

# Portraying a Japanese Buddhist Monk in the SCA

*Ummon asked: 'The world is such a wide world, why do you answer a bell and don ceremonial robes?'*

## Basic Garb



The standard “uniform” for a monk of the Tendai, Rinzai, and Soto sects in our period is quite similar. I am not well enough versed in their dissimilarities to give you the idiosyncrasies of each. However, this basic outfit should work for most recreation attempts. Note that our model is dressed for travel and sports his travel pack and wrapped begging bowl.

**Kosode:** This is a general term for a “kimono” type garment with less-than-huge sleeves. Essentially, this is also an undergarment and is not usually worn alone unless one is secluded in one’s private residence. Style and proportions varied throughout the period. Colors: white, light gray, taupe.

**Kukuri-bakama:** These simple “work hakama” would typically be worn when laboring or traveling over the kosode and under the koromo. Color: usually the same as the kosode.

**Kyahan:** These “gaiters” or leggings were another typical traveling accessory. Color: same as bakama.



**Obi:** The obi is normally a flat sash worn around the waist to help keep one’s kosode layers closed. Lay people would sometimes have colorful obi, but the monk’s should match his kosode. Note: this is worn under the koromo and tied at the back. (Note: if you are a samurai, it is under your hakama and shouldn’t show much) The monk would also typically wear a second obi to hold shut the koromo. I have seen flat versions, but for an average traveling/working monk, the koromo obi is stuffed. Similar to the stuffed obi one sees on suits of armor, the monk’s obi is about an inch and a half in diameter (I used commercially available drape-cord cotton batting to stuff mine ñ very easy) and long enough to wrap around the waist at least twice and tie in the front. (similar to wearing a modern karate obi) The knots used to tie it could be quite intricate. Since this outer obi can be a fairly hefty item, I will sometimes dispense with the inner, flat obi. Colors: Black, white, gray. Since white and gray are not a good idea unless you’re a knight, black is preferable. I have seen some personae use purple or orange. I am not certain of the periodness of these colors, but they do look well.

**Koromo:** The koromo, also called hoi, is constructed similarly to the kosode. However, it lacks the triangular front panels we see on an ordinary kimono. Thus, while it has enough slack to overlap, it does not overlap as much (i.e. where the point of the triangular panel of a kimono will usually reach around to one’s hip bone, the koromo may not reach that far) The sleeves of a koromo are often very full and long and have a slash opening in the underarm to allow freedom of movement. Koromo are almost invariably black silk, though hemp cloth, I suspect, would have been a probable alternative for low-ranking monks. The silk is often light enough to be transparent. My koromo is made of a fine silk organza. Like the kesa, tradition holds that the koromo is hand-made and dyed by the monk from discarded, donated fabric.

**Kesa:** The kesa is the official garment signifying ordination and dharma transmission from a master to a disciple. It would be worn with a kosode (there are many variations), but not necessarily the koromo, for official functions. Legend says the Buddha made his kesa from cremation shrouds he



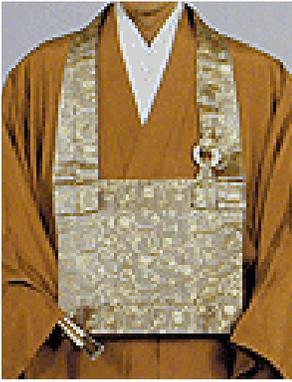
found along the banks of the Ganges. According to the strictest tradition, every ordained monk sewed his/her own kesa from scraps of discarded fabric or fabric donated to him by well-wishing lay people; a sort of special alms gift. Like the lotus rising from the mud, a kesa made this way is symbolic of enlightenment and the dharma. Depending on the wealth of the contributor, kesa could be quite colorful and intricate indeed! While tradition says monks sew their own kesa, it is evident by the Momoyama period that kesa are being tailored by professionals as gifts; particularly for high-ranking priests and abbots. Therefore, if you are a poor sewer, I do not think you need to feel ashamed if your kesa is made for you by a friend. My wife made my rakusu. I myself have played with the idea of collecting scrap fabric from SCAdian gentles in order to make a formal kesa. It’s a persona project which I think would be most interesting.

Kesa are constructed in a quilt-like manner with several pieces of fabric arranged in rows, overlapping and “underlapping” in some areas to form a pattern reminiscent of a rice field. The number of vertical divisions (Jap. “jo”) denotes the rank of the wearer. The highest rank I know of in Zen sects is 25 Jo; the lowest being 11.



Size can vary widely. The Buddha’s kesa is said to have been 10 feet and 1 inch. To the westerner, full-size kesa can be described as rather like a toga and are worn over one shoulder and wrapped around the body. Kesa feature ties at the upper two corners. These ties are brought together and knotted through a ring made of wood, metal, ceramics or even jade (Chinese). Color can vary according to the preferences of the lineage of the school and the rank of the wearer. In Zen, muted colors were generally preferred. (at least in less decadent times!)

Another tradition states that one always prays silently before donning one’s kesa. Supposedly, both Nara and Heiankyo were laid out in the pattern of a kesa. (the holy grid system?) It is said that the kesa is also symbolic of the universe itself; that to wear it is a reminder of one’s connection with the universe and the illusion of duality.



I am happy in my kesa,  
Calmly I possess the universe.  
I stay or leave as it wishes.  
The pure breeze drives the white clouds.  
- Daichi Zenji

Wherever it goes,  
The snail is at home when it dies.  
There is no world outside the kesa.  
- Daichi Zenji

**Rakusu:** The rakusu is a sort of mini-kesa. As far as I can tell, it is a Japanese invention. It's purpose is to allow the monk to wear a vestment which is more convenient for work and travel. Size seems to vary and at some point, the line between kesa and rakusu becomes blurred. My rule of thumb is that a full kesa comes close to touching the floor when the wearer is standing while the rakusu may only come down to the waist or just below it. Also, a rakusu does not wrap around the body so much as it hangs in front like an apron. Rakusu seem to have been popular and one can find several examples in portraits. For the samurai, this is the form of vestment one would wear over one's armor. (along with or instead of a hefty ju) Takeda Shingen is an excellent example.

**Ju:** (Sanskrit. "mala") This is the Buddhist rosary. The most typical design consists of 107 beads strung together with one slightly over-sized bead through which a tassel is tied. (a convenient way of hiding the knot) Type of ju varies with sect, but the 107-bead version seems fairly standard. The 107 beads represent the venal sins of man. Like its western counterpart, the ju is used to pace ones self while reciting prayers. It is also a powerful symbol of the Dharma and the discipline of monkhood. Materials include Bodi seeds (seeds of the type of tree under which the Buddha sat when he became enlightened), rosewood, jade (Chinese and rather pretentious in my opinion), sandalwood, cherry, and so forth. Ju are easy to make or may be purchased at most meditation supply shops. One note: stick to wood, avoid wearing the bone, skull-shaped bead mala which is, I believe, solely a Tibetan item.

**Shakujo:** The priest's staff is common to most sects. Based on its design, I suspect it began as a symbol of either the Shingon or Tendai sect and then disseminated as other sects shot off of these two. The staff is thin, made of light wood or bamboo, and mounted with a brass finial. This varied in design, but most commonly included five or six metal rings. These originally represented the realms of existence on the wheel of life (Humans, Animals, Hell, Hungry ghosts, Gods, and Jealous gods). The shakujo is symbolic of priesthood. The noise made by it's rings as one walks is said to act as fair warning to all sentient beings of one's approach (i.e. if you step on an ant, it's not your fault because you tried to give it a warning). The sound may also represent the "ohm" or universal sound of creation. It is certainly a good rhythm to walk and meditate to. During alms rounds, the leader of the procession will typically carry a shakujo and thus announce the coming of the monks. It is also sometimes speculated that the shakujo could serve as a weapon, but this is more typical of China where the finial looks more like the head of a mace!



**Gasa:** The typical monk's traveling hat is an over-large bowl- or mushroom-shaped, woven rice straw hat. It does not come to a point like a farmer's hat. It does not ride high on the head like a samurai's traveling hat. It is just a big bowl covering the upper half to 2/3rds of the face. Thus, it helps mute the identity of the monk and allows him to be undistracted by sights around him as he travels. (you can only see about four feet ahead while wearing it) Keeps the rain off, too. How about that!



**Zukin (hoods and other hats):** There are a variety of hoods and hat-like head-coverings; many ceremonial. One looks like a cross between a "Poet's hat" and a French Legionnaire's cap! Another looks a little like hats you may have seen Tibetan priests or Chinese nomads wearing (roughly conical with an up-turned brim and "flaps"). Then there are the simple "scholar's hats" such as Sen Rikyu sported. Lots of variety, probably lots of hidden symbolism of rank, sect, etc. There was also the famous head cowl worn by the Sohei, which seems to be a simple rectangle of fabric with ties or a separate headband.

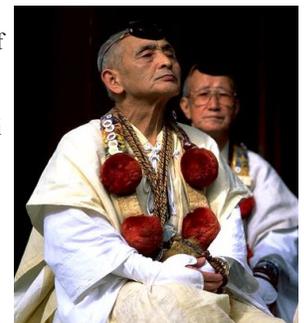


**Garb Variants:**

**Shingon:** Shingon monks are often portrayed with a koromo which is more like a kesa; a large toga-like garment draped over one shoulder. (It is similar to the outer robe the Dalai Lama wears) Usually this is saffron orange in color. It is possible this IS their idea of a kesa, but I am not certain.

**Yamabushi:** Yamabushi garb is quite unique and difficult to describe. It seems to consist of kyahan, work hakama and a kosode (beige or off white), worn under a sort of vest similar to the late-period samurai's kataginu. Attached to the collar of this jacket are four large red pom-pom balls! The Yamabushi also wears a small black lacquer "pill box" hat. Yamabushi sometimes wore ceremonial swords.

**Komuso:** Unfortunately, I do not have any period images of Komuso. Edo-era Komuso are rather distinct. They usually are shown without a koromo, but with a rakusu worn off to the side, sometimes over the shoulder like a cavalier's cape. Presumably, this is to help keep it out of the way of the shakuhachi flute the Komuso is constantly playing. Often they are shown wearing a lacquered portable shrine box hanging about their chest. I do not know what this would contain. Most distinctive of all is the Komuso hat which looks for all the



world like an upside-down waste-paper basket! With a small slit cut in the side (or a section of loosely woven straw like a window) for the monk to look out of, this hat totally obscures the entire head. Komuso are typically shown wearing a wakisashi or other small sword stored in a draw-string bag. I have no idea if this is period.

Some online resources: (I can not stress enough how essential these sites are!)

Lady Fujiwara's site: [www.reconstructinghistory.com](http://www.reconstructinghistory.com)

Master Effingham's site: [http://www.geocities.com/sengokudaimyo/Miscellany/Misc\\_home.html](http://www.geocities.com/sengokudaimyo/Miscellany/Misc_home.html)

Kyoto Costume Museum (Japanese): <http://www.iz2.or.jp/fukusyoku/busou/index.htm>



## Sects

### Some background

The very first Buddhism to arrive in Japan was Theravada (Sanskrit for “the lesser vehicle”); called Hinayana (“not Mahayana”) by the Mahayana Buddhists. This is a collection of sects which, in many ways, are closest to the original teachings of the historical Buddha. They utilize the Pali Canon, the oldest Buddhist texts - written in the Buddha's language, and stress study of his direct teachings and actions in life. Hinayana Buddhism generally asserts that to achieve enlightenment is very difficult ñ most students in this life will be lucky if they gain enough merit to reincarnate in the next life with better karma and thereby be one step closer to fulfilling Nirvana. Thus, Hinayana Buddhism stresses monastic life and feels the individual needs to look after his or her own development. This is not selfishness, it is merely a statement of realism: it is arrogant to think that you can help anyone else when you can barely help yourself. This attitude, however, does not in any way prevent students from practicing compassion towards other beings.

Most of the sects in Japan with which we are familiar grew from the Mahayana school (Sanskrit for “Great Vehicle”). Mahayana developed in India during the first century CE. It is called the “Great Vehicle” because of its all-inclusive approach to enlightenment, as embodied in the Bodhisattva ideal, and the desire to liberate all beings. In other words, the student's goal is enlightenment, but more so, to become like a Bodhisattva ñ an enlightened being who uses his strength to assist other less fortunate beings. (example: The Chinese deity of mercy, Kuan Yin is considered to be a Bodhisattva as are Hotei and Japan's own Jizo who regularly enters hell to rescue lost souls) In China, Mahayana Buddhism flourished and took on many forms. Mahayana Buddhism entered Japan around the sixth century CE with the rapid assimilation of Chinese culture in general.

Finally, there is Vajrayana (Sanskrit for “the Diamond Vehicle”). Vajrayana developed out of the Mahayana teachings in northwest India around 500 CE and spread to Tibet, China and Japan; it involves esoteric visualizations, rituals, and mantras which can only be learned by study with a master. It is also known as Tantric Buddhism due to the use of tantras, or sacred texts. Vajrayana incorporates several deities. Intellectually, these are considered largely symbolic of states of being, or power originating from enlightenment, but may be worshipped as real by the masses.

### The “Old Sects”

**Tendai:** The ninth-century founder of Tendai is known as Dengyo Daishi (767-822), a posthumous title meaning “great teacher and transmitter of the Dharma”. Daishi was originally a Hinayana Buddhist priest in the old capital of Nara. Around 800 CE, he journeyed to China to study Mahayana Buddhism with the sect of T'ien t'ai (Jap. Tendai) Mountain. This consisted exclusively of Lotus Sutra teachings which were the underpinning of the classic writings of the patriarch Chih-i.

Upon returning to Japan, Daishi left Nara and established a small temple called Ichijo Shiken-In near the top of the then-sparsely populated Mt. Hiei, just northeast of Kyoto (then Heiankyo). Here he remained confined for twelve years of practice. He founded a new form of study and practice based on the Lotus Sutra teachings along with advanced meditative theories. Later, esoteric practices (visualizations, rituals, and mantras) were also added. These are sometimes called “Taimitsu” or “Mikkyo” (“secret teaching”), and are similar to the esoteric practices of Shingon.

Both Nichiren and Rinzai are descendants of Tendai; most of their founders (including Daishi himself) having been members of the monasteries on Mt. Hiei. Jodo, or Pure Land Buddhism is also closely associated with Tendai. **See: [www.tendai-lotus.org](http://www.tendai-lotus.org).**

**Shingon:** Shingon is more or less a form of Vajrayana Buddhism. Established by Kobo Daishi (Kukai) at the beginning of the Heian period (9th century), this school is known for its stress on Mikkyo practices and blends many doctrines, philosophies, deities, religious rituals, and meditation techniques from a wide variety of sources.

The teachings of Shingon are based on the Mahavairocana Sutra (J: Dainichi-kyo) and the Vajrasekhara sutra (J: Kongocho-kyo). These sutras were probably written during the last half of the seventh century in India. They contain the first systematic presentation of Mikkyo doctrine. The center of Shingon was the monastery complex on Mt. Koya. The famous Yamabushi are related to the Shingon sect. **See [www.shingon.org](http://www.shingon.org).**

### The “Young Sects”

#### Some Background and an explanation of Sohei

In the early Kamakura period, Buddhism in Japan was rife with corruption. The great monasteries on Mt. Hiei, Mt. Koya and in Nara were quite materialistic and involved in politics, land disputes, and even warfare. Their branch temples dotted the Empire and allowed them to exercise considerable power. (by most accounts, the Tendai of Mt. Hiei seem to have been the worst)

One good example of monastery corruption is the rise of the **Sohei**. Sohei began to appear in the Heian era. The term means “novice” and came to be a catch-all term for warrior monks attached to a given monastery ñ most notably those on Mt. Hiei. Most Sohei were poor Buddhists. Often recruited from peasants living around the temples, they were essentially enforcers: brash, uneducated, poor practitioner of the Dharma who ate meat, brawled and knew women. (not a bad lifestyle in the eyes of many a SCAdian, neh?). A classic maneuver of the monasteries was to send Sohei down

into the capital whenever they were upset about something. The “monks” would carry ceremonial floats bearing important images from the temple halls. After picking a fight, or having an “accident” with people in the streets, the monks would become incensed by the disrespect the people, police, government and even the Emperor himself displayed for the Law of Buddha. Protests outside the gates of the imperial palace could turn into ugly riots. Later on, during and after the Genpei War, the Sohei were assigned to support samurai armies whose commanders held the monastery’s favor or to whom they owed a favor. To varying degrees, this sort of thing went on right up until Oda Nobun thrashed the monasteries of Mt. Hiei and forcibly disbanded the Sohei.



In the popular culture, people referred to the age of Mappo, the “latter days of the dharma”. This expression, popular from late Heian into Kamakura, implied that the world was in a state of decline. There were thought to be several ages of the Buddha’s teachings, and this was the last before the end of the world. This pessimism only served to fuel social and spiritual anxiety. Certainly, on a political level it may have been true as the Heian court saw its downfall and military government took over.

As a reaction to the lack of sincere spirituality, several monks began to explore other methods and schools. Seeking to move away from the esoteric practices, which often involved magical rites, deities, etc, many embraced Zen 禅 the word meaning meditation.

**Jodo:** The “Pure Land” devotional form of Buddhism advocated surrender to a Bodhisattva as a means to be reborn in his Pure Land (a realm free from suffering) from which it is easier to attain nirvana. In Japan, this meant Amitabha; Amida Buddha and his “western paradise”. Adherents believed that all that was required was for the believer to call the name of Amida with pure sincerity usually upon one’s deathbed. (“Namu Amida Butsu Namu Amida Butsu”) Amida would then descend out of the western sky riding on a white elephant in a swirl of pink clouds and personally escort the dying person’s soul to the pure land. Jodo stresses compassion and its priests regularly perform various rites for their parishioners, often visiting them at home. While Jodo had been in evidence for centuries in Japan, it did not gain great popularity until the Kamakura era. If Tendai is Catholicism, then Jodo is Protestantism, in a certain simplistic metaphor. A popular Kamakura expression said, “Shingon is for the Imperial court. Tendai is for the nobles. Zen is for the samurai and Jodo for the masses.”

**Nichiren:** Nichiren (1222-1282) was a monk trained on Mt. Hiei who believed in the supreme perfection of the Lotus Sutra. Disenchanted with the highly esoteric teachings and practices of Tendai, he advocated the devout recitation of “Namu myoho renge kyo,” the title of the sutra, in order to attain instantaneous enlightenment. Nichiren taught his doctrine to the masses who, intimidated by Tendai and Shingon complexities, were open to newer, more direct paths to salvation. His followers would later claim that he was the reincarnation of the cosmic Buddha. The Nichiren sect may be seen as a sort of bridge between the purely meditative technique of Zen sects and the devotional technique of Jodo. It can almost be considered esoteric in that its rituals and practices are somewhat obscure.

**Zen Sects:** “Zen” is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese word Ch’an, which in turn is a rendition of the Sanskrit term dhyana, meaning “meditation.” An Indian monk named Bodhidharma started the Ch’an school of Chinese Buddhism when he came to China in 520 C.E.. Zen flourished during the T’ang dynasty led by such powerful figures as Chih-i, Hui-neng and Lin-chi (who started the sect now known as Rinzaï in Japan). Zen became the most popular form of Buddhism in Japan during the Kamakura period when it was adopted by the samurai. The school stresses the importance of the enlightenment experience and the futility of rational thought, intellectual study and religious ritual in attaining this; a central element of Zen is zazen, a meditative practice which seeks to free the mind of all thought and conceptualization. For doctrine, zen sects tend to focus on the Lotus sutra as their primary source. Just as important are the teachings and sayings of previous zen masters (especially of a sect’s own lineage). One example is the platform sutra or “dusting the mirror” sutra of the sixth great patriarch Hui-neng (638-713) which discusses the concept of sudden enlightenment. Zen was also heavily influenced by Taoism as it developed in China.

**Rinzaï:** One of the two major schools of Zen Buddhism, Rinzaï was founded by the Chinese master Lin-chi I-hsuan (Japanese; Rinzaï Gigen) and brought to Japan by Eisai Zenji at the end of the twelfth century; it stresses koan Zen as the means to attain enlightenment. A koan is a paradoxical riddle or statement that is used to force the mind to abandon logic and dualistic thought. “What is the sound of one hand clapping?”

**Soto:** (Chinese. Ts’ao-tung) is the other major school of Zen Buddhism. It was brought to Japan by Dogen (1200-1253) in the thirteenth century; it emphasizes simple zazen, or sitting meditation, as the central practice in order to attain enlightenment.



Dogen

## The “Exotic Sects”

**Yamabushi:** Literally translated as “mountain warrior” and is the term used to describe members of the Shugendo sect; a branch of Shingon founded (according to legend) by En-no-Gyoja in the seventh-century. Shugendo stresses physical endurance and trial as a means to realizing personal strength, and ultimately, enlightenment. One could almost call this sect “Xtrem Shingon!”. Its practitioners spent most of their time wandering the mountains of Japan visiting holy sites; Buddhist as well as Shinto. Their most extreme rituals include walking across beds of red-hot coals, chanting while sitting under ice-cold waterfalls and hanging from their feet from the edges of cliffs. Not surprisingly, these monks gained a powerful reputation for magical abilities. In art and folklore, they are closely connected to the infamous tengu (crow-men) who seem to love to taunt, irritate and impersonate Yamabushi. Yamabushi are also associated with shinobi (ninja) on the premise that shinobi tactics were born in the mountains these men inhabited. The sect still survives today.

**Fuke:** Commonly known as the Komuso (“monks of emptiness”), Fuke is a Zen offshoot said to have been founded by Shinchi Kakushin (1207-1298) who was a noted early Zen advocate and multi-talented monk. The Komuso’s Zen centers upon mastery of the shakuhachi; a flute made from the base of a bamboo stalk. (note: the shakuhachi is a traditional monk’s instrument imported from China. In the Edo period, it became increasingly popular with lay-musicians as well.) Fuke monks stressed pilgrimage and would wander around the Empire playing their flutes as they walked - a very physical form of meditation. I am unsure what formed the foundation of their doctrine, but then, it is possible they did not have much of a doctrine to begin with. Most Komuso were lay-practitioners, not truly ordained monastics. Towards the end of the Momoyama period and into the Edo era, their ranks included many ronin. As a result, the sect gained a bad reputation as ruffians and perhaps thieves used it’s uniform as an easy dodge from the authorities. Popular legend (and several grade-B movies) says that Tokugawa bakufu ninja spies often disguised themselves as Komuso. This is unverified. See [www.komuso.com](http://www.komuso.com) (mostly post-period information)

**Senin:** Not truly a sect at all, I include this group here in case someone would find it interesting. Senin is a general term for the Taoist hermits of Japan, particularly of the Nara and Heian periods. Another cultural import from China, Taoist philosophy and mysticism was all the rage in these early times. Taoist sorcerers performed exorcisms for the Imperial court and Taoist geomancers arranged the layouts of gardens, homes and government offices. (Feng Shui) Meanwhile, the Senin, in true Taoist fashion, chose to live apart from the ailing world of civilization and return to nature. Wandering in the mountains and living in caves, Senin meditated on the Tao and, according to legend, amassed great magical powers as a result of their purity and close communion with Nature and the kami (nature spirits). In many respects, the Senin were the precursors of the Yamabushi and various Zen hermits.

## The Monastic Life

### Prayer and Meditation:

Each day in the monastery has a proscribed amount of time set aside for meditation. Typically, at least three to four hours of the day which begins at dawn and ends sometime after sundown. Meditation is conducted as a group in the Meditation Hall, however, individuals may also meditate in solitude at other times of the day. Group meditation is usually monitored by the roshi or by one of his assistants (higher-ranking monks). Typically, the monks sit on mats or cushions on a bench which runs around the room. In Rinzai monasteries, they sit facing the walls of the hall. In Soto, they face into the room. Sitting meditation is interspersed at intervals with walking meditation which helps alleviate the discomfort from sitting zazen for an extended period.

Prayer is conducted in the Dharma Hall or Buddha Hall. Here the monks chant sutras together. This chanting is another form of meditation. Part of Mahayana tradition says that each time a sutra (especially the Lotus) is read aloud (or even its name invoked) the sound is a blessing to all sentient beings and can help them achieve salvation. Thus, the sutra chanting is a service performed for the benefit of the world.

Atta dipa: a Rinzai Zen monastery morning chant: Originally in Pali (the language the Buddha spoke)

You are the light itself  
Rely on yourself  
Do not rely on others.  
The Dharma is the light  
Do not rely on anything other than the Dharma.

### Work:

As in Europe, monasteries in Japan were supposed to be more-or-less self-sufficient. Monks would work rice fields owned by the monastery. A portion of each day was dedicated to labor maintaining the monastery ñ fieldwork, gardening, cleaning, cooking, building needed things, caring for the sick, etc. The duties were usually rotated among the monks. I believe it was not uncommon for monks to work on public works projects as well; building dams and bridges and the like to help improve conditions for the community around the monastery.

### Meals:

Traditionally, Zen monasteries served only a couple of meals a day ñ all before midday. Diet consisted mostly of rice, millet, soy, and vegetables in various forms. All monasteries were vegetarian. The position of cook was an important one. While the kitchen help rotated, there was often a dedicated head-cook monk. Cooking holds a great deal of Zen symbolism, as does eating. Monks ate together silently with the exception of prayers chanted before and after the meal. In some very strict traditions, the monks were required to say “Itadakemas” (I give thanks) before each bite!

### Alms:

Despite attempting to be self-sufficient, most monasteries would practice alms rounds. Collecting alms was a symbolic act as well as a practical one and, thus, even if the monastery’s warehouse was full, the monks would go beg. Usually, a procession would proceed out of the monastery and through the main streets of the neighboring village. One monk would lead the way, making noise with his shakujo. The other monks would follow in single file carrying their alms bowls. Citizens of the town would come out and drop things into the bowls. Monks might also stand silently on a street corner holding out their bowls for people to drop alms in. Sometimes ringing a small bell. This was typical of monks on pilgrimage. It is a practice you can still see today. Communication with lay people was usually limited. Monks kept their hats on and did not engage in conversation. Such interaction would cause the alms gift to become an act of favoritism. If kept anonymous, the begging is thus ennobling for both parties.

### **Martial Arts and Sport:**

Many monasteries held martial arts tournaments as a way of exercising the monks and letting off some steam (not to mention the martial training Sohei would require). Some of these events were open to outsiders, but this may be more of a post-period phenomenon. Wrestling sumo-style was popular as was armed combat with yari (spear) or naginata (a form of halberd - the traditional monk's weapon).

### **Interviews:**

In most traditions, meeting privately with the roshi (master/teacher, usually the abbot) is an important event. This is when the master is able to gauge the progress of the student; consider new disciplines or advances in rank, even test to see if the student has gained enlightenment. He may give the monk a new koan, or ask him a series of questions, and so forth. Stories centered around such interviews can be full of wit and wisdom.

### **Arts and Learning:**

Many monks were great artists and scholars. Obviously, their monasteries allowed time for study and development of creativity. Some typical arts included calligraphy and ink painting (considered a good meditative tool), tea ceremony, garden design, wood-carving, bonsai and ikebana, and poetry. Many noble and samurai children were educated in monasteries or by individual monk tutors. Monastic libraries were, like their counterparts in Europe, important repositories of knowledge. Their store houses were filled with the donations of the wealthy (grand-dad's armor, mom's kimono, various artworks, etc.) and form an important resource for modern researchers.



### **Pilgrimage: Angya**

Two forms of pilgrimage exist in monastic life. The first is the foot journey taken when one first chooses to enter a monastery. This is considered part of the initiation process. The second is the pilgrimage taken at the individual's discretion later in his training; usually after several years in the monastery and often upon the recommendation of his roshi. This pilgrimage would take the monk to any variety of holy sites around Japan. It was considered especially beneficial for a monk to visit major monasteries of his sect and to experience the teachings of noted masters. In some cases, advanced monks (usually those who had received dharma transmission) even went to study under masters of other sects.

Tradition holds that a monk on pilgrimage would only be allowed to rest in a monastery if he could best one of the local monks in a dharma duel ñ a debate over some aspect of the Buddha's teachings or a two-way koan challenge.

## **Persona Play:**

How do you portray what is essentially a cloistered lifestyle in the SCA? Here are a few options for persona story development:

- You are currently on angya. You have just left home to join the monastery and something has gotten in your way.
- You are a more accomplished monk and are on pilgrimage to visit Mt. Hiei, or Enryaku-ji, or the capital, etc.
- You are a lay monk. When you are not fighting the enemies of your clan, you are devoted to the study of the sutras. It is a pity the obligations of the world are so weighty! But such is the life of a samurai.
- You are a fierce sohei! Recently, you were sent out by your temple, along with several hundred other brothers, to assist the Minamoto in their struggle against the Taira. It has been a long campaign.
- You are a malcontent! The monastery is as corrupt as any brothel and you have had enough. You can read the writings of the patriarchs as well as any man, so why not do it yourself? Thus, you have come here to live alone and to build merit by assisting the poor and sick in this city.
- You are the Abbot. Sigh! The duties of running an important temple are rigorous. One hardly has time for a good game of Go. On top of all this, you have numerous meetings with ministers from the capital to secure funding of the new Dharma Hall, the new bell, and that image of the Shogun you have been ordered to produce.
- You are a scholar. The peace of the temple is alluring. Yet it is essential that the young lord of the Clan be properly educated. Thus, this posting is an honor. It is not uncommon for the Daimyo to seek your advice as well. Especially since among the texts you have studied are the sayings of The Chinese General!
- You are an artist monk. Nobles of the court have shown a great interest in your work and you have taken to selling your paintings and copying sutras for patrons. The money is going to fund construction of a shrine in your home village. (the use of money would make this a very late period persona)

### **Thoughts on alms collecting in the SCA:**

"Doing alms" can be fun persona play. It is a very authentic way for your persona to interact with others. Exercise some common sense. First, make sure the autocrat is ok with it. Next, do not push yourself on people. This is not the period way to do it, and it is annoying. Be sensitive to those around you ñ if someone looks confused, be prepared to drop out of persona and explain what you are doing. Don't over-do the silent aspect; if someone approaches you with a sincere question, consider answering them either in or out of persona. Don't let them think your behavior is stand-of-ish and do not let them think you are hawking anything or trying to prostaletize (it's obvious to you that you aren't, but you'd be surprised what some people will imagine).

Be prepared for people to misinterpret your persona! (magician, ninja spy, mystic priest, you name it) Once, while alms collecting at Pennsic, I had a couple grovel at my feet (literally) and ask for my blessing. Awkward moment! I didn't drop out of persona, but I realized the begging routine had to shift gears so I immediately plopped myself down in the dirt in front of them, made them get up, and asked them why they were behaving so oddly - debasing themselves before a simple monk. In the end, I did give them a "blessing" and it was a fun persona interchange. Finally, while rice would be the traditional alms gift, people will more likely give you money. If you collect any, make sure you donate it to the Chirurgeons, the kingdom travel fund, or a charity. Do not keep it.

## Folklore, Stories and Tradition

### THE GATES OF PARADISE

A soldier named Nobushige came to the Zen master Hakuin, and asked: "Is there really a paradise and a hell?"

"Who are you?" inquired Hakuin.

"I am a samurai," the warrior replied.

"You, a soldier!" exclaimed Hakuin. "What kind of ruler would have you as his guard? Your face looks like that of a beggar."

Nobushige became so angry that he began to draw his sword, but Hakuin continued: "So you have a sword! Your weapon is probably much too dull to cut off my head."

As Nobushige drew his sword Hakuin remarked: "Here open the gates of hell!"

At these words the samurai, perceiving the master's discipline, sheathed his sword and bowed.

"Here open the gates of paradise," said Hakuin.

- from *Zen flesh, Zen bones, Zen and Pre-Zen Writings*, compiled by Paul Reps

### TO STUDY THE WAY

To study the way is to study the self

To study the self is to forget the self

To forget the self is to be enlightened  
by all things of the universe.

To be enlightened by all things is to  
transcend the distinction of self and other

and to go on in ceaseless enlightenment forever.

- Dogen Kigen Zenji

### BELONGING

When you understand, you belong to the family;

When you do not understand, you are a stranger.

Those who do not understand belong to the family,

And when they understand they are strangers.

- a koan from *The Gateless Gate* by Ekai, called Mumon

### BELLS AND ROBES

*Ummon asked:* "The world is such a wide world, why do you answer a bell and don ceremonial robes?"

*Mumon's Comment:* When one studies Zen one need not follow sound or colour or form. Even though some have attained insight when hearing a voice or seeing a colour or a form, this is a very common way. It is not true Zen. The real Zen student controls sound, colour, form, and actualizes the truth in his everyday life. Sound comes to the ear, the ear goes to the sound. When you blot out sound and sense, what do you understand? While listening with ears one never can understand. To understand intimately one should see sound.

### THE SIXTEEN PRECEPTS

#### THE THREE TREASURES

Be one with the Buddha  
Be one with the Dharma  
Be one with the Sangha

#### THE TEN GRAVE PRECEPTS

Do not kill  
Do not steal  
Do not be greedy  
Do not tell a lie  
Do not be ignorant  
Do not talk about other's faults  
Do not elevate yourself by criticizing others  
Do not be stingy  
Do not get angry  
Do not speak ill of the Three Treasures

#### THE THREE PURE PRECEPTS

Do not commit evil  
Do good  
Do good for others

### THE DEEPEST MEANING

The Soto monk and garden  
designer, Muso Soseki, who  
designed the garden at Tenryuji  
in the mid-1300's composed  
this poem:

The sounds of the streams  
splash out the Buddha's sermon,  
Don't say that the deepest  
meaning comes only from one's  
mouth,  
Day and night, 80,000 poems  
arise one after the other,  
And in fact, not a single word  
has ever been spoken.

### THE FOUR GREAT VOWS

(Shi gu sei gan)  
Shu jo muhen sei gan do  
Bo no mujin sei gan dan  
Ho mon muryo sei gan gaku  
Butsu do mujo sei gan jo

However innumerable all beings are  
I vow to save them all  
However inexhaustible my delusions are  
I vow to extinguish them all  
However immeasurable the Dharma  
Teachings are  
I vow to master them all  
However endless the Buddha's Way is  
I vow to follow it completely

Shu jo muhen sei gan do  
Bo no mujin sei gan dan  
Ho mon muryo sei gan gaku  
Butsu do mujo sei gan jo

### THE GASSHO

The gassho is the traditional monkly greeting used to show respect for, well, just about anyone, really. To do it, place the palms of your hands together in the position of prayer, and bow your head or whole torso in a respectful manner. You have probably seen the Dalai Lama do this - or even Mahatma Ghandi. The practice was inherited from ancient Indian culture.

## **SUGGESTED READING**

### **History**

*A History of Japan to 1334*, George Sansom, Stanford University Press, 1961 - THE source. Highly recommended.

*A History of Japan 1334-1615*, George Sansom, Stanford University Press, 1961 - Again, THE source. Highly recommended.

### **Culture**

*Cha-No-Yu The Japanese Tea Ceremony*, A. L. Sadler, Charles E. Tuttle Co., Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan, 1962 - good overview of the basic facts of Tea, detailed descriptions, large collection of tea-related stories and historic facts.

*Japanese Tales*, edited and translated by Royall Tyler, Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library, 1987 - concise and easy to read collection of folklore including lots of monk stories!

*The Sayings of Confucius*, translated by James R. Ware, Penguin Books, 1955 - one of the three great teachers well-rounded scholars and educated monks would know.

*Japan: The Shaping of Daimyo Culture 1185-1868*, edited by Yoskiaki Shimizu, George Braziller, Inc., New York and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1988 - big expensive coffee table book with detailed coverage of this art exhibition. Excellent facts and photos. Highly recommended.

*The Tale of Genji*, Lady Murasaki, translated by Arthur Waley, Random House, Inc., 1960 - one of the three great classics.

*Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu, a new translation by Gia-fu Feng and Jane English, Vintage Books, 1972 - Besides the Buddha, the other of the three great teachers.

*The World of the Shining Prince*, Ivan Morris, Kodansha, 1964 - a companion book written to assist understanding of the world of The Tale of Genji and other mid-Heian texts. Considered a masterpiece.

*The Training of the Zen Buddhist Monk*, Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki. Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1994. - Although it discusses experiences in a contemporary monastery, this book is a very good guide to daily life for a monk.

### **Buddhism/Zen**

*Zen Flesh, Zen Bones ñ a collection of Zen and pre-Zen writings*, compiled by Paul Reps. Doubleday, 1989 ñ not necessarily the best introduction to Zen, but very good material and stories. As you learn about zen, more and more of this book resonates.

*Entering the Stream*, Compiled and edited by Samuel Bercholz and Sherab Chodzin Kohn. Shambhala Publications, 1993.

*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*, Shunryu Suzuki. Weatherhill, 1970.

*The Lotus Sutra*, Translated by Burton Watson. Columbia University Press, 1993.

*A Concise History of Buddhism*, Andrew Skilton. Barnes and Noble Books, 2000.

*A History of Zen Buddhism: A History, Vol. II: Japan*, Heinrich Dumoulin. Macmillan Publishing Co., 1990

### **Reference**

*Name Construction in Medieval Japan*, Barbara Nostrand Ph. D. (ska: Solveig Thronardottir), Potboiler Press, 1994. - a good tool for choosing a Japanese SCA name. See if you can borrow it from a herald.

Jeffrey's E-J Dictionary: <http://enterprise.dsi.crc.ca/cgi-bin/j-e/dict> - my favorite on-line Japanese-English-Japanese dictionary.

Lady Fujiwara's site: [www.reconstructinghistory.com](http://www.reconstructinghistory.com) - excellent garb construction information.

Master Effingham's site (An Online Japanese Miscellany): [http://www.geocities.com/sengokudaimyo/Miscellany/Misc\\_home.html](http://www.geocities.com/sengokudaimyo/Miscellany/Misc_home.html) - Effingham is the SCA's most accomplished scholar on Japanese culture. Attend his Pennsic classes. Read his site. Do what he says!

Kyoto Costume Museum: <http://www.iz2.or.jp/fukusyoku/busou/index.htm> - this site is in Japanese only. It is an excellent reference for garb.

Disclaimer: "Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the Wise. Seek instead what they sought." - Lao Tzu

I am not a great scholar or historian. The information I present here is very basic and may contain some generalities or errors. My experience is mostly with 16<sup>th</sup> century Japan and Zen, so please forgive me if you feel other periods or cultures are under-represented. The bibliography is far from complete. Comments and suggestions are warmly appreciated. Thank you.

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