

# SPIRITUAL IDENTITY



## *O henro-gi* (Buddhist pilgrim's jacket)

*Taisho (1912-1926) or Showa (1926-1989) period, Japan, first half of the 20th century*

Followers of many faiths worldwide embark on pilgrimages—journeys of spiritual significance, usually to a sacred place, undertaken as an act of devotion. Buddhist pilgrims in Japan, known as *o-henro-san*, usually wear an outfit comprising a conical hat, a walking staff, and a white cotton jacket like this example. Undyed, white fabric can symbolize purity, the renunciation of worldly luxury, and death in Japanese culture.

Most of Japan's approximately 300 pilgrimage circuits include either 33 or 88 sacred sites—numbers auspicious in Buddhism—and a pilgrim usually visits them in a set order. These pilgrimages are often physically arduous and may require many weeks to complete. When pilgrims arrive at a sacred site, they recite a Buddhist chant or sutra and then may receive the temple's cinnabar stamp and inscription in a booklet or on their jacket to document the visit.

This jacket made of hand-stitched, hand-woven cotton, likely dates to the middle of the 20th century. It graphically traces the journey a pilgrim who traveled the *Kumano kodo* (Kumano pilgrimage route), which passes through the Kii Peninsula and Mt. Koya, the headquarters of the Japanese Shingon sect. Devout believers consider these jackets to be imbued with great spiritual power, and after the pilgrimage may wear them when dying and, after death, during cremation.

Cotton warp and weft yarns; plain weave, stamped  
The Textile Museum 2008.17.1, Krauss Collection of Japanese Textiles

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