The Pilgrimage Road   遍路道

Henro-michi, or The Pilgrimage Road, is one of the names given to the 88 temple pilgrimage, associated with the Buddhist monk Kukai, on the island of Shikoku. This 1,200km Buddhist pilgrimage is traditionally carried out on foot, usually taking between thirty and sixty days to complete. Pilgrims can be easily identified by their *oizuru* (thin white garments), *suge-kasa* (conical hats) and *kongo-zue* (walking sticks). The first twenty-three temples are located in Tokushima Prefecture – this section of the journey is likened to the 'awakening' stage on the path to enlightenment.

The area around Ido-ji   井戸寺付近

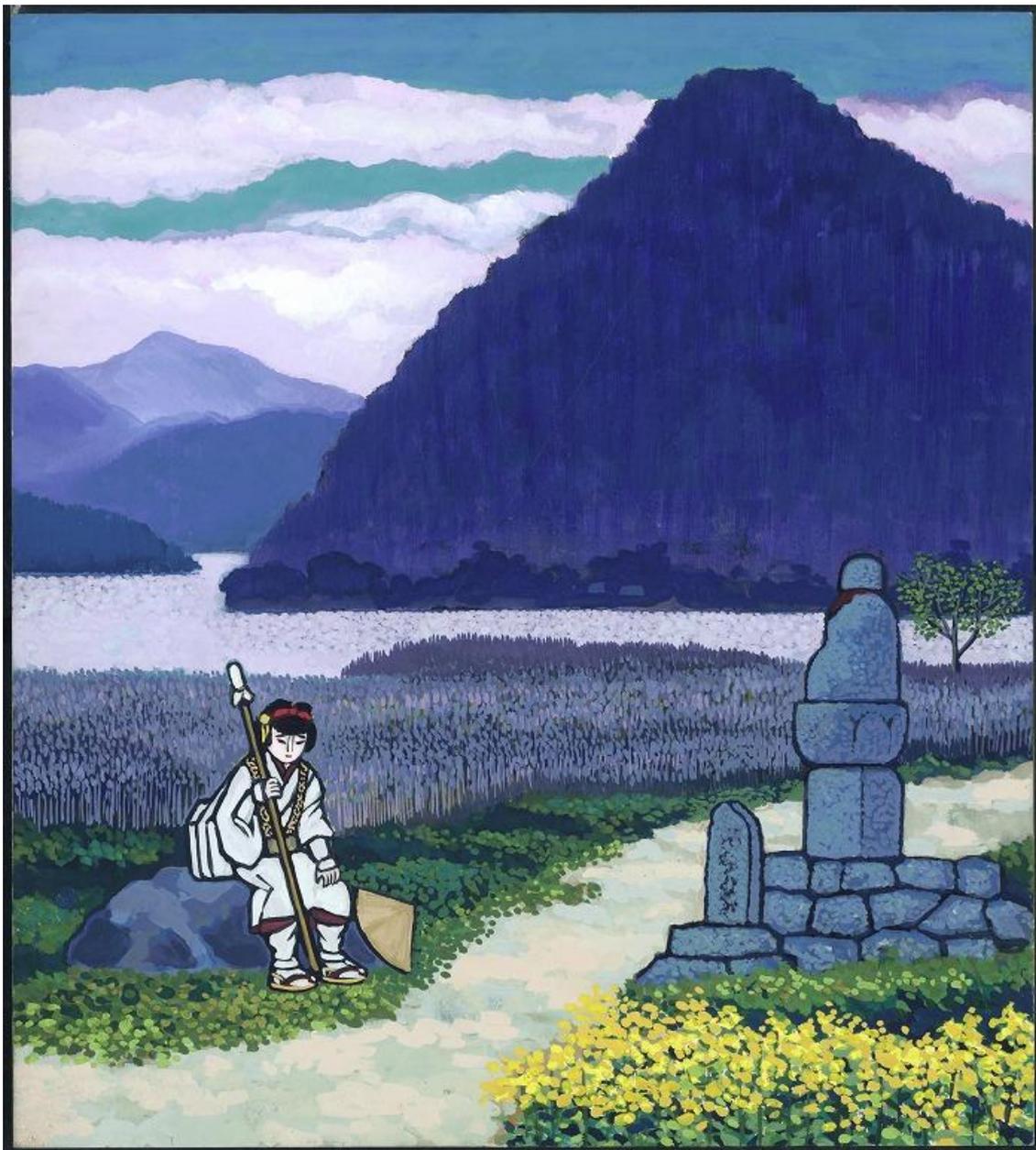Water in the well… pilgrims looking to find their reflection, all they see is well water.

Ido-ji is the seventeenth temple of the pilgrimage. Once the rainy season has passed, the wind blowing down from the mountains in the north tells the pilgrims that winter is near.

Once the rainy season has passed, the sunset reflected on the waterlogged

road tells the pilgrims to seek shelter.

Ido-ji is the seventeenth temple of the pilgrimage.

Water in the well… legend states that if pilgrims do not see their reflection

in the well water something bad will happen to them within the next three

years.

A five temple pilgrimage　　五ヵ寺巡り

The Pilgrimage Road starts in Awa and then passes, clockwise, through

Tosa and Iyo, before finishing in Sanuki. Those who cannot complete the

full pilgrimage may just choose one of these provinces.

The thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth temples

of the pilgrimage follow the course of the Akui River. Flowering rapeseed

blossom and lotus flowers can be found along the river between these five

temples.

Kumatani-ji　熊谷寺

Kumatani-ji is the eighth temple of the pilgrimage. The spirit of the Heian

period can be felt in the pilgrims as they make their offerings.

From Kumatani-ji, the mountains of Myozai and Katsuura can just about

be seen across the plain. Through the spring mist, there they are.

Kumatani-ji stands at the foot of a mountain, cloaked in a spring mist. At the gates, cherry blossom petals fall to the sound of bells chiming. The petals float to the ground.

Generations of petals come and go at Kumatani-ji, always falling.

Generations of pilgrims come and go, too, journeying on.

Heavy showers on Muya Road.   撫養街道驟雨

Rain so sudden that there is no time to take out rainwear.

Rain on a journey down a long road, alone.

Rain on a journey bound by ties that were thought to have broken long ago.

Rain that seems to say "wash it away, wash it away, wash it all away".

The Pilgrimage Road   遍路道

I long for the road

Kites may fly overhead, carried by a strong dusty wind
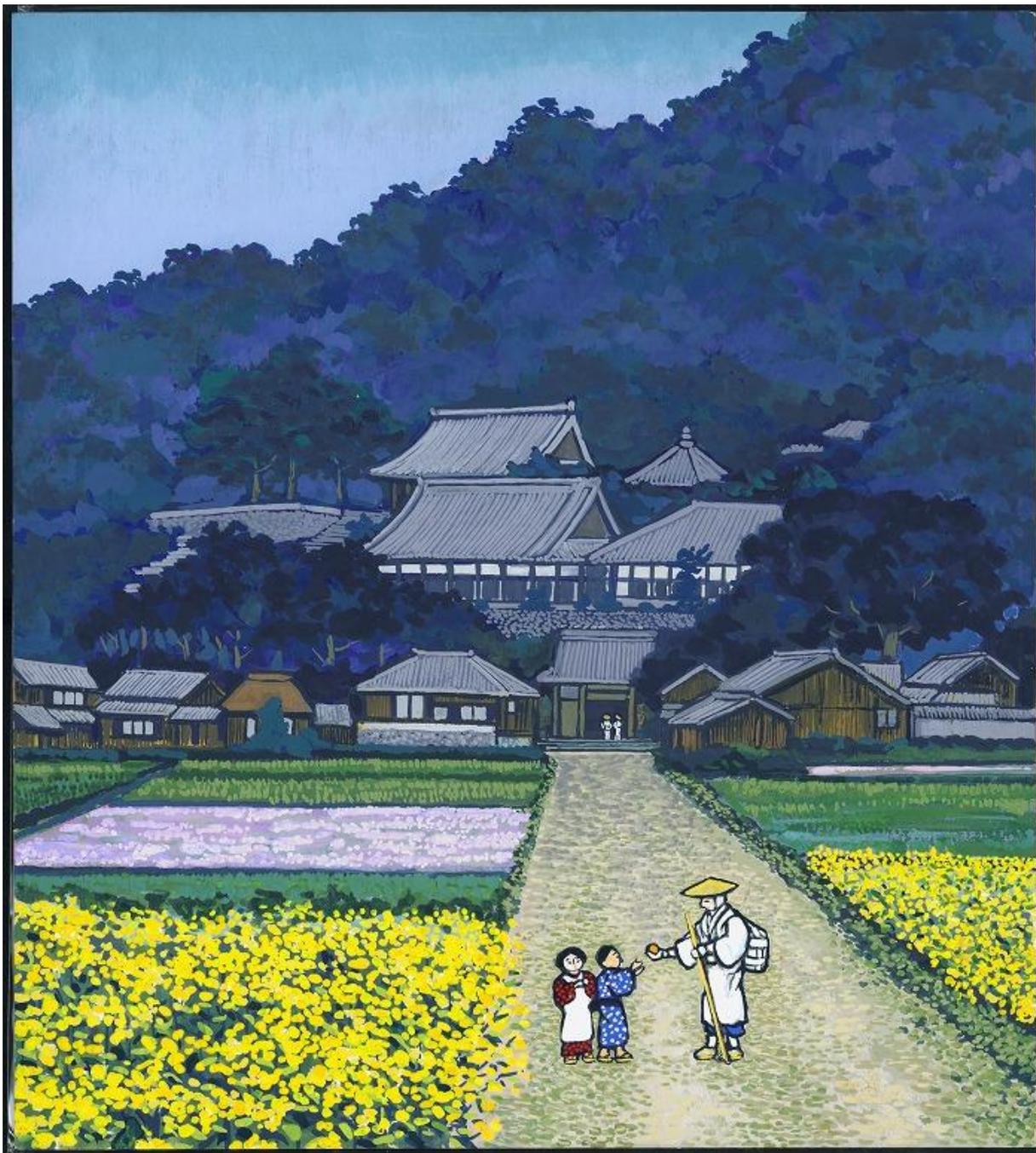
I long for the road

Horseshoes might kick up water as loaded wagons pass by

I long for the road

I long for a road to be walked on

Knotweed growing under a broken mud wall

The flowers I played with, some day long ago
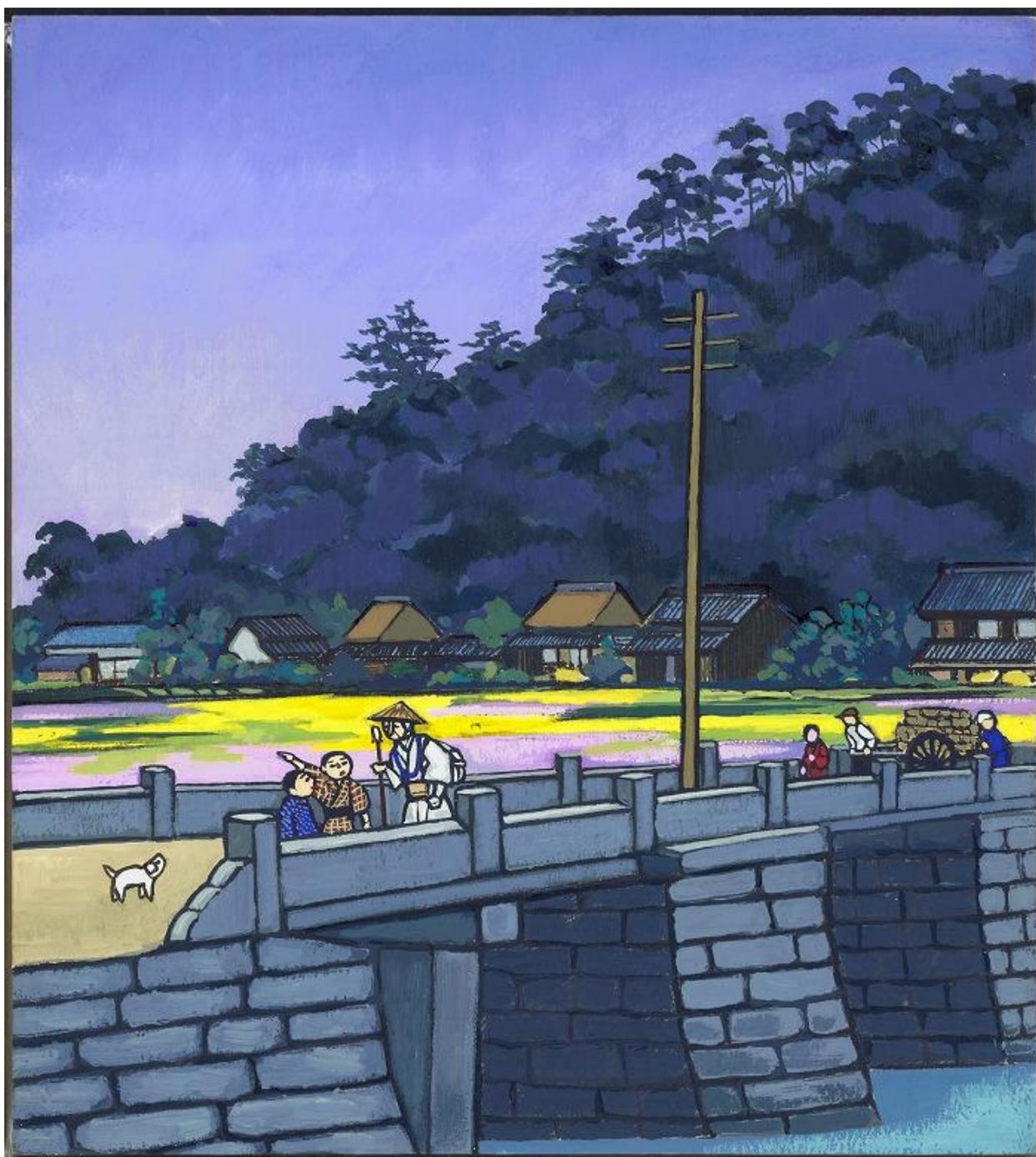
Yakuo-ji Temple   薬王寺

Yakuo-ji is the twenty-third temple of the pilgrimage and the last temple

until Hotsumisaki-ji at Muroto, Tosa. These two temples are separated by

80km of coast road. 4km from Yakuo-ji there was a difficult uphill section

– known as "the pilgrim's downfall". There were several cherry trees along this stretch and it was said that if pilgrims tried to go up to see the blossoms they were sure to fall back down the road.

The white of the pilgrims' *oizuri* as they fall down the wet red dirt hills, the silent showers of mountain cherry blossoms – this is what the pilgrimage road is said to have looked like.

Shirasagi Bridge   しらさぎ橋

Tatsue-ji is the nineteenth temple of the pilgrimage. A skylark soars

higher than the pagoda as water flows quietly underneath Shirasagi

Bridge. The rapeseed and lotus flowers are in full bloom. The *sorin*, usually

standing on top of the pagoda in the cold wind, looks softer, as if relaxed,

putting on a pleasant face in the spring haze. The spring wind blows

through breathtaking colours, carrying the sound of the pilgrims' bells.