



 **Hossu**

Yet another implement priests hold during a ceremony or a dharma talk is the *hossu*, a sheaf of hair, hemp, or cotton attached to a handle that is held by the officiant. The origin of the use of the *hossu* goes back to India where monastics, who were forbidden to kill creatures, were allowed to use a whisk to drive away mosquitoes and flies. When the *hossu* was introduced to China, priests considered the *hossu* to be a sacred item symbolizing buddha-dharma that an officiant would use to solemnly swing sideways and forward to drive away delusions and misfortune. For this reason, the hair of the *hossu* has been considered to be the Buddha's hair and has been treated with utmost care.

As explained above, the robes and implements used by priests gradually changed in their meaning and usage throughout Buddhist history, eventually taking their present forms. Dogen Zenji, who founded Soto Zen Buddhism, left a message with this meaning: The teaching of Soto Zen Buddhism is to follow the proper manners and forms and live a life according to Dharma. One of the most basic practices for priests is to treat Buddhist robes and implements with the great care, employing them to settle the body and mind.

Robes and Implements

法衣



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Hōe and Hōgu

When conducting a ceremony or giving a dharma talk, Buddhist priests wear various robes and hold various implements. Their robes and implements vary according to their rank or the role they play in the ceremony.



Kesa

The *kesa* is a robe of great liberation. Of all the robes that priests wear, the *Kesa* is treated with the greatest care. Originally, priests wore robes made of pieces of discarded cloth sewn together. Such clothing was called *funzo-e* (robes made of worn-out and stained cloth). It is said that monks and nuns wore clothing of such humble quality to diminish attachment to their clothing or to avoid envy. The *funzo-e* was dyed ocher with grass and wood, and, thus, the name “*kesa*” came from the Sanskrit word *kasaya*, meaning “ocher.” Except for special occasions, priests wear the *kesa* over their left shoulder (leaving the right shoulder bare) to express their faith and respect to the Buddha who wears the *kesa* over both shoulders.

Rakusu

The *rakusu* is a simplified *kesa* that priests wear around their necks for convenience when working. The *rakusu* is worn as a formal vestment mostly on non-ceremonial occasions. In the Zen school, the *rakusu* has a ring called *rakusu-kan*, which originally served as a clasp for *kesa*. Also, the *rakusu* of the Soto Zen school has a decorative stitch called *orematsuba* behind the neck. One account says this stitch represents the Buddha entering parinirvana.

Jikitotsu

The *jikitotsu* is a robe worn under the *kesa*. As Buddhism spread into regions with cold climates, priests began wearing *jikitotsu* underneath the *kesa* to keep themselves warm. Originally, *jikitotsu* consisted of a top and a skirt but they were later sewn together and have since been used in that form.

Kotsu

The *kotsu* is one of the implements priests hold during a ceremony or a dharma talk. The *kotsu* originates from what was called a *shaku*, a tablet used by imperial officials. The *shaku* was used to hold a piece of paper on its back in order for the officials to see their notes. Later, people started to use *shaku* to maintain their dignified conduct during important ceremonies and rituals.

Nyoi

The *nyoi* is another of the implements priests hold during a ceremony or a dharma talk. The origin of the *nyoi* is *tsumazue*, an ancient Chinese back scratcher. Since it can reach itchy parts of the body that otherwise can't be reached, it started to be interpreted as “according to one's will.” Also, the ability to reach and support what one cannot reach has been interpreted as an expression of compassion, and thus the mind of a bodhisattva or a buddha. For such reasons, priests began using *nyoi* to maintain their dignified conduct during important ceremonies and rituals.