inside to the outside. Innermost is the Earthly Branch and the corresponding Ying and Yang aspect (negative or positive). Next is the Zodiac animal, followed by the month and then the hour, with the cardinal directions listed on the outer rim. Using this representation, we can see that, when the prohibition in *Sakuteiki* Parts 2 and 3 describes the evil spirit and *Oni*, it also states that these *Oni* come from the *ox-tiger* direction, or the northeasterly direction.

An important relationship shown in Figure 3 is that of the ox-tiger direction and the relationship to December and January. The month between ox and tiger was also the time *oni* were believed to appear, and Saito explains that the Japanese have held a *dai-nanogi* ritual on the last day of the year since the Nara period (C.E. 710) (Saito, 2014). Saito further points out that, in this pivotal time of the year, yin and yang lose their natural balance (2014).

In the Chinese tradition, *ekiki* means “demon that spreads contagious diseases,”³ and these demons also were believed to appear at the end of the year (Mizuno, 2014, pp. 164). To prevent *ekiki* from coming, they held a special ceremony called *nanogi*. Because of this relationship, Mizuno’s interpretation also suggests that we have to consider both timing and spatial principals as they relate to the zodiac. In that respect, even if people do not set a tall stone as a landmark in the northeast, it is still possible that *Oni* can enter the site from that direction.

However, Part 2 also states that, even if a tall stone set in the northeast becomes a sign for *Oni* to enter, if Buddhist trinity stones are set in the southwest direction, an *Oni* will not be able to come. This powerful and positive arrangement suggests the existence of a line, as shown below in Figure 4.

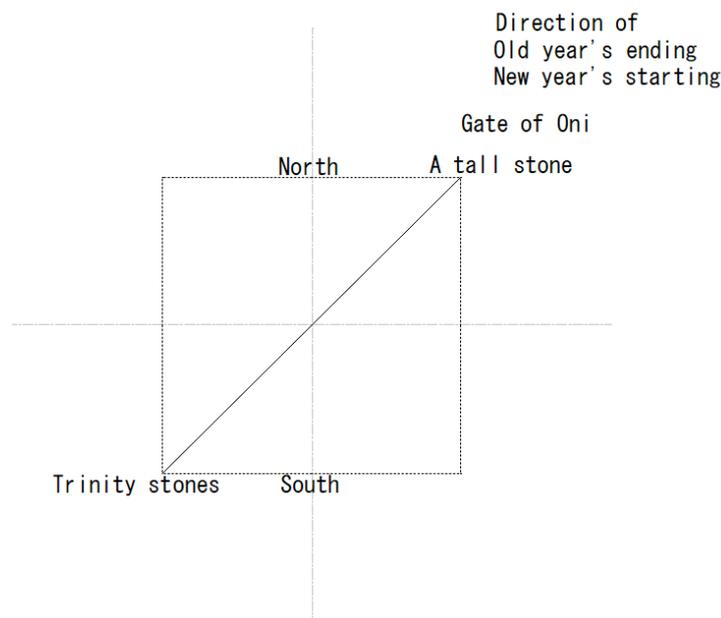


Figure 4: A line connects northeast and southwest.

³ This definition is quoted from the weblio website of the Japanese-English dictionary. Retrieved from “<https://translate.weblio.jp/>”

Traditionally, the Japanese referred to the northeast direction as *ki-mon*, *Oni's* gate, or *Oni's* front gate, while this southwest direction is referred to as *ura-kimon*, *Oni's* back gate.⁴ *Sakuteiki* verifies this *Oni's* entrance and prescribes the way to avoid it while also situating an imaginary and invisible line, which connects northeast to southwest. It seems likely this venerable belief would be considered with respect to a city, even if the scales are different than that of making a garden.

Examination

We examined the concept of stone placement extracted from *Sakuteiki* above. From here, we will show how the city of Heian-kyo was designed to avoid violating the established prohibition by examining how countermeasures were enacted around Heian-kyo to hedge out *Oni*. To find evidence of these countermeasures, *Kojiki* (The Records of Ancient Matters, C.E. 713) and information about local shrines and temples, including their locations, were examined.

Kojiki, a collection of ancient traditional texts from Japan, describes the genealogy of the descendants of Opo-Tosi-No-Kami. About these descendants, it says: “Next [is] Opo-Yama-Gupi-No-Kami, [who is] also named Yama-Suwe-No-Opo-Nusi-Kami.⁵ This deity dwells on Mount Piye in the land of Tika-Tu-Apumi...” (Philippi, 1969).

Kami here refers to a deity. This sentence explains how the deity named Opo-Yama-Gupi-No-Kami appeared on Mount Piye, which is depicted on the map in Figure 5. This map corresponds with the same area shown in Figure 1.

In Figure 5, mountain ranges are a flax color. The yellow rectangle is Heian-kyo. Mount Piye, now called Mount Hiei, is underlined and shown on the left side of Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan. To worship the deity of the mountain, Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine was established around 91 B.C.E. in the 7th year of Emperor Sujin and following the presumed descent of the deity (Hiyoshi Taisha Shrine web site). From its position in relation to Heian-kyo, we believe this shrine to be the old warding point of this direction⁶. This is because *Oni* is the other side of *Kami*. When people respect the *Kami* at the shrine, the *Oni* (the *Kami's* anger) cannot appear, and it is therefore warded off.

⁴ In ancient Chinese, “論衡, Lunheng” by 王充 Wang Chong (27- 100 C.E.) first recorded the word “鬼門 *kimon*.” Simple 鬼門 *kimon* is commonly called 表鬼門 front *kimon*. The opposite place is called 裏鬼門 back *kimon*. The origin of the words “front” and “back” were unknown. In the ancient Chinese, *Oni* was acknowledged, but the concept seemed to change in Japan.

⁵ This is the *Kami* that rules over the mountain (Nakamura, 2000).

⁶ Retrieved from “<http://hiyoshitaisha.jp/about/>”.

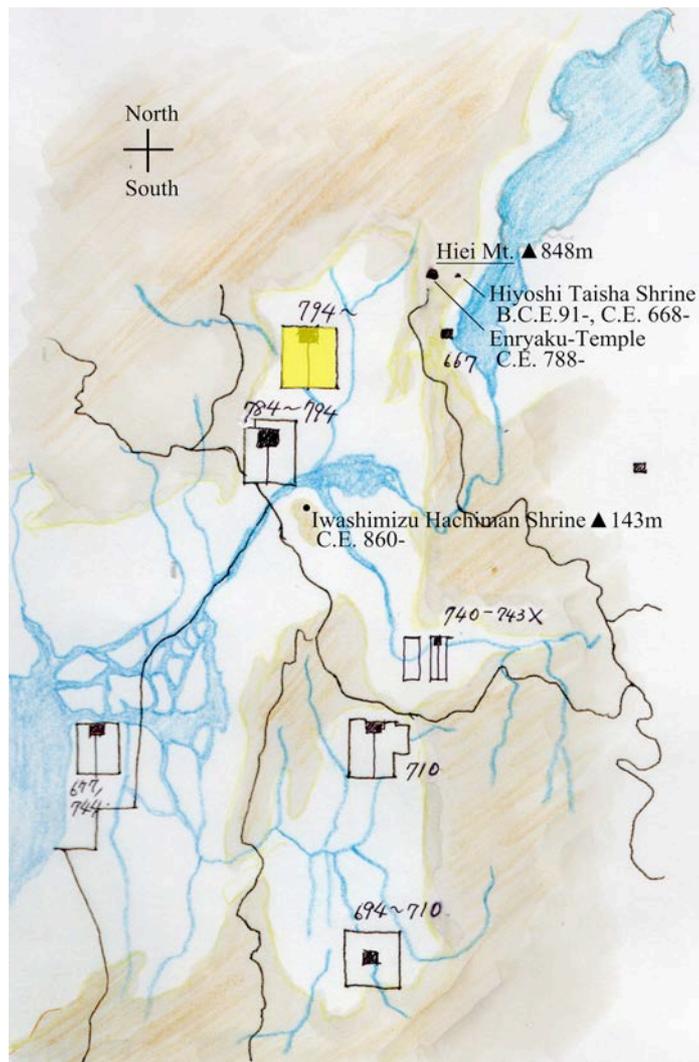


Figure 5: Heian-kyo and its guardian.

▲: mountain height, beige color: mountain

To further support our theory, we note that, in 788, the patriarch Denkyo Daisi Saicho established the Buddhist temple of Enryaku. This placement corresponds with the second warding position of Heian-kyo. We believe this because, in the previous section, we mentioned that *Oni* have at least two aspects. These aspects include a God furious aspect and one produced by energy caused by the misfortunate sentiment of human beings. The former aspect is guarded by the shrine, and the latter is guarded by the temple for these reasons: In Shinto shrines, priests serve as intermediaries between man and *Kami* (Yamaguchi, 2014). In the Buddhist temple, monks study the nature of human beings and pray for the peace of southeast Heian-kyo city.⁷

The northeast direction of Heian-kyo was guarded from the incursion of *Oni* by *Kami*, who had descended onto the Hiei mountain along with the shrine and the temple. Interestingly, these elements had already been established before Heian-kyo's construction, and the city was founded after the countermeasures for an *Oni*'s

⁷ The trainee monks pray for the peace of the city on mount Hiei. This is a practice called "Gyoku tai sugi."

negative effect had been fully established. Following this, in 860 C.E., the Iwashimizu Hachiman Shrine, which worshiped three deities, was established. After this, the analogy of Figure 4 seems to have been fulfilled. Our invisible line connecting the northeast and the southwest has been completed, and it also appears to be an invisible barrier, preventing influences coming from the previous cities located to the south.

Examination 2

We will now compare *Sakuteiki*'s prohibitions, shown previously in Table 1, with matching Biblical references to provide a more universal utility of these ideas, which have often been dismissed as local superstition or myth. By making such comparisons, we can also examine the practice critically from a different perspective. The results of this comparison are included in the following table.

PART	Sakuteiki - English Description	Matching reference from the New Jerusalem Bible
Overall Description	“Regarding the placement of stones, there are many taboos. If so much as one of these taboos is violated, the master of the household will fall ill and eventually die, and his land will fall into desolation and become the abode of devils. The taboos are as follows:”	“You will not bow down to their gods or worship them or observe their rites, but throw them down and smash their cultic stones.” (Exodus 23:24)
1	“Using a stone that once stood upright in a reclining manner or using a reclining stone as a standing stone. If this is done, that stone will definitely become a phantom stone and be cursed.”	“Taking one of the stones of that place, he made it his pillow and --- Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Truly, Yahweh is in this place and I did not know!’ He was afraid and said, ‘How awe -inspiring this place is! This is nothing less than the abode of God, and this is the gate of heaven!’ Early next morning, Jacob took the stone he had used for the pillow, and set it up as a pillar, pouring oil over the top of it.” (Genesis 28:11-19)
2	“(A stone that is 1.2 to 1.5 meters tall should not be placed in the northeasterly direction. This will become a phantom stone. Since it would become a landmark to aid the entry of evil spirits, people will not be able to live there for long.) However, if a Buddhist	“‘I am the God of your ancestors,’ he said. ‘The God of Abraham, the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob.’” (Exodus 3:6) “He who comes from heaven bears witness to the things he has seen and heard, but his testimony is not accepted by anybody; though anyone who does accept his testimony is attesting that God

	Trinity is placed in the southwest, there will be no curse; neither will devils be able to enter.”	is true, since he whom God has sent speaks God's own words, for God gives him the Spirit without reserve. The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to his hands. Anyone who believes in the Son has eternal life, but anyone who refuses to believe in the Son will never see life.” (John 3:31-36) “...but the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you.” (John 14:26)
3	“Also, do not set a stone that is more than 1.5 meters tall in the northeast as this will allow devils to enter from the devil’s gate. (complement of Part 2)”	

Table 2. Sakuteiki and the Bible description.

In Table 2 Part 1, *Sakuteiki* explains that, if a stone, which was originally reclining, is set vertically or if a vertical stone is set in a horizontal position, it will become a phantom stone. In the Bible, Jacob slept on a stone, which he had used as a pillow. After having a mysterious dream, he then sets the stone upright. By setting the stone upright, Jacob blesses the location because he saw Yahweh there. However, Jacob broke *Sakuteiki*'s prohibition. After this event, Jacob was continually blessed by God. If the Biblical description is true, the phantom stone is not necessarily a bad thing.

In Japanese, “ox” is translated into “o-ushi” (male ox), and “tiger” is “tora.” When Moses went up to Mount Sinai, he received the first commandment, but the Israelites created a molten calf. Therefore, God said, “I see that this is a stiff-necked people. Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation” (Tanakh, 1985). God was furious at that time. Moses assuaged God’s anger (Exodus: 32). Then, Moses got the chance to go up to Mount Sinai again, and he received God’s words (Exodus: 34). This is thought to be the Torah.⁸ The Torah is thought to be the precious words of God. Thus, the Torah gave humanity a new history. It is divided between the previous ages and the later ages. In this way, the Torah plays a “mediating” role between God’s peaceful and furious sides.

In Table 2 Part 3, *Sakuteiki* describes the effect of placing trinity stones in the southeast direction. Takei and Keane’s translation shows “Buddhist trinity stones,” but the direct translation from Japanese is “three precious stones.” When Moses observed the burning bush, he heard the voice of God say, “I am the God of your

⁸ Information retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/texts/torah.shtml>

ancestors. The God of Abraham, the God of Issac, and the God of Jacob.” God here refers to himself by using the names of three important ancestors in biblical tradition.

Taking these two descriptions into account, the line connecting northeast and southwest in Figure 4 seems to be revealing God’s presence.

Conclusion

Established in 794, Heian-kyo (also called Kyoto) stood as the Imperial City for 1074 years. Kyoto retains much of this unique history and attracts visitors from across the globe. This paper examines how the theory presented in *Sakuteiki* is reflected in the establishment of this city. From the oldest Japanese book on creating gardens, a theory can be extracted, which identifies the way to prevent *Oni* from entering into a specific site. These *Oni*, a complicated, dual-natured existence believed in by the ancient Japanese, could presumably be enticed by the placement of a stone or be prevented from appearing altogether through similar, but opposing, methods. While study suggests *Oni* entered a site from the northeast direction, the prescribed way to prevent its coming was with the placement of Buddhist trinity stones in the southwest. This juxtaposition creates an imaginary and invisible line connecting northeast and southwest. Taking Mizuno’s (2008) explanation into account, this line showed a further link between not just spatial but also temporal placement between the months of December and January. This line also seems to be the barrier line to prevent the entry of negative influences from the south. This study reveals that this established practice took place in the Heian-kyo District as well in order to prevent *Oni* from entering. We found three corresponding elements in the northeast *Kami*—the shrine, the temple, and another shrine to three deities—which is located in the southeast. These connections have sometimes been pointed out in general folklore, but here, we verified when those elements were constructed. The northeast guarding elements had been realized before Heian-kyo was built, leading to the possibility that their presence influenced the placement of the city.

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Contact email: okajima@nankyudai.ac.jp