

Tanuki on the Battlefield

Folklore, War, and Regional Identity in Shikoku, Japan



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Overview

Tanuki soldier legends in Ehime, Kagawa, and Tokushima (Absent in Kōchi)

Shikoku during the Russo–Japanese War (1904–1905)

- Kōchi → Restoration prestige
- Ehime · Kagawa · Tokushima → Political defeat

Peripheral position :

High mobilization → High casualty rates

Tanuki: trickster → wartime agent

Moral economy at work

Moral Economy Framework

- **Thompson** — customary fairness, crowd protest
- **Scott** — subsistence ethics, moral claims on authority
- **Fassin** — circulation of moral sentiments in politics

Focus shifts from:

“Was war just?”



How communities interpret loss

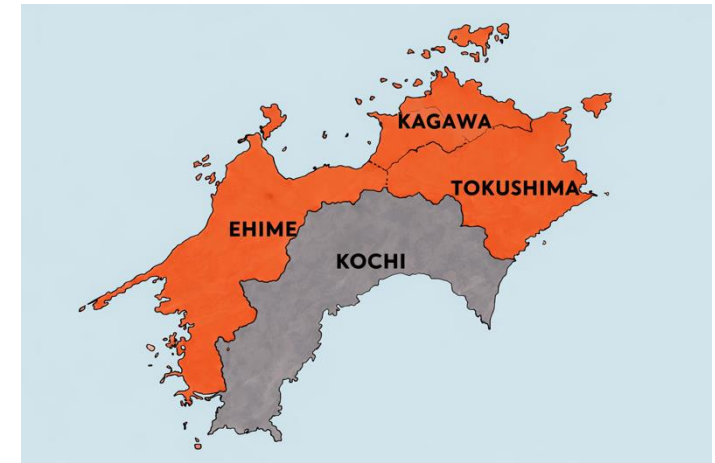
Regional Distribution of the Tanuki Soldier Legend

Ehime · Kagawa · Tokushima→ Tanuki soldiers

Kōchi→ No participation legends

Post-1868 restructuring

- Administrative instability
- Discursive marginalization



Pattern: Political marginality + high wartime loss

→ **Supernatural participation narratives**

Russo–Japanese War: Visibility and Loss

From Shikoku:

- Akiyama brothers : Nationally visible military leadership
- Front-line deployment : Eleventh Division in Kagawa

At home:

- Disproportionately high casualty rates

Prestige and sacrifice converged.



Akiyama Yoshifuru



Akiyama Saneyuki

Historical Backdrop: Post-1868 Reordering

Ehime, Kagawa, Tokushima

- Prefectural mergers
 - Political discontinuity
 - Religious disruption
- Weakening of regional authority

Kōchi

Continuity & prestige

National belonging in Ehime, Kagawa, Tokushima :
not self-evident , had to be demonstrated

Prewar Tanuki Ecology

Tanuki as:

- Trickster
- Guardian
- Combatant

Embedded in regional shrine networks

Reciprocity · Protection · Collective struggle

Wartime narratives : **Recontextualization**



Tasaburo-tanuki and his wife at Yashimaji

Tanuki Army Motifs and Media Realism

- **Motif Complex**

Multiplication · Illusion · Protection · Sacrificial death

- **Modern War Form**

Uniforms · sharpshooters · named battlefields

- **Media Realism**

Enemy recognition (Kuropatkin)

- **Folklore + mass reportage**

Imperial violence rendered ethically intelligible



Osan-tanuki



Aleksey Kuropatkin

Negative Case : Kōchi

In Kōchi

- Tanuki traditions : present
- War-participation legends : absent
- Restoration prestige and territorial continuity
- High casualty rates

Casualty exposure alone does not produce narrative emergence.

Political marginality matters.

Conclusion

Political marginality × wartime loss

Reactivation of regional symbolic traditions

Tanuki as mediator

Local communities ↔ national war
Sacrifice made regionally intelligible