

the faceless **MONKS** of **EMPTINESS**

Ineko Takano's face is hidden as she wanders the Japanese countryside with the woven straw tengai on her head, playing the role of the **komuso**...the itinerant Fuke sect monk. She begs for alms while playing the shakuhachi, a bamboo flute. The Tokugawa government granted komuso exclusive use of the instrument and the unusual freedom to cross any border in feudal Japan.

Women were not allowed to be komuso, but were it possible, Ineko would not shave her head, unlike most monks...but she would carry a sword. She would wear a plain indigo blue or grey shawl, tied with an obi (sash) and sporting a bag containing a spare shakuhachi.

The **Tengai** (or tengui) hat was the symbol of the komuso, the **monks of emptiness**. The public would not bother the faceless troubadours and it allowed komuso to abandon their egos.

Komuso monks assisted the Shogun government of the Tokugawa to maintain order during the Edo period (1603 to 1867). "Faceless" and unassuming, they could move unnoticed among the public. Was this of use to the Shogun? The Shogunate then began restricting the monks after spies and bandits began to disguise themselves as komuso.

Komuso practiced Zen Buddhism between 1600 and 1868. Their lasting legacy is their music. **Ineko Takano wore this outfit circa 1930s, perhaps as part of a stageplay for the Buddhist Temple of Alameda, CA.**



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