

Fuji Faith in Western Japan

A Fishing Village Festival in Ise

The village of Hozaura is located almost 250 kilometers west of Mt. Fuji. Every July, the villagers hold a mountain-opening festival for nearby Mt. Sengen. On this night, through song and dance, they welcome Sengen-shin, the deity of Mt. Fuji, and make the two mountains one.

During this Sengen Festival, the men of the village paint their faces with thick white make-up and march to the mountain bearing two enormous bamboo pillars known as the greater and lesser sacred pillar, or *ohei* and *kohei*. The pillars are decorated at the top with branches and leaves holding countless white folding fans with red circles symbolizing the sun. At the mountaintop, they are erected as *yorishiro* for Sengen-shin: ritual objects in which the kami's presence is received.

The men sing and dance the traditional festival tune throughout, which includes the memorable lyrics "Fuji is the mountain of men's love" (*Fuji wa otoko no koi no yama*). The festival seems to incorporate faith in Mt. Fuji into local traditions of song and dance.