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Discourses of the Reappearing

The Reenactment of the “Cloth-Bridge Consecration Rite” at Mt. Tateyama

This article discusses the modern reenactments of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* (the “Cloth-Bridge Consecration [Initiation] rite”) in Tateyama-chō, Toyama prefecture, and the religious and political issues they raised. Originally a popular Edo-period rite for women’s salvation, the *Nunohashi kanjōe* was obsolete for one hundred and thirty years, until it was reconstructed and performed as the main “spectacle” of the Culture Festival *ibento* (“event”) in Tateyama in 1996. A decade later, in 2005, 2006, and 2009, its reenactments were resumed as “ceremonies of traditional healing.” This paper follows the progression of these attempts at transforming a Buddhist ritual into a modern-day “cultural *ibento*.” It looks at the gap between the politics and purposes behind the reenactments of the rites, and the reactions of the women who participated in them. It further considers general issues illuminated by these reenactments, such as the nature and status of religious experiences, and the relations of religion and state in contemporary Japan.

KEYWORDS: Mt. Tateyama—*Nunohashi kanjōe*—women’s salvation rites—Cloth-Bridge Consecration (Initiation)—*ibento*—Buddhism as healing tradition—rebirth in Amida’s Pure Land—renewal rituals

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ON THE bright morning of 29 September 1996, the proud mountains of Tateyama 立山 in Toyama Prefecture witnessed an unusual event, or, rather, *ibento* イベント, the like of which had not been conducted for the last one hundred and thirty years. On that September morning, the Tateyama ridge rang with the mesmerizing chanting of *shōmyō* 声明, and a large audience of several thousand locals hushed and held its breath at the beauty of the ritual procession passing before its eyes. This was the reenactment of the rite of *Nunohashi daikanjō-hōe* 布橋大灌頂法会, the “Great Consecration (Initiation) Ceremony of the Cloth-Covered Bridge.” This rite, which in the late Edo period (1603–1867) had drawn multitudes seeking the promise of rebirth in Amida’s paradise, was last performed in Meiji 2 (1869), before being outlawed.

The *Nunohashi* rite was the highlight of the *ibento* that day, which also included lectures, concerts, and folk performances, and a food fair. The whole day’s events were a great performative success. The audience was large, the weather held, and everything went as planned, except for one unpredictable embarrassment: the rite itself turned out to be *too* successful. As it happened, many of the women participants walked away from it with a surprising, unplanned, unintended, and politically explosive spiritual (if not religious) experience. Of course, the organizers at the time elegantly ignored these fervent reactions, as one might expect. But they had reasons enough to agree that the reenactment of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* was to be a one-time event.

Nine years later, however, persistent local demand caused the Tateyama town officials to try it again. The rite was reenacted in 2005, 2006, and three years later in 2009, again with great success, and it may now become a feature of Tateyama town once every few years.

This article examines the intriguing reactions to this attempt at reviving an old rite for a prefecture’s “national culture festival” (*kokumin bunkasai* 国民文化祭) as an *ibento*, and looks at the questions raised in its aftermath.

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The reconstructed *Nunohashi kanjōe* ritual, though an attempt to conjure up a mysterious and nostalgic past, does not fall into the category of “the vanishing old,”¹ but rather into that of “the reappearing deceased”: a reenactment of a cult that was extinct for more than one hundred and thirty years. Nor could it be considered as an “invented tradition” (HOBBSBAWM and RANGER 1983), for it was actually practiced in the past, and was partially revived for certain contemporary reasons. We can, however, see this reenacted ritual as aligned with the general “nostalgia” boom of the performing arts and traditional rituals in Japan in recent decades. It belongs in the trend of the search for the *urusato* ふるさと (故郷), the “old” or “native village” (ROBERTSON 1991, 13–37)—a search that has been used in modern Japan (particularly since the 1970s and 1980s) as a government policy to enhance tourism, for commercial advertising, for local economic survival, as well as for religious revival, and for establishing and enhancing local or national identity (IVY 1995; ROBERTSON 1991).²

Through this *urusato* discourse, Japanese identity is now sought, among others, in symbols of the past (to give one relevant example, in the white robes of the pilgrim; READER 1987, 287–91). It goes without saying that “*urusato*-creating” policies informed the choice of Tateyama town to revive this old ritual. As the organizers themselves declared, the rite was meant to promote a sense of local identity, to inspire a renewal of awareness of its cultural heritage and thereby promote local solidarity, as well as to enhance the local economy and “revitalize the area” (*Tateyama fesutibaru hōkokusho* 立山フェスティバル報告書 [henceforth TFH] 1997, 27–29). The puzzling thing here is, however, that while this ritual tradition was painstakingly revived and staged as a grand spectacle, it was at the same time suppressed, and its very traditional essence laboriously, and insistently, hidden and blurred amid the modern facade of a multi-site and multi-faceted *ibento*.

The term “*ibento*” has become a standard referent to a staged and choreographed public event, a “*matsuri* without *kami*” (ANAMI 1997, 68–72), complete with performances, shows, food, and craft fairs. Such *ibento* have been common in Japan since the 1980s, and are conducted for the purpose of *mura-okoshi* 村起し (village-revitalizing), *chiiki-okoshi* 地域おこし (area-revitalizing), or *machi-zukuri* 町づくり (town-creating) (KOMATSU 1997a; YASUI 1997; DEJIMA 1997). *ibento* or events of this kind, especially the large-scale ones, became a mechanism for

1. The title of this article is a paraphrase of Ivy’s 1995 book title, taken literally. This of course does not do justice to the book’s complex theoretical discussions, many of which would be relevant to our case, were we not focused on a different angle.

2. The discourse of *urusato* policies, expressions, and affects, has been extensively discussed by many in recent decades and lies beyond the scope of this paper.

local governments to awaken the sleepy towns of rural Japan, and strengthen them economically.³

By producing the *Nunohashi kanjōe* rite in the framework of a one-time *ibento*, the organizers meant to emphasize the cultural or historical character of the rite, thereby glossing over its religious essence. The measure of their success in doing that will be discussed later, but one should remark that the *Nunohashi* rite shares some features with the modern-day *ibento* employed for local *mura-okoshi* purposes. In essence, the *Nunohashi* rite was never an identity-producing ritual to celebrate a local deity; in fact, it was never a *matsuri* at all. It was rather a Buddhist ritual, aimed at the universal salvation of all, but especially of women, and performed not for the local population, but especially for those who came from afar. The *Nunohashi* rite was always a village-sustaining ritual, a ritual that generated financial revenues, because it catered to outsiders. Its recent revival in the context of a culture festival would finally prove to be aimed at the very same purpose. This, however, happened over a process that entailed grappling with the limits and demands of modern times and politics. Still, the role of *mura-* or *chiiki-okoshi* assigned to the *Nunohashi* rite by the local government forces it into an uncomfortable category. Thus, although it was revived as a particular local identity-creating ritual, one cannot lose sight of its universal nature and efficacy.⁴

The modern reenactments of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* rite thus raise some intriguing questions. The rite that was enacted as a spectacle from the past ended up acting as a living, powerful ritual that endowed its participants with a religious experience. The first question that one is compelled to ask here is, how could this happen? How could a ritual, performed out of context, out of time, and without its original *raison d'être* and function, still work its power so effectively today? Another question concerns the meaning and purpose of forcing a religious rite into the performative corset of an *ibento*. Herein lies a political

3. Komatsu distinguishes between the *machi-zukuri* and the *mura-* or *chiiki-okoshi* types, and states that both traditional shrine *matsuri* (catering to the visiting kami) and the new “kami-less” *matsuri* and *ibento* (catering to the visiting guests) have similar communal effects (KOMATSU 1997b, 29–38; also ANAMI 1997, 77–80; ROBERTSON 1991, 38–71). Dejima emphasizes the fad-like, renovational, and once-only production of an *ibento*, as opposed to the repetitious, eternal nature of traditional *matsuri*. He observes that when a traditional *matsuri* is woven into a grand *ibento*, it becomes its centrifugal force (DEJIMA 1997, 229–32, 256), as was the case with the *ibento* presented here.

4. The Tateyama Festival organizers were well aware of this aspect when they listed among their goals the promotion of Tateyama cultural heritage around Japan, the promotion of connections with other areas, and, most importantly, the renewal of the “Japanese heart” and spirituality by reflecting on questions of life and death through the experience of Tateyama mandala (TFH 1997, 15, 22).

issue: the reenactment of the *Nunohashi* rite raises the conflict between the politics of culture and religion in today's Japan.

I will return to these questions later, but first I will layout the geographical, historical, and religious background of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* tradition. Next I will describe the first reenactment of the rite in the context of the 1996 Tateyama Festival, discuss the reactions it caused, and the questions raised thereby. Last to be discussed are the 2005, 2006, and 2009 reenactments with their changed purposes, the new questions they posed, and the complex issues they raised in their contemporary contexts. In this we may find that, indeed, nostalgia is not anymore what it used to be. Let us first begin with the general background.

Background: Mt. Tateyama and its Religious History

The awe-inspiring Tateyama range towers over the Toyama plain as part of the Northern Alps in Toyama Prefecture, or the historical Etchū 越中 province.⁵ The various peaks of the range now bear individual names,⁶ but “Tateyama” today refers only to Oyama 雄山 (3003 meters) (HIRASAWA 2005, 12–13).

Tateyama's huge caldera is blessed with special geographical features and attractive scenic routes that has made it into a successful center for pilgrimage and tourism from ancient times. Today, Tateyama attracts many climbers every year as part of the Tateyama-Kurobe 黒部 alpine route. The large visitor center in Murōdō 室堂, in the caldera plateau, and the mountaintop hot-spring spa (*onsen*), can now be comfortably reached with buses and cable cars. At the foot of the mountain, in Ashikuraji 芦峯寺, one can find the Tateyama Museum of Toyama Prefecture 富山県立山博物館, an active research center that combines the study of natural phenomena, geology, and archaeology with the historical and religious studies of the mountain.⁷ A unique and inspiring art-park based on the famous Tateyama mandalas—*Mandara yūen* 曼荼羅遊苑,⁸ is spread out

5. Its highest peak (Ōnanji 大汝) reaches 3015 meters. This range has been named Tateyama—“standing, towering mountains”—since the middle ages, but in olden times was referred to as Tachiyama 太刀山, “Sword Mountain,” or perhaps “kami manifesting 立 mountain 山” (SUZUKI 1996, 9; HIROSE and SHIMIZU 1995, 38–42).

6. To name a few: Bessan 別山, Tsurugi-dake 剣岳, Yakushi-ga-oka 薬師ヶ丘, Jōdo-san 浄土山, and Dainichi-dake 大日岳.

7. The Tateyama Museum of Toyama was founded in 1991. The various issues mentioned are all expressed through its quarterly *Kenkyū kiyō* 研究紀要 (Research Bulletin).

8. The “Mandala amusement park” is an artistic reconstruction of the passage through the various realms of hells and paradises, envisioning the Tateyama mandala. The theme park forms part of the Tateyama Museum, and its tour takes about fifty minutes. See FORMANEK 1998, 188, n.17, where she quotes Tateyama's nickname: “the other world's playground” (*anoyo no yūenchi* あの世の遊園地).

near the Tateyama Museum at the foot of the mountain. All this suggests a thriving tourist and mountaineering center.

However, Mt. Tateyama is also an ancient worship site. Admired since the Nara period (710–784), it is celebrated in the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集 for its beauty, divinity, and awesomeness.⁹ It is also mentioned in the *Engishiki* 延喜式. Tateyama has been known as a mountain practitioners' pilgrimage site since the early Heian period (794–1185),¹⁰ and served as a center for *yamabushi* 山伏 ascetics throughout medieval times (HIROSE and SHIMIZU 1995, 37, 50–51; SUZUKI 1996, 9; HIRASAWA 2005, 20–23).

Under *yamabushi* influence, the various peaks became identified as Buddhas and kami, according to *honji suijaku* 本地垂迹 thought: Mt. Tateyama (Oyama, “male peak”) was identified as Amida Nyorai 阿弥陀如来 (*honji* 本地) and as Izanagi-no-mikoto イザナギの尊, the primeval male creator god (*suijaku* 垂迹); Tsurugi-dake became identified as Fudō Myōō 不動明王, the patron deity of the *yamabushi*, and as the mythical virile deity Tachikara-o-no-mikoto 太刀男の尊 who dragged the Sun Goddess out of her Heavenly Cave (HIROSE and SHIMIZU 1995, 41–42).¹¹ However, throughout its long history, the most significant and persistent identification of Mt. Tateyama was with Buddha Amida (HIRASAWA 2005, 58–84).

During the medieval period Tateyama was mentioned in hell-descent legends in such miraculous story collections as *Honchō hokkegenki* 本朝法華験記 or *Konjaku monogatari* 今昔物語 (HIROSE and SHIMIZU 1995, 44),¹² but local records of religious activity are relatively scarce until the Edo period. Tateyama reemerges as a dominant pilgrimage mountain in the eighteenth century, with considerable local documentation (FUKUE 1995, 25; 1998, 41–44; FORMANEK 1998).

During the Edo period, Mt. Tateyama became especially famous for its *etoki* 絵解き (explaining pictures) practice, which served to propagate the saving powers of the mountain. Since the eighteenth century, this *etoki* activity has drawn thousands of pilgrims annually to Tateyama's slopes, and the local

9. Tateyama is admired for being covered with snow even through the summer months in the *Man'yōshū* poems: 4000–4005 and 4024 (Fascicle 17; see *Man'yōshū* 2003, vol. 4, 154–58, 173). The poems were written in the eighth century by Otomo no Yakamochi (and his companion Ikenushi) when appointed governor of Etchū. For an English translation of poems 4000–4005 see *Man'yōshū* 1965, 182–84.

10. A few *shakujō* 錫杖 (a priestly prayer object) from early Heian were found on top of Tsurugi-dake and Dainichi-dake (SUZUKI 1996, 9).

11. At the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912), an elaborate system of the “hidden” (*kakure* 隠れ) meaning of the kami had identified Tateyama with the mythical pair of male and female creator deities (Izanagi and Izanami), and Tsurugi-dake with Susa-no-o-no-mikoto 須佐の男の尊, the Sun Goddess's younger brother (HIROSE and SHIMIZU 1995, 41–42).

12. For an example in English see *Hokkegenki* III: 126 in DYKSTRA 1983, 141–41.

yamabushi have been serving as pilgrim guides and ritual masters (HIRASAWA 2005, 20–27). Tateyama also became famous for its medicines that were peddled throughout Japan, as was its mandala *etoki* (HIRASAWA 2005, 28–31).

Tateyama's huge caldera forms a combination of spectacular natural phenomena that were understood as portals or actual manifestations of the various realms, especially the lands of the dead. The three-fold snow-covered peak of Oyama was seen as the gate to Amida's Pure Land, and getting there on foot was considered to be a promise of paradise. The scenic waterfall Shōmyō-ga-taki 称名ヶ滝 reflects well the spiritual power of the mountain, for it is believed to intone the *nenbutsu* 念仏.¹³ But the mountain is especially famous for its various unique hellish realms: a large volcanic stretch in the caldera, with sulfur spikes, smoke-heaving caverns, and boiling pools, form the lowest burning hells; other hells are represented by landmarks like the rusty-colored puddles considered as the Chi-ga-ike 血ヶ池 or "Blood Pond," a special hell for women where they are punished for emitting blood from their bodies (see footnote 26); or the frozen pond called Mikuri-ga-ike みくりヶ池, and Tsurugi-dake as Hariyama 針山, the "needle mountain."¹⁴ These and other hellish spots are reflected in the famous Tateyama mandalas.¹⁵

As all Tateyama mandalas depict, a path winds its way from the foot of the mountain all the way to Oyama peak. This route, called *zenjōdō* 禅定道, is the recreation of the route taken by the "mountain-opener" (*kaisan* 開山), the hunter Saeki Ariyori 佐伯有頼, who once followed a white hawk into the mountain, where he met a bear, shot it with an arrow, and then followed its tracks to the mountain top. There he beheld an apparition of a golden Amida with a bloody arrow pierced through the heart, and Fudō Myōō by his side.¹⁶ The bear was

13. Though falling from a great height, the Shōmyō-ga-taki does not roar but murmurs. Its name reflects the double meaning of "calling the name [of Amida]" (*shōmyō* 称名) and "[melodiously] chanting the sutras" (*shōmyō* 声明).

14. Mikuri-ga-ike corresponds to the frozen hells, and the "mountain of needles" is a hell specific to Tateyama (FUKUE 2005, 68–71).

15. There is substantial literature about Tateyama faith and mandalas. For example, a detailed description and discussion of the mandalas and their hellish realms can be found in FUKUE 1998, 2005, and 2006, and in KIKUCHI 1994–1995; and their illustrations in the Tateyama Museum's publication series. In Western languages the most detailed study is HIRASAWA 2005 and 2008. See also SEIDEL 1992 and 1996–1997; KAMINISHI 2006, 165–92; and FORMANEK 1998, 169–78.

16. In an older medieval source of Tateyama *engi* 縁起 (foundation legend), Saeki Ariwaka 佐伯有若 followed a white hawk in 701, entered Tateyama and met a bear, shot it and followed its blood-tracks to Oyama's top, where he beheld the bear changing into the arrow-pierced, golden body of Amida. In the Edo-period versions of this legend, Ariwaka's son Ariyori, a youth of fifteen or sixteen, is the one who followed a white hawk he lost into the mountain, then met the bear/Amida. See an analysis of the legends in HIRASAWA 2005, 62–90, and an annotated translation in HIRASAWA 2006.

of course a manifestation of Amida, and the white hawk of Fudō Myōō. These deities both reflect the various influences on the Tateyama cults.¹⁷

The cult of Mt. Tateyama included a promise of rebirth in Amida's Pure Land for those who traveled the *zenjōdō* path to the summit. This road, it should be remembered, was formerly open only to men: Tateyama was always a *nyonin kinsei* 女人禁制 or *nyonin kekkai* 女人結界 mountain—an area restricted for women.¹⁸ The restriction was lifted only in 1869, following the Meiji restoration.¹⁹

So strong was the *nyonin kinsei* restriction during the Edo period that the body of Tateyama legends tell of headstrong women, either of high renown and power or pious Buddhist nuns, who tried to climb the mountain but were turned into a stone or a tree (FUKUE 2005, 89–91; HIRASAWA 2005, 174–82). Such stories depict the mountain as a holy ground that does not stand any pollution, in particular female pollution. In the Edo period, a woman could visit the mountain only after death.²⁰

Though representing such a female-repelling mountain, the Tateyama cult unravels its old layers of mountain worship as centering around a female deity: the seated figure of a scary, mysterious, wrinkled granny, the mountain goddess called *Onbasama* or *Ubasama* 姥様 (grandmother deity). Many *ubason* 姥尊 (old-woman deity) statues were found on Tateyama, and as KIKUCHI (1997) has shown,

17. The foundation legends display their ancient layered roots. Following Gorai, SUZUKI (1996, 10) remarks that the name Ariyori reflects shamanic characteristics (*ari*, “manifestation”; *yor*, “shamanic possession”). Also, the turning of the animal deity into a Buddhist figure shows the superimposition of Buddhism on top of an ancient kami cult. Thus the legend connects the founder to both old kami cults and their shamanic practices, and to Buddhist meaning. The founder also becomes the symbol of the mountain-climbing youth who turns into a man, even a holy man.

Tateyama *engi* stands in the line of other mountain-opening legends like that of Kumano, Hiko-san and others. Remarkably, the mountain-opener is often a hunter. This suggests that mountain worship sprang from among the ancient hunting communities and from the *yama-bushi*, the ascetics who turned mountains into holy practice grounds (MIYAKE 1985, 492–518).

18. On the meaning and structure of *nyonin kekkai* see, for example, SUZUKI 2002 and 2007; FAURE 2003, 219–49; and SEKIMORI 2006.

19. The first woman to climb the mountain (in Meiji 6) was a local resident, Fukami Chie. In late Edo it became a custom for local teenagers to climb the mountain as an initiation to manhood. This custom was renewed in the Meiji era with the inclusion of women (HIROSE and SHIMIZU 1995, 28–29).

20. With an ancient Shingon connection, Tateyama stands in the women-excluding Buddhist tradition of Mt. Kōya (SUZUKI 2002, especially 170–90; also NISHIGUCHI 2002). Such beliefs are persistent. A descendent of the first woman climber (whose family owned the Tateyama *onsen*), Mr. Fukami Hideshi, related in a televised interview that during that first climb, the weather turned and Chie's male companions, frightened by the thunders, were sure that the mountain was upset and they hurried her down (BBT [Toyama Television] program *Nunohashi kanjōe—Jidai o koete*, broadcast 28 November 2005).



FIGURE 1. General view of the *Nunohashi* site in 2005 (all photos and posters courtesy of Tateyama-chō).

there is also old-woman worship in other mountains throughout Japan. Here in Tateyama the old mountain goddess (*yama no kami* 山の神) has a special role: she is the guardian of the mountain path, and her worship hall (*Unbadō* ウンバ堂) at the foot of the mountain serves, as we shall see, as a house of rebirth in Amida's Pure Land for those who cannot follow the mountain path (*zenjōdō*).²¹ *Onbasama's* central place in the Tateyama cult is reflected in the use of a special Chinese character—*Onba*—invented for her in Ashikuraji, her main worship center.

We can clearly see here how the folk religious goddess of the earlier stratum of mountain worship, the original *yama no kami*, has been superimposed

21. *Onbasama* is also connected to life-renewal rites, assists in childbirth, and protects women. The frightening *yama no kami* (or *gongen* 権現) is also the guardian of the barrier (*kek-kai*) of the holy mountain. KIKUCHI (1997, 40–42) counts these characteristics as unique to the Tateyama *Ubason*. In the foundation legends *Onbasama* is associated with the mother of the founder Ariyori (who went to look for him in the mountain), and is thus connected to the cult of mothers of saints (like the mothers of Kūkai and of En no Gyōja), who are also worshiped at the *kek-kai* (where women's veneration sites were placed; see SEKIMORI 2006). The “mountain granny” is also the old shamaness, the priestess of the female mountain god, whose worship was rejected by the Buddhist tradition but survived as a marginal women's cult (FAURE 2003, 219–49 and 310–16). *Onbasama* is also identified as the *honji* of the creation deity who brought rice and millet to earth. She may also be connected to Korean deities through her typical Korean sitting posture (HIRASAWA 2005, 214–16). *Onbasama* is further associated with the female demon Datsueba 奪衣婆, who is seen in the mandala as sitting near the *Unbadō* and stripping the clothes off the dead. See HIRASAWA 2005, 216–23; FAURE 2003, 310–16; FUKUE 2005, 103–105, 117–19.

by an excluding Buddhist tradition and with Amida worship (HIRASAWA 2005, 174–200).

The Political History of Tateyama Worship

The Tateyama cult was combined through practices and beliefs influenced by Shingon, Tendai, Shugendō, Jōdo, kami-cults, and folk religion. The various layers of Buddhist worship reflect the religious institutional history of Tateyama. As we saw, the indigenous cult of *Onbasama* was later layered over by powerful male-deity identification. But basically, Tateyama is identified with Amida and his Pure Land (HIRASAWA 2005, 58–84).

For centuries Tateyama was a mountain where only brave ascetic practitioners could enter, but in the heyday of popular travel during the Edo period, many pilgrims from all over Japan flocked to the sacred mountain. Folk pilgrimage increased especially in the eighteenth century, when visitors to Tateyama counted in the thousands (HIRASAWA 2005, 25; FUKUE 1998, 41–51; FORMANEK 1998, 172–73). Such pilgrims needed the leadership of *yamabushi* who could serve as mountain guides (*yama sendatsu* 山先達). Pilgrim centers thus developed at the foot of Mt. Tateyama (SUZUKI 1996, 11).

During the Edo period the area belonged to the *daimyō* house of Maeda 前田, who established Ashikuraji and Iwakuraji 岩峠寺, the two *yamabushi* communities and pilgrim centers. Both communities grew and prospered, and their priests (*shūtō* 衆徒) worshiped both Buddha and kami.²² Pilgrims gathered there to climb the mountain, receive its blessings, tie a karmic knot with Amida, and assure a rebirth in his Pure Land.

When popular pilgrimages increased and the *daimyō* forbade practicing austerities on Tateyama, these two centers began to compete for believers and to spread their proselytizing activities far and wide: Iwakuraji extended its influence into Etchū, Kaga, Nōto, and Echigo, while Ashikuraji was permitted to advertise its fame throughout Japan. Since a court ruling in 1711, Iwakuraji had exclusive rights to guide pilgrims on the mountain and give them sutra readings, and Ashikuraji had the right to distribute amulets around Japan and to perform rites in Ashikuraji, but not in the mountain. So the pilgrims came to Iwakuraji to receive guidance and rites, chose to stay in Ashikuraji for its proximity to the mountain, and then climbed the mountains with Iwakuraji guides. However, in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Iwakuraji began to compete with Ashikuraji and spread the distribution of its amulets around Japan, thus driving

22. In 1801 Ashikuraji included thirty-three houses of Buddhist priests and five of kami priests, and in Iwakuraji there were twenty-four Buddhist houses that also served the Tateyama *gongen* (SUZUKI 1996, 12).



FIGURE 2. Crossing the Cloth-Bridge in 2005.

Ashikuraji to bankruptcy and ruin (FUKUE 1998, 115–21). In 1825 a Shingon priest appealed to the courts and worked to revive the Ashikuraji center. Ashikuraji won the legal battle in 1833, and revived its exclusive right to conduct *etoki* throughout Japan.

While Iwakuraji rituals focused on this life, with the worship of the agricultural *yama no kami* and with guiding pilgrims through the *zendō* (SUZUKI 1996, 19)—Ashikuraji focused on the afterlife, with its annual *Nunohashi* rite and the worship of *Onbasama* (at the autumn and spring *higan* 彼岸 and at *obon* お盆). And since its members could not guide on the mountain, Ashikuraji became identified with women-oriented rituals. Ashikuraji priests thus focused on the rite of *Nunohashi kanjōe*, which became the center's main source of livelihood (HIRASAWA 2005, 47–50; FUKUE 1998, 53–87).²³

The would-be participants for this rite were reached through a thorough tour of the countryside and by proselytizing the powers of Tateyama using the age-old method of *etoki* or “explaining the pictures” of the famous Tateyama mandalas.

23. When the two towns settled their dispute they both benefited from each other's division of labor, and that is why the landmarks of their rivals are shown in their respective mandalas (HIRASAWA 2005, 54–57).

The Mandalas

The Tateyama mandalas were created between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries.²⁴ Before Meiji they were referred to as *eden* 絵伝 (“pictures used for storytelling” or “pictorial tradition”) (KAMINISHI 2006, 173). The images may belong in the genre of “pilgrimage mandalas” (*sankei mandala* 参詣曼荼羅) that show the pilgrim the highlights of the road (HIRASAWA 2005, 38–39). Tateyama’s *yamabushi* walked with their mandala-pictures, sometimes hung them on walls or trees for the performance, and then rolled them up to carry along. The *etoki* expounded the Tateyama legends; taught the mountain’s sacred geography as embodying the six realms of existence (*rokudō* 六道) from hell to paradise, and the whole Buddhist universe; and preached the Buddhist doctrines of Amida’s compassion. It thus propagated the powers of the mountain, while also connecting some sale commodities—medicines and other products—to the stories.

A number of extant mandalas are now in the possession of the Tateyama Museum, most from Ashikuraji, and a few from Iwakuraji. They can be easily distinguished, for all the mandalas from Ashikuraji depict the *Nunohashi kanjōe* rite in detail,²⁵ while those from Iwakuraji do not show it at all. The mandalas of both centers depict the mountain range of Tateyama, with its adjoining peaks, as a mandala of the universe: the sun and moon at the top right and top left, “Needle mountain” (Tsurugi-dake) on the left-hand side, and the entourage of Amida floating in the skies above the main peak of Oyama. There inside a grotto at Oyama’s peak stand Amida and Fudō Myōō. The bottom part always depicts the founder of Tateyama worship, the hunter Saeki Ariyori, following an arrow-shot bear (and often a hovering hawk). From the bottom of the mandalas, one can follow the *zendō* all the way to the top of Oyama. The path up the mountain winds around several sites unique to Tateyama, like the aforementioned wood-ened and petrified women. The whole universe, including its lower six realms, is detailed in the mandalas, and vividly depicted among them are the various fantastic hells, with the ever-present Chi-ga-ike.²⁶

24. There are forty-one extant mandalas today. They are of the Japanese *mandara* genre (TEN GROTENHUIS 1999, 3–4; FUKUE 2005, 150–54; HIRASAWA 2005).

25. This visual detail helped in the modern reconstructions of the ritual.

26. This is the special hell for women, whose sole sin is their very female body that emits blood throughout their lives (thus including even barren women). It was claimed that when this blood is washed in rivers and ponds, it could contaminate the water priests use for their tea. Japanese women went to great lengths to avoid this hell: they commissioned Blood-Pond rituals, in which the so-called “Menstruation Sūtra” (*Ketsubonkyō* 血盆經, lit. “Blood-Bowl Sutra”) was read and conferred upon women. The sutra, attributed to the medieval Chinese priest Mulien (Jp. Mokuren 木蓮), assured for women salvation from rebirth in the Blood-Pond Hell. In Tateyama, priests or male relatives used to throw copies of the sutra on behalf of women into the red swamp representing this hellish realm, to save the women from being born there (HIRASAWA 2005,

While the Iwakuraji mandalas, which served as path guides for the pilgrims, are more geographically accurate and focus on the real landscape, Ashikuraji mandalas were created more for the purpose of *etoki*: they emphasize the rituals and narrations, and focus on the fantastic depiction of paradise and the hells (HIRASAWA 2005, 54–55; FUKUE 2005). In the later Ashikuraji mandalas the ritual of *Nunohashi* takes a central place and is even bigger than the hell realms. The female participants are emphasized in the images, thus proving how significant had the women clientele become for Ashikuraji's economy (HIRASAWA 2005, 53–54).²⁷ In the *Nunohashi* image, the red bridge stretches over a river, connecting the Enmadō 閻魔堂 on one side with the Unbadō 堂 on the other. This is the locus of our ritual even today.

As noted, the *Nunohashi daikanjō-hōe* rite served to attract a wider following among the commoners, and as an economic break for Ashikuraji. Let us now turn to this main focus of our study.

The Nunohashi daikanjō-hōe Rite: Structure, Meaning, and History

Ashikuraji devised the *Nunohashi daikanjō-hōe* ritual especially to allow womenfolk, who were banned from climbing the sacred mountain, the chance to benefit from its powers and secure a promise of rebirth in the Pure Land. The rite could make them recreate the passage through the various realms, voyage through death to paradise and back to this world, tie a karmic knot (*kechien* 結縁) and establish a blood-tie (*kechien* 血縁) with Amida, and promise salvation for their souls (FUKUE 1998, 53–87; 2006; HIRASAWA 2005, 209–16). The *Nunohashi* rite consists of a symbolic crossing over a bridge from this to the other world, and returning. Structurally, it is essentially a “rite of passage” of revivification and renewal of life, and its parallels can be seen in similar rituals in Japan and beyond (see below).

The rite begins in the Enmadō, the hall of the king and judge of the realm of Death,²⁸ and ends in the Unbadō,²⁹ the hall of the mother-goddess of Mt. Tate-

182–208; SUZUKI 2002, 177–83, FUKUE 2005, 62–66; HIRONAKA 1992 and 1993. For a translation of the *Ketsubonkyō* see TAKEMI 1983, 240–45). Scholars now trace a progression of *ketsubonkyō* use and popularity: from a means to save deceased relatives from the Blood-pool hell in early medieval times, to women's practice for their own salvation in late medieval times, to an amulet for safe birth and earthly benefits in the Edo period (GLASSMAN 2008, 180–81).

27. Ashikuraji rituals catered especially to women: following their *etoki* sessions, Ashikuraji priests sold talismans and charms that promised a rebirth in Amida's Pure Land, or formed a certificate of sex-change (turning the female body into a virtual male), and conducted the aforementioned Blood-Pond rituals (KAMINISHI 2006, 186–87).

28. The hall houses an image of King Enma and his two attendants; see HIRASAWA 2008.

29. The Unbadō used to house sixty-six images of *Onbasama*, like the number of provinces in the Edo period.

yama, across a river. In the hall of King Enma, a service symbolizing a funeral is taking place, where the women ceremonially die in this world and become pilgrim souls on the way to paradise. Only in such a symbolically dead body can they cross the bridge to the other side, where the restricted area begins.

After this symbolic funerary rite, the women participants (*nyonin-shū* 女人衆) cross the Ubadō river (Ubadō-gawa 姥堂川 or Uba-ga-tani 姥ヶ谷) that runs through Ashikuraji. Over the river (that represents *Sanzu no kawa* 三途の河, the river that runs on the border of the land of death) hangs a forty-five-and-a-half-meter-long bright red bridge (also named *Ama no ukihashi* 天の浮橋 or the Heavenly Bridge, on which stood the mythical creator deities). According to the Buddhist view, the bridge is a symbolic replica of *taizōkai* 胎藏界 and *kongōkai* 金剛界, the Womb and Diamond mandala-realms, with the numbers of pillars and boards corresponding to the number of Buddhas in the mandalas (FUKUE 2006, 61). The symbolism here is detailed, down to the number of fringes on the flags attached to the pillars of the bridge, as befits a ritual of the *mikkyō* 密教 tradition. Indeed, there is a cemetery just on the other side of the bridge, next to the historical site of Unbadō. Those who walk on the bridge feel as if they cross over to the other world.³⁰

For the ceremony, three long strips of white cloth are stretched across the red bridge (hence “cloth-bridge”), on which tread the initiates. The cloth is extended all the way from the Enmadō and over the bridge to the Unbadō.

Cloth itself was always considered as one of the sacred substances where kami prefer to reside.³¹ The whiteness of the cloth is especially significant: white cloth is used in purification, and to mark the presence of the kami.³² White cloth also has a particular significance in the Buddhist tradition for pacifying the dead and for ritual purification.³³ Thus symbolically, the bridge is crossed by the souls of the dead, not by the living (GORAI 1977, 158; 165–66; SUZUKI 2002, 190). The *Nunohashi* is often compared with the now-extinct *Ōkagura Jōdo-iri* 大神楽浄土入り ritual of *Hanamatsuri* 花祭 in Okumikawa 奥三河, and its *Shirayama gyōji* 白山行事 (“White Mountain ritual,” related to Hakusan 白山), for sharing these elements of creating a purifying

30. Walking on the bridge was called “bridge initiation” (*hashi kanjō* 橋灌頂) and was believed to reduce bad karma. For sinners the bridge must have looked very narrow, for they were said to fall into the *Sanzu no kawa*, or into the mouth of its dragon (FUKUE 1995, 27).

31. On the social and political significance of cloth in general, see WEINER and SCHNEIDER 1989, 1–4; on the significance of various cloths in Japan, see CORT 1989, 380–86.

32. The significance of the color white as a sign of divinity is also connected to a cluster of symbols of purity. See OHNUKI-TIERNEY 1993, 75–79.

33. In medieval times white cloth was used in *nenbutsu* ceremonies to pacify the spirits of the battle dead (KIKUCHI 1997, 36).

path to the other world. In that sense, cloth has always played the role of a bridge (KIKUCHI 1997, 37).³⁴

Kikuchi further points to other similar rites of revival or rebirth involving white cloth, like the *Izaihō* イザイホウ in Okinawa; the *Niga byakudō* 二河白道 rituals³⁵ at Taima dera 当麻寺; various Shugendō practices and Shingon *kechien* (karma-binding) ceremonies (KIKUCHI 1994, vol. I; 1997).³⁶

The women tread upon this cloth across the bridge blindfolded, led by a group of priests designated as the *indō-shū* 引導衆, the “priests who conduct the funeral” (headed by the chief funeral conductor priest, or *indōshi* 引導師). They embody Shaka (Śākyamuni) Buddha and are accompanied by *yamabushi*. From the other side of the bridge a second group of priests, the *raigō-shū* 来迎衆 or “welcoming party” (led by the *raigōshi* 来迎師), embodying Amida Buddha,³⁷ proceeds towards them. Meeting in the middle, the two groups of priests joined to perform the sutra recitation service (*gongyō* 勤行) and initiation (*kanjō shugyō* 灌頂修行), and then turned together to lead the *nyonin-shū* over the bridge and into the Unbadō.³⁸

Once inside, the women prayed and chanted, and then received their final *kanjō* initiation and their *kechimyaku* 血脈 or lineage-tie (lit. “blood vessel”) with

34. On the origins and comparisons of *Shirayama gyōji* and the *Jōdo-iri* see GORAI 1977. For a detailed analysis of their differences and similarities see YAMAMOTO 1993, 191–224; 1997a and 1997b. See also HAYAKAWA 1994, vol. II, 74–75. A recent but too brief a summary of the rite in English can be found in LEE 2006.

35. *Niga byakudō* or “two rivers and a white path” is the image of the path of the dead soul towards Amida’s western paradise: on the south side a river of fire is blazing, and on the north side a river of water, and in between them the believer crosses on a narrow white path, encouraged by the urgings of Shaka and the summons of Amida, until he reaches the western bank (FUKUE 2005, 113–15; INAGAKI 1984, 228–29).

36. Kikuchi traces various instances of the ritual use of white cloth in Japan and elsewhere: In Ise, priests tread on white cloth in the once-every-twenty-years renewal ceremony (also in Kasuga). The parallel is seen also in the whiteness of Okina 翁—the “old man” deity of the performing arts—and in many shamanistic examples from folk performing arts across Japan (for example in *Kōjin kagura* 荒神神楽). Kikuchi quotes Honda Yasuji’s observation that in both Korea and China, white cloth is used in shamanic rituals and funerals as a bridge and as a path, a way to connect this world and the other, the mourners and their dead. The white cloth symbolically sends the spirits of the dead to the other world and turns the dead soul into a protective ancestral god. This custom is also found among the shamanic cultures of Inner and Northern Asia (KIKUCHI 1997, 36–39).

37. *Raigō* 来迎 or “welcoming approach” is the descent of Amida and his retinue to welcome the dead person into his Western Paradise. Images of *raigō* have been widespread in Japan since medieval times, and were often used in deathbed services.

38. According to Shingon understanding, the ritual transformation was held in the mid-bridge rites (FUKUE 1995, 27; TFH 1997, 25). Like the Tateyama cult itself, the *Nunohashi* rite includes the combined influences of Tendai, Shingon, Jōdo, Shugendō, and folk cults (FUKUE 2005, 96–105; 2006, 104–105). The *kanjō* here originated in both the Buddhist *mikkyō* tradition of water initiation (connected to ancient Indian rites of coronation), of the “tie-binding” (*kechien kanjō* 結縁灌頂) kind (in this case, with Amida); and in the Japanese concept of purification by

Amida and with *Onbasama*. In the later versions of the ritual, they first sat in total darkness, and then the doors of the eastern wall of the Unbadō were flung open so they could behold the peak of Mt. Jōdo, and thus tie a karmic knot with the Pure Land. In the end the women received a certificate of *kechimyaku*, a copy of the *Ketsubonkyō* and a certificate of gender transformation (*henryo-tennan* 変女転男), signifying their spiritual acquisition of a male body (FUKUE 2005, 108–10; HIRASAWA 2005, 213; YAMAMOTO 1993, 225–88).

After the ceremony they returned across the bridge to the departure point side, in a most important symbolic return to this earth, to this world.³⁹

Judging from its content and structure the rite might be medieval in origin, but it was not documented before the Edo period. It is recorded that in 1614, the wife of Maeda Toshiie 前田利家 (the ordained nun Hōshun'in 芳春院), and her daughter-in-law, the wife of Maeda Toshinaga 前田利長 (the nun Gyokusen'in 玉泉院), made a pilgrimage to Tateyama and participated in the rite of *Nunohashi kanjōe* (HIRASAWA 2005, 23). This is also the first time the bridge was named “Cloth Bridge.” Thus it is assumed that in 1614 the cult was already established, and later continued in the same way (FUKUE 1998, 55).

What started as a private rite for the Maeda wives in the beginning of the seventeenth century had become a public *ibento* by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Few documents about this cult prior to the eighteenth century survive, but there have been many since then, and they point to a significant change in the rite's meaning and purpose through time (FUKUE 1995; 2006, 147–59).⁴⁰ From a kami-oriented purification rite in mid-Edo, it became a *mikkyō* Buddhist rite by late Edo (FUKUE 1998, 59–75; 2005, 113–15). In the earlier period, the ritual aimed mainly to facilitate the entry of women to Amida's paradise, but later the rite worked to turn women into Buddhas (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏) whose sins were washed away. This shows the influence of Shingon ritual (FUKUE 1995, 27). The rite was thus constructed with Tendai form and Shingon thought and

water (here of the *nagare kanjō* 流れ灌頂 kind) (FUKUE 2005, 113–15). It was also based on the *raigō*-related outdoor ceremony (*teigi no gishiki* 庭儀儀式, like *Mukaekō* 迎講). For a detailed historical record of the *Nunohashi* rite and its changing meaning see FUKUE 2006, 59–87. On *Mukaekō* see HORTON 2008.

39. The description of the reconstructed ritual follows in the next section.

40. Fukue shows many changes that occurred in the structure of the rite between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. To mention a few: At first there was no bridge, and the initiates climbed the riverbanks. Then the bridge was built in a different place than it is today. There was a time when the women went without blindfolds, because it was so dark even in the middle of the day (the road passed through thick vegetation that blocked the sunlight) and they had to use candles to see the way. Unbadō was once very dark because the sixty-six *Ubason* statues blocked the light, and thus no wall was lifted at the end (FUKUE 1998, 59–75; see also FORMANEK 1998, 172–78).

content, and also incorporated the Amidist tradition of Hakusan belief (FUKUE 1995, 27–28; 1998, 73–75).

During the nineteenth century the pilgrims' tastes were changing: people stopped coming to Tateyama to perform austerities and climb the *zendō*, and instead preferred to enjoy Tateyama's famous *onsen*, visit holy places at the foot of the mountain, or get married there. The change in public tastes made the *Nunohashi kanjōe* into an *ibento* as early as the nineteenth century (FUKUE 1998, 70–72). In 1820 a permanent bridge was built over the river between Enmadō and Unbadō (FUKUE 1995, 28–29). The popularity of the cult reached its highpoint in late Edo (especially during the Tempo era of 1830–1844). It was conducted annually on the day of the autumn *higan* (equinox), and continued to flourish up to its last performance in Meiji 2. Of course, women were the prime candidates for this rite, and it was indeed geared for women, incorporating the traditions of the mother goddess of Tateyama. However, men too started to undergo this rite: old, crippled, and sick, many men preferred the easy and rewarding ritual path to the grueling climb up the *zendō*. Still, the *Nunohashi kanjōe* remained widely known as a rite for the salvation of women.

In spite of the many changes it underwent in the nineteenth century, the *Nunohashi* rite maintained its basic economic purpose, to propagate the powers and blessings of Tateyama and attract a following to it. Visitors would then come to worship and pay for religious services, so that the center of Ashikuraji could survive and prosper (HIRASAWA 2005, 209–16.) The *Nunohashi kanjōe* rite became the hallmark of Ashikuraji in particular, and of Tateyama worship in general. Let us now turn to describe the main subject of our study, the recent reconstructions of the rite.

The 1996 Tateyama Festival

In 1996, it was Toyama Prefecture's turn to celebrate the National Culture Festival (*Kokumin bunkasai Toyama '96*). On this occasion, they produced the Tateyama Festival (*Tateyama festibaru*) in the town of Tateyama. The Tateyama area has no famous folklore tradition or great *matsuri* of the kind that could be presented as a special identity marker. However, Mt. Tateyama has a unique history as a center of pilgrimage in former centuries. Thus the Tateyama town and Toyama prefecture officials decided to produce a special festival event focusing on the Tateyama mandalas and rituals. Their goal was to bring people to experience and admire the historical culture of Tateyama, and thereby to create a stable cultural base that would infuse the area with economic development. They chose this theme in an attempt to “return to Japan's spiritual and traditional roots” through the “mandala-world” of Tateyama (TFH 1997, 15; 22; 28–29). The leading slogan or “catchphrase” for this festival was: “Time-slip... into the mandala-world”



FIGURE 3. Tateyama Festival poster, 1996.

(*Mandarasekai e... taimusurippu* 曼荼羅世界へ...タイムスリップ) (see FIGURE 3). This slogan meant to lure spectators into the mysterious Tateyama mountain, creating an aura of fantasy with cosmological appeal. Its subtitle—“Now reviving the heart and wisdom of our predecessors!” (*Ima yomigaeru senjin no chie to kokoro* 今よみがえる先人の知恵とところ!)—is meant to connect visitors with Tateyama’s history, now reemerging from its misty past.

For the main festival attraction, they decided to reenact the “vanished” ritual of *Nunohashi kanjōe* that historically attracted so many visitors to Tateyama. To this end they enlisted the expert advice of the Tateyama Museum scholars. They hoped to recreate the processional rite as the focus of the “mandala world” experience, in its historical, authentic route in Ashikuraji: from the Enmadō, down the stony stairs of *Myōnen-zaka* 明念坂, over the red “cloth bridge,” and into the Unbadō. While Enmadō still retains its identity as a Buddhist temple

today, Unbadō is no more: it was destroyed in early Meiji. In its stead now stands a modern concert hall called Yōbōkan 遙望館. The Yōbōkan is modeled after the Unbadō in that its eastern wall facing the mountain can be raised up.

The *Nunohashi kanjōe* was to be the highlight of the “mandala-world” *ibento*. However, the “mandala-world” was also to be reflected in the other items of the planned program: traditional folk performances (*dentō geinō* 伝統芸能) in the Shugendō tradition; a concert of *gagaku* 雅楽 and *shōmyō* of both the Shin-gon and Tendai traditions; and a session of mandala *etoki*, the specialty of the Tateyama faith. The organizers invited three local celebrities to accompany the *ibento* with their comments and to participate in a roundtable discussion: the actor Kodama Kiyoshi was the general commentator; the writer Henmi Jun participated in the rite as the representative of the initiates;⁴¹ and the educator Hayashi Masahiko, a researcher of mandala *etoki*, added his comments.

The Toyama Prefecture organizers in 1996 did everything in their power so that the reenactment of the *Nunohashi* rite would not be performed as a ritual, but as a secular *ibento*. Avoiding—in fact, annulling—the religious character of the rite was their explicit instruction (TFH 1997, 32).⁴² To achieve that effect they staged it as a dramatic spectacle. They also broke the ritual process towards its end, and inserted *dentō geinō* performances and a commentated demonstration, before concluding it (TFH 1997, 26–27). The *Nunohashi* rite was thus transformed from a ritual into a spectacle, a highlight of an *ibento*. This is clearly reflected in the structure of the day program, presented below following the Festival Report (TFH 1997, 20–21) and my own observations. The day program of 29 September 1996 ran as follows:

9:30–10:00, opening ceremony. It started with the performance of Ashikuraji’s *gongen* drum (*gongen taiko* 権現太鼓), followed by greetings of the representative of the administrative committee of Tateyama town, its mayor, a representative of Toyama Prefecture Council, the head of Tateyama City Council, and others. Then each of the special guests greeted the audience, and the opening ceremony concluded with another session of *gongen taiko*. Participants and spectators then gathered at the entrance of Enma hall for the main event—the Cloth-Bridge Consecration Rite.

10:30–12:30, *Nunohashi kanjōe*—the main attraction (described separately below) was solemnly conducted over the bridge. This part of the rite lasted about an hour. On the other side of the bridge spectators joined the participants

41. Henmi Jun was invited again ten years later to the 2006 reenactment to participate in the same leading role.

42. The “Basic Requirements for a General Plan Policy” state: “Eradicate the tint of a religious ritual (*shūkyō gyōji* 宗教行事) by stage-directing (*enshutsu* 演出). Use theatrical techniques, combine with other *ibento*, and so on” (TFH 1997, 32).

in front of the Yōbōkan, where a special space was set for a performance of *shishi mai* 獅子舞 (a dance of *shishi* masks) and traditional children's dances. Next, a partial replica of the bridge was set up, and a repeat performance of the *Nunohashi* rite was conducted so that spectators could observe it from close range. Mr. Kodama accompanied the demonstration with detailed explanations. Then all filed into the Yōbōkan, where the rite was concluded (see below).

13:00–13:40, *Dentō geinō*—local folk performing arts in front of the Yōbōkan. They presented *Chigo mai* 稚児舞 (children's dances) from local Ashikuraji, and a guest group from Itoigawa city 糸魚川市, Niigata prefecture, designated as a “National Important Intangible Folk Cultural Property” (*Kuni no jūyō mukei minzoku bunkazai* 国の重要無形民俗文化財). The dances were chosen for their “military-style Shugendō heritage,” and were accompanied by explanations about their respective meaning and relevance: *shishi mai* was performed to purify the area and expel evil spirits; *Tateyama no mai* 立山の舞 is a local dance from Ashikuraji; *oteteko mai* おててこ舞 is an *ennen* 延年 dance accompanied by *gagaku* music; and the local *Tateyama gongen taiko* echoes *yamabushi* tradition and is performed for the blessing of the five grains.

14:00–15:30, *Shōmyō* and *gagaku* concert at the Yōbōkan. The variegated concert featuring Heian and medieval music included *gagaku*, a *Shirabyōshi* 白拍子 dance, as well as *shōmyō*, all accompanied by commentary.

14:00–16:00, *Tateyama mandala etoki* in *Zendōbō* 善道坊 (an Ashikuraji lodge) by Hayashi Masahiko (parallel to the concert). The *etoki* was followed by a panel discussion with the three special guests, centering on actual social issues and debating on how to regain the lost Japanese sense of spirituality and meaning in life through the mandala and ritual experience.

10:00–16:00, continuous food bazaar. Many participants just picnicked throughout the day, making time only to watch the main *Nunohashi* rite.

As can be seen from this *ibento* day program, the *Nunohashi* rite itself was interrupted by folk, *matsuri*-like performances. It was structurally broken, put in parenthesis, and commentated away. Still, all that did not really matter in the end for, as we shall see, the rite proved to be surprisingly effective, against all odds. Let us now describe the reenactment of the rite itself.

THE 1996 REENACTMENT OF THE NUNOHASHI KANJŌE

As we just saw, the organizers dissected, enveloped, and wrapped the 1996 reenactment of the Buddhist rite of *Nunohashi kanjōe* with “*ibento* material,” so as to blur its true religious ritual nature. They referred to it as a dramatic “spectacle” (*misemono* 見せ物); and when recruiting volunteer women participants for it, they asked for “extras” like for the movies, never mentioning a religious rite. At the same time, they strove to perform it in an “authentic” way. For that purpose the organizers invited priests from both Shingon and Tendai *shōmyō* groups

(from Tokyo and Kyoto) to perform the rite.⁴³ The priests took their task seriously, painstakingly reconstructing the rite from old documents, and rehearsed it with care.⁴⁴ The organizers also engaged a local practicing *yamabushi* to serve as *sendatsu* (mountain guide), and a *gagaku* ensemble from Kyoto.

No small amount of effort and ingenuity were put into the reconstruction of the *Nunohashi* rite. Ashikuraji's bright red bridge was prepared for the ritual, following both written and visual sources, in order to revive its complex *mikkyō* symbolism. For example, they placed four cedar branches on the four side-corners of the bridge, in front of the "sacred jewels" (*gihōju* 擬宝珠) on the bridge corners (*hashizume* 橋詰め), forming a ritual boundary (*kekkaï*); and next to them they placed replicas of the flags (*man* 慢) seen in the mandala images. Three long strips of white cloth were stretched from the Enmadō and across the bridge to the Yōbōkan (it took three hundred and sixty rolls of cloth; TFH 1997, 26). A bamboo fence was built along the route from Enmadō to the bridge, and three hundred and eighty small lanterns were placed between the bridge and the Yōbōkan. In front of the Yōbōkan they constructed a partial replica of the bridge to enable the demonstration, and inside the hall they built a concert stage. Of all the props and ritual implements they chose to renew but few: relying on late Edo documents and pictures, they reconstructed a selection that included replicas of the sacred umbrellas (*sangai* 傘蓋), the aforementioned flags and various staffs and banners (*sei* 旌); and they ordered costumes from a professional company (TFH 26–27).

In 1996 there were twenty-seven women participants⁴⁵ plus "guiding girls," about twenty priests, attendants, and flag-bearing youths, seventeen *shōmyō* chanters, and six *gagaku* players; altogether more than seventy performers (one hundred more participated in the production of this event; see TFH 1997, 22). In its original form, the rite would take a whole day, but for the reenactment it was abridged to a mere one hour.

43. The *indō-shū* were Shingon priests, members of the Tokyo *shōmyō* ensemble Karyōbinga Shōmyō Kenkyūkai 迦陵頻伽声明研究会; the *raigō-shū* were Tendai priests of the *shōmyō* ensemble Shichiseikai 七声会 from Kyoto. The official festival report lists the names of all participant priests, without their sectarian and temple affiliation (TFH 1997, 56).

44. A priest from Mt. Kōya spent time in Ashikuraji to investigate the old documents and reconstruct the rite. The participating priests conducted rehearsals, for the ritual involves several unique procedures that, if not for this *ibento*, they would have no occasion to perform (interview with Arai Kōjun, 23 May 2006).

45. There were supposed to be twenty-eight women but two declined at the last minute, so they offered their places to Kanda Yoriko (with whom I attended the rite), and to me. They finally decided to include only Professor Kanda and leave my *gaijin* face out of the camera's eye, so as to preserve the "authenticity" image of the rite. Though remaining a spectator, I was able to follow my friend into the participants' dressing rooms and hear their impressions firsthand.

THE 1996 RITUAL PROCESS

The *nyonin-shū*, dressed in white, gathered in the Enmadō. Inside that hall, the Shingon priests of the *indō-shū* conducted a rite of “confession” (*sange no hōyō* 懺悔の法要) for the women initiates, and a *sanmayakai* 三昧耶戒 ceremony, where they were given a symbolic funeral and received the ten precepts (*jūzenkai* 十善戒) to prepare them for the following initiation (*kanjō*; for details see TFH 1997, 25–26). The whole session, which formerly lasted several hours, was abridged to twenty minutes (10:30–10:50). At the end of it the women were given pieces of incense to put in their robes, and then had white cloth wrapped over their eyes. They emerged from the hall blindfolded, wearing but white *tabi* 足袋 socks on their feet, and donning a pilgrim’s straw hat for the following procession. They proceeded slowly from the Enmadō down the stone stairs of *Myōnen-zaka* to the foot of the bridge: the leading group of Shingon priests, headed by the head priest (*indōshi*, also *ajari* 阿闍梨), the ceremony master (*e-bugyō* 会奉行, “assembly magistrate”), the *yamabushi* guide, followed by the line of blindfolded women, and ending with the “bodhisattva flags” bearers and the *gagaku* players. At the foot of the bridge, the *indōshi* performed a path-opening rite (for details see TFH 1997, 18; 25–26). Then all began their march across the bridge in a ceremonial, deliberate three-steps-pause pace, to the sound of a *yamabushi* conch and *gagaku* music. The women followed in lines, hands clasping prayer rosaries (*juzu* 数珠) and joined in prayer gesture (*gasshō* 合掌). Both priests and women walked with this slow ceremonial step, women stepping upon the white cloth, priests treading carefully between the lines. Then the *indō-shū* stopped in the middle of the bridge, and the *nyonin-shū* at a distance behind. At that time, the welcoming group of Tendai priests (*raigō-shū*) started towards them from the far side of the bridge (from the former Unbadō), walking at the same ceremonial pace, chanting and scattering “lotus petals” (*sange* 散華).⁴⁶

Meeting in the middle, the two groups of priests joined with greetings and chanting, and then formed two lines, stretching along the edges of the bridge and facing inward. The *e-bugyō* walked back down the bridge to summon the group of women. The *nyonin-shū* fell into a single white line and followed him, passing between the two lines of colorful priests who showered them with incense and *shōmyō*. The blindfolded women could then hear and smell the blessings of paradise. Finally, priests, musicians, and women all turned as one group to cross the river to the other side, *raigōshi* leading, priests chanting and scattering “petals.” It all formed a stunning visual picture: the priests in their shining purple, red, green, and yellow robes, and the line of women in pure white between them,

46. This is the Buddhist rite of “scattering flowers,” where *shōmyō*-chanting priests scatter five-color lotus-petal-shaped paper leaves.

on a bright red bridge, immersed in the lush greenery of summer. This striking visual march was accompanied by spiritual sounds: the blows of the conch, the ringing of bells, the elongated sweeping *gagaku* music, and the echoing chanting of *shōmyō*.

The ceremonial crossing of the bridge took about thirty minutes (11:00–11:30). When they crossed to the other side, they were led directly to the corner of the Yōbōkan to wait while the children performed their folk dances. Then, for the next thirty minutes (until about 12:00), a repeat performance of the *Nunohashi* rite was conducted as a demonstration for the spectators, accompanied by commentary. Following this, priests, women, and ticket-holding spectators filed into the Yōbōkan. Inside, in the darkness, the final rites were conducted in the Tendai pattern.⁴⁷ This too lasted about twenty minutes (12:00–12:20). The women took off their blindfolds and sat to listen to the *shōmyō* and to chant the ten *nenbutsu* (*jūnen* 十念), and thereby were given *ketchimyaku*—a “blood-tie” to Amida (but not a full *kanjō*). Finally, to the raised voices of the chant, the eastern wall of the hall rose up, and the peak of Mt. Jōdo 浄土山, embodying Amida’s Pure Land, was clearly visible at the center of that frame.⁴⁸ The initiated were thus awakened to behold paradise, and bound a karmic tie to be reborn there. In a ritual sense, they were reborn in Amida’s Pure Land that very day. It was a moving moment for all who sat in the Yōbōkan.

After a silent admiration of the scenery, there were concluding speeches, among them Ms. Henmi’s words and thanks. All left the Yōbōkan, and then the procession of priests, women, and spectators returned in a quick pace across the bridge back to “this world.” As mentioned, the day program continued with a concert in the Yōbōkan and an *etoki* session and discussion in the Zendōbō at Ashikuraji.

THE 1996 REACTIONS

Considering the atypical silent concentration of the thousands of spectators during the rite, there is no doubt that something special had happened that day in 1996 in the reenactment of the *Nunohashi kanjōe*. And indeed, after the ceremony was over there came a wave of emotions from the participants, especially from the women, who all reported undergoing an overwhelming experience. Immediately following the rite the women hung together, laughing with excitement, reluctant to let go of the feeling they shared. They reported a strong sense of group *communitas*: they said they felt like sisters, fellow pilgrims with a

47. Here the organizers followed the Tendai service (*hōe* 法会) with the *shikahōyō* 四箇法要 pattern, according to an 1842 document (TFH 1997, 25).

48. This peak is visible from the Yōbōkan; Oyama’s peak is hidden behind it. By noon the air became hazy but the peak’s outline could still be seen against the sky.

common fate and like emotions. They all agreed they “experienced paradise” (*goku-raku* 極楽), in those very words.

There are some objective reasons for the shared experience: the women participated in their own symbolic funeral and were dressed in burial shrouds; walking with only their socks on the rough earth gave them a detached feeling, to some even disconcerting pain; the need to concentrate on their steps while blindfolded (they were warned never to step outside the white strip lest they fail to gain paradise), and surely, being blindfolded itself gave them a sense of isolation from outside distractions and an inward look. However, these are insufficient reasons to explain the profound spiritual, if not religious, experience that most women shared.

In fact, some women could not stop taking about this experience: one of the elder participants, Bandō Tomiko, kept calling me in Tokyo for months after, telling and retelling me of her experience (see below). Even my sober scholar friend Kanda Yoriko, who was asked to participate at the last minute, reported an elation of “going to paradise.” She said: “It was as if they sang just for me, spread incense just for me, as if music and perfume were poured over me; it was as if I was especially greeted by messengers of the other world.”⁴⁹

The participants’ reactions were collected at a special symposium conducted a few months later (on 22 February 1997), and reprinted in the Tateyama Festival Report (TFH 1997, 60–65). I briefly quote a few of these reactions below.

Kurita Mutsuko was moved by her burial gown-like white clothes. In the Yōbōkan she prayed fervently to be saved. “When I opened my eyes and saw Oyama in front of me I felt so happy, my whole body shivered with joy! I was sure—now I can go to *gokuraku jōdo*! I want to continue my life as a full and good person” (TFH 1997, 60). Ueno Retsuko wrote: “I will never forget the sense of elation I experienced when I crossed... the bridge. I heard the sound of *shōmyō* as if a thousand Buddhas descended from heaven. But in the middle of the bridge when we passed between the lines of priests, suddenly all the sounds disappeared and I felt as if I walked alone in the world, in a whole white, silent landscape. [In the Yōbōkan] I was wrapped up, body and heart, with the sounds of the chanted sutras... I forgot about time, and just prayed... the chanting ended like a big retreating wave, and the screen went up and I saw Tateyama clearly... it was a very moving experience” (TFH 1997, 60). Saeki Eiko said: “When I saw the Tateyama range in front of me after they raised the wall—I had an unforgettable experience I cannot convey in words... I will never forget it. I felt I was saved that day... I want to make my life fuller, and full of gratitude” (TFH 1997, 61). Toyooka Hiroe described how she “floated in a mysterious world of sound and light, which pulled her heart inside.” She said it

49. Personal communication, 1996. Professor Kanda still confirms those feelings today.

was a real-life experience of paradise, like a dream (TFH 1997, 61–62). Nakajima Namiko: “Though it was my first experience as an “extra,” I was so moved and could not dry my tears. Now every time I look upon Mt. Tateyama I feel full of power and happiness. I feel thankful (*arigatai*). I want to live everyday with the strength of that day” (TFH 1997, 62).

Nakada Mutsuko was always resentful of Tateyama’s attitude towards women as polluted. She decided to participate in the hope of some kind of an answer, though expecting “just an *ibento*.” But when she walked down the *Myōnen-zaka*, the pricking stones reminded her of *Hariyama* (“needle mountain”) hell. On the bridge she felt that time stood still, and with the colorful patches of the priests ahead of her she felt she was walking towards paradise. “I feel I was born again,” she reported (TFH 1997, 62). Baba Masako also expected only a kind of a masquerade. But when she stepped out of Enmadō she made a “time slip” from this to the other world: time stopped, and she felt the wind on her body the way she never felt before (TFH 1997, 63). Miwa Makiko had “the highest, most elevated experience” of her life (TFH 1997, 64–65). Murakami Yukiko said: “It was the most mysterious experience I ever had. For a short flash I was separated from this regular world and felt that until now nothing was real. When I came to the end of the bridge I felt I met a new me” (TFH 1997, 65).

The aforementioned Bando Tomiko wrote: “I felt as if I were flying in the air through the green sky, holding hands with—who? Mom and dad? Was it Amida? It was a sense of indescribable happiness, as if the sounds of the sutras, or somebody, took my heart for a flight somewhere, and I felt numb. The sound of *shōmyō* called so many Buddhas to fly over me, and I could not stop my tears.... I felt thankful, as if I actually met the Buddha. And for a long time afterwards I felt calm and happy.”⁵⁰ She too was moved by the sight of Tateyama, and blessed her mysterious karma that enabled her to participate in the rite that day (TFH 1997, 63–64).

Such reactions were not limited to the initiated women. The Buddhist priests, who practiced the rite for months, also felt that they had tapped into something special that day.⁵¹ Even some of the other “extras” reported moving experiences, similar to those of the *nyonin-shū*. For example, Baba Shōichi, an “extra” *indō-shū*, said “I felt as if I were walking above the clouds, above the world, I thought it was something mysterious like paradise, and my body floating in it.... In the Unbadō I again felt that I went to another world. I felt cleansed of all my former

50. She acknowledges her correspondence with me; I here quote from her letter as well, dated 1 October 1996.

51. Makino Yaichi, an *indō-shū*, said he felt “white like the cloth” on the bridge (TFH 1997, 64). Other priests I talked to at that time or interviewed later all admitted being moved by the rite.

deeds, and that the new me was sitting there. I will now look at life and death from a different angle” (TFH 1997, 62–63).⁵²

These are some representative reactions from the participants in the 1996 reenactment of the *Nunohashi* rite, written for the symposium. As we can see, even months later the reactions did not lose their emotional energy: the participants report they tasted paradise. I should remark that those very same reactions were repeated a decade later, in the 2005, 2006, and 2009 reenactments (see below). But before we can turn to those later cases, some questions must first be raised at this point.

QUESTIONS

The first question to be asked concerns this gap between the organizers’ intentions and the actual results: How does a ritual, performed out of context, out of time, out of rhythm, and without its original function, still work its power so effectively today?

Indeed, the odds are many: first, the ritual today has none of its original function and necessity. Women have been climbing Mt. Tateyama for over a hundred years now, and can benefit from walking its paths and visiting its mandala portals. This alone completely annuls the rite’s original *raison d’être*. Also, very few today actually believe in Amida’s Pure Land at all, let alone in its presence on Mt. Tateyama, especially in the graphic manner that contrasts with all its adjoining hells. In fact, many of the participants were not followers of any particular Buddhist sect. So, for the most part, the belief system on which the rite was once based is now missing. It was conducted without any real need or function, and indeed, without any expectations. Most participants were planning to volunteer as “extras” for a “spectacle” out of curiosity or a sense of adventure. For the most part, they were in it for fun, not for religious experience. In addition, the rite itself was deliberately shortened and split in half for the sake of extraneous performances and demonstrations. So why did it have such a powerful effect on the participants?

The straightforward answer to the above question should be obvious to any scholar of religion or any anthropologist: it is the ritual *performance itself* that is effective. The *Nunohashi* rite has the classical three-partite structure of a “rite of passage”:⁵³ The first part is a separation from normal time and space, accompa-

52. Several participants (among them Nori Emiko, Saeki Eiko, Toyooka Hiroe, Nakajima Namiko, Nagaya Yasuko, and Makino Yaichi) similarly commented on their change of heart and view of life; on sensing another world; of feeling purified; of feeling a strong connection with the faithful women of the past; and of acquiring a new outlook on Tateyama itself, thinking it should be appreciated for its spiritual and natural treasures, not just as a place for entertainment.

53. A term coined by VAN GENNEP (1960). Of the vast theoretical literature on ritual, ritual process, and ritual liminality, reference must be limited here to the classical work of Victor TURNER (1967; 1969); see also BELL 1992.

nied by death symbolism (the “funeral” in the Enmadō); then there is a liminal phase, where the transformatory main part of the ritual takes place, detached from normal time and space (crossing the bridge and being transformed through initiation in the womb-like Unbadō); and a final phase of reintegration into this world, accompanied by birth symbolism (opening the eyes, leaving the Unbadō, and returning to “this world” over the bridge). Thus the ritual mechanism itself, its very performance, produces an affective power—even without its underlying belief system. To put it simply: ritual works!

It is perhaps because the *Nunohashi* rite was never a community ritual of the *matsuri* type, but one aimed at individual salvation, that enabled it to retain its transformatory impact on individuals, even when performed for different ends. Thus the reenactment of the *Nunohashi* rite and the reactions in its aftermath form yet another overwhelming proof of the performative power of ritual.

The organizers of the Tateyama Festival were perhaps partly aware of that when they decided to create a “mandala experience” out of a reenacted old rite. This leads us to the next question, concerning the meaning and purpose of forcing a religious rite into the performative corset of an *ibento*. Behind this question lies the sensitive issue of the conflict between the politics of culture and religion in today’s Japan.

The organizers of the 1996 Tateyama Festival decided to present the unique features of their area: the Tateyama mandala and the *Nunohashi kanjōe* rite. Their objective, as we saw, was to harness this *ibento* to promote economic activity in the area (TFH 1997, 15; 22; 26–29). They followed the flourishing *ibento* industry of the time that produced new festivals, while sometimes integrating traditional *kami matsuri* in grand *ibento* productions (DEJIMA 1997, 229–32; 256). However, what is true for traditional *kami matsuri*, that in today’s government policy are often recognized as “cultural assets,” is not true for Buddhist rituals that are labeled as “religious” (and rightly so, of course; we will return to this point later).

Aware of the risk in using government money for religious purposes, the organizers tried to suppress the religious character of the ritual and to remodel it as a spectacle, as a centerpiece of an organized cultural *ibento* (TFH 1997, 32). Thus though they enlisted the help of scholars of history from Tateyama Museum, they did not let them take any part in staging the ritual, lest they would hinder the spectacle-oriented decisions of the *ibento* organizers.⁵⁴ With this attitude, the organizers also managed to deeply insult some of the Buddhist priests they recruited for this rite:⁵⁵ They enlisted the priests’ help in reconstructing the old and

54. The organizers thought that the scholars would be too attached to accurate historical reconstruction and would stand in the way of the *ibento*-like production (Fukue Mitsuru, personal communication, September 1996[at the event itself]).

55. The following information was obtained as a personal communication during an interview I conducted in January 1997 with one of the senior participant priests, who asked not to be quoted by name. I respect his understandable request.

complex rite, and in performing it. However, at the same time, they asked them to “make it nonreligious.” The priests were shocked at this impossible, inconsiderate request and almost declined participation, saying that the organizers should hire Kabuki actors for the task, not Buddhist priests. However, they finally decided not to lose this rare opportunity to revive the old rite, and thus to ignore the strange directive and perform the rite in the only way they knew: for their part, the Buddhist priests conducted a Buddhist ritual.

As mentioned, the organizers recruited volunteer women participants as “extras.” So one can imagine the organizers’ embarrassment when these “extras” surprisingly found themselves in *gokuraku*; and embarrassed they were indeed, even dismayed,⁵⁶ when they were showered with fervent thanks from the women participants for organizing such a wonderful spiritual experience for them. It seems significant, as well as amusing, that the *hubris* of the male business-like behavior towards this rite was “punished” by (one can hardly avoid a vivid *manga*-like image of it) a stampede of white-robed, religiously elated women. In this respect, the organizers failed in their attempt to perform a religious rite as a secular spectacle.

Surely, the organizers were justified in trying to blur the religious character of the rite: they were obviously careful not to violate the strict law of separation of state and religion. Also, they tried to avoid another sticky issue of local politics: a protest of Buddhist sects not invited or not included in the ritual could have made this into an even more complicated and controversial affair.⁵⁷

Again, the organizers clearly declared their economic goal of enlivening the area (*chiiki kasseika* 地域活性化) with this ritual-*ibento* (TFH 1997, 28–29). As we remember, the *Nunohashi kanjōe* was originally an economic device to enliven the Ashikuraji center at the foot of Mt. Tateyama. At that time, the religious experience was the professed goal of the rite; today, however, it is no longer acceptable to mix government money and religious experiences. Thus the organizer’s very idea of reenacting the *Nunohashi* rite was politically daring, even risky. For, as we just saw, although they managed to conduct a successful *ibento*, they did not succeed in sucking the religious power out of their ritual of choice.

Thus, for the organizers of the 1996 reenactment of the *Nunohashi* rite, there was a clear lesson to be learned: one should not perform a ritual if one does not intend it to work. Or, if one decides to make a particular ritual into a money-raising enterprise, one should be well prepared to pay some religious dues for it.

56. A Tateyama city official openly admitted this in an interview conducted on 17 April 2006.

57. Apparently they first asked Jōdo-Shin priests from the area to perform the rite, but they declined; thus Shingon and Tendai priests were recruited for the task (Mr. Fukue, personal communication, 1996; Mr. Arai, in an interview conducted on 23 May 2006).

Be that as it may, at least in 1996 the lesson was internalized: the organizers of the Tateyama Festival decided that the *Nunohashi kanjōe* would be a one-time event, never to be repeated. In time, however, public demand prevailed over that decision. In the following years, many residents, women in particular, repeatedly asked to reenact the ritual.⁵⁸ After nine years, a new mayor in Tateyama took up the challenge. This time, however, it was not to be a prefectural “Culture Festival” but a Tateyama town enterprise with a new meaning.

The later reconstructions of 2005, 2006, and 2009 were thus produced with open eyes, with new attitudes and new goals, and, as mentioned, with considerable success.⁵⁹ I will discuss the three together, first describing their reenactments and then their participant’s reactions, while focusing on our main issues of discussion.

The Later Reconstructions of 2005, 2006, and 2009

The decision to renew the *Nunohashi ibento* in 2005 was taken by the then-mayor of Tateyama town, with the same general objective of investing the town with economic energy (*machi-okoshi*). However, the town officials remembered the embarrassment caused by the first reenactment and were careful not to repeat former mistakes. In their attempt to avoid the religious pitfalls (that is, not break the laws of the country) they found an ingenious solution: to take the bull by its horns, as it were, and conduct the *Nunohashi* rite not as a spectacle—for the sake of the spectators—but for the sake of the participant women themselves. They thus entirely shifted the focus of the reenactment. They did not insist anymore on producing an *ibento* spectacle, and could go ahead (or rather, go back) and conduct an effective ritual, one that participants could experience (*taiken* 体験). They still had to find a way to circumvent the religious character of the rite, and they did this by using a familiar method: they relabeled it. The *Nunohashi* rite was now referred to as a “traditional ceremony” (*dentōteki gishiki* 伝統的儀式) that was not aimed at Buddhist salvation (though it used the language), but towards the “spiritual healing” (*iyashi* 癒し) of the women participants. Thus,

58. According to town officials, public demand to renew it was great and persistent (personal communication, September 2005; also reported in the *Yomiuri shinbun*, 19 September 2005, 31).

59. I attended the 2005 reenactment in the company of Gaynor Sekimori. This time I had limited contact with the participants, and relied also on later interviews and documents. Since I did not attend the 2006 reenactment, I relied here on the official video and photos, and on newspaper interviews. For these I am especially indebted to Fukue Mitsuru and others in the Tateyama Museum; to the Tateyama town officials, especially to Minabe Hidenori, who generously provided me with official documentation; and to *Yomiuri shinbun* journalist Fukushima Toshiyuki, who kindly shared his interview materials with me. For the recent 2009 reenactment (that I also did not attend) I likewise relied on the local organizers’ planning documents, on newspaper reports, and on personal communications. I am deeply indebted to Fukue for this later information.



FIGURE 4. The 2005 *ibento* poster.

instead of concentrating on the religious history of Mt. Tateyama with its Buddhist “mandala world,” the organizers now presented its traditional “healing culture” (*iyashi bunka* 癒し文化).

In the new advertising poster for the 2005 reenactment one can see this sharp shift in attitude: neither the mountain nor the mandala, but the participant woman is put in the center (see FIGURE 4). The young pilgrim stands with her eyes covered, palms joined in *gasshō*, holding prayer beads. Behind her stretches the Cloth-Bridge, and images from the Tateyama mandala float above her. The image is accompanied by the slogan: “A journey to touch (feel) the traditional culture of healing” (*Iyashi no dentō bunka ni fureru tabi* 癒しの伝統文化に触れる旅).

THE 2005 *IBENTO*

In 2005 this new approach characterized the whole reconstruction process: it was echoed in the organizers’ speeches, in the media coverage, and was reflected—at times almost verbatim—in the women’s reactions.

In the opening ceremony of the *ibento* on 18 September 2005, the then-mayor of Tateyama town (and instigator of the renewal), Ōtsuji Susumu, declared the rite was now to be conducted annually for the sake of the women themselves, to revive the “healing culture” (*iyashi bunka*) of Tateyama. His primary objective was to attract participants and spectators from around Japan for the purpose of *machi-okoshi*, and infuse the city of Tateyama with economic energy.⁶⁰ Indeed, as many as eighty women underwent the *Nunohashi* initiation rite in 2005 (against the twenty-seven “extras” in 1996). Their ages ranged from twenty-one to seventy-seven, and they came from as far as Tokyo, Kanagawa, Saitama, Gifu, Nara, Ishikawa, as well as from Toyama prefecture. More than four thousand spectators gathered in Ashikuraji that day (as in 1996).

As it now focused on the spiritual experience of the participants, the *Nunohashi* rite was performed fully and without major breaks (though in an abridged form as before; see below). The participating women paid ¥60,000 for a three-day stay. In addition, four hundred people, men and women alike, participated (for a fee of ¥2000) in the public “bridge crossing” in the footsteps of the initiates. In addition to the rite there were other programs: a performance of Tateyama *taiko* (Tateyama drum), a “mandala concert,” a symposium and special exhibition at Tateyama Museum, and the inevitable fair. The day program was as follows:

9:30–10:50, opening ceremony, with greetings by Saeki Nobuharu, Chief of the Executive Committee, Prefectural Governor Ishii Ryūichi, the Mayor of Tateyama-chō Ōtsuji Susumu, members of both prefectural and town assemblies, and by the special representative of the initiates, the local celebrity actress Tsurugi Miyuki.⁶¹ The ceremony started and ended with the sound of Tateyama *taiko*.

10:00–12:25, the *Nunohashi* rite (including fifteen minutes for TV coverage).⁶²

12:30–13:40, lunch break.

14:00–15:00, a performance of “mandala music” of *gagaku* and *bugaku* 舞樂 by the Yōyūkai 洋遊会 group (from Fukuoka-chō, Toyama), before the Yōbōkan.

15:00–16:30, mandala exhibition and symposium at the Tateyama Museum.⁶³

10:00–16:00, food and crafts bazaar.

60. His speech was recorded by both the BBT and NET 3 TV programs, and was endorsed by the Toyama Prefectural Governor, Ishii Ryūichi.

61. Ms. Tsurugi is a popular local star, a former Takarazuka actress and singer.

62. According to the municipal documents of the *ibento* program, time was set apart for the local KNB TV live interviews during the walk down towards the bridge.

63. To coincide with the *ibento*, the Tateyama Museum conducted a symposium on the world of Tateyama mandala, with the scholarly participation of Takasu Jun (Aichi Kyōiku University), Hirasawa Caroline (Waseda University), and Fukue Mitsuru and Yonehara Hiroshi (Tateyama Museum).

As we can see, this time the *ibento* elements were toned down. The organizers were focused mainly on the performance of the rite and on accommodating its many participants. The women were treated the evening before to mandala *etoki* by Saeki Fumimaro,⁶⁴ a *kokyū* 胡弓 concert, and to a *bugaku* performance after the rite.⁶⁵ Those who chose to stay an additional night were taken on a tour of the mountain the next day.

THE REENACTED NUNOHASHI RITE OF 2005

The rite of 2005 looked grander than its predecessor, and was slightly longer, owing to the sheer number of participants. In addition to the eighty women, the number of priests and music players also increased (to about nineteen priests, twelve players, and several conches). The previous Shingon and Tendai *shōmyō* ensembles were invited again to perform the rite, for they were the ones with the know-how. In accord with the new attitude, this time they gave the women a proper *kanjō* initiation. The *indōshi* Mr. Arai and the *yamabushi* Mr. Saeki climbed the mountain the morning before the rite and brought water from the sacred Suzuri-ga-ike 硯ヶ池 pond on Bessan, to be used in the consecration ceremony.

The spectacle character of the rite was not entirely abandoned. The eighty women participants, although clad as pilgrims in white death-shrouds, wore camera-oriented colorful *obi* sashes in green, blue, purple, red, and golden yellow.⁶⁶ They were given a full ten minutes to enter and settle down in the Enmadō. The *sange* and precept-giving ceremony in the Enmadō echoed the previous one, and lasted about twenty-five minutes (10:15–10:40).⁶⁷ This time, however, they stepped outside before putting on their hats and blindfolds, and also wore white *zōri* 草履 sandals for the hazardous walk. The procession started towards the bridge at 10:50, arriving at 11:00, then halted for fifteen minutes of television interviews. The ritual crossing followed the same three-steps-halt ceremonial pace, only this time the women filled all three lanes of white cloth over the bridge.⁶⁸ The bridge crossing lasted thirty-five minutes (11:15–11:50), and then they all entered the Yōbōkan for the final twenty-minute-long service (11:50–12:10). This time no

64. Mr. Saeki Fumimaro is a local Shinto priest of Oyama Jinja, who aspires to revive Shugendō practice in Mt. Tateyama.

65. The *etoki* and the musical performance were for participants only; next day's "mandala concert" was performed outdoors and was open to the public.

66. Many media images focused on the red and white picture of the women on the bridge.

67. As before, the *nyonin-shū* were given incense and received the ten precepts during this symbolic funerary service. I am grateful to Gaynor Sekimori for noting the proceedings of this service. See also TFH 1997, 25–26.

68. Some even bent to collect "lotus petals" on their way, oblivious to appearances, obviously free of performer consciousness.



FIGURE 5. The 2006 *ibento* poster (1).

spectators were allowed inside the Yōbōkan. During the final rite, a group of six *gagaku* players remained on the bridge to accompany the “public crossing.” In the pitch dark of the Yōbōkan, *gagaku* and *shōmyō* joined the women’s *nenbutsu* chanting, then ceased, and at the ring of the bell the eastern wall rose quietly. For a while the women were absorbed in contemplation, and only their tearful sniffles could be heard. In the TV programs⁶⁹ one could watch their various emotional expressions: smiling, happy faces, or self-absorbed, concentrated faces, praying fervently with closed eyes, many shedding tears. When the *shōmyō* resumed, the *indōshi* gave each woman a *kanjō*, dripping sacred water on the head.⁷⁰ At 12:15, all formed a procession, led by the (welcoming) *raigō-shū* and trailed by the

69. For example, in both the NET3 ワイド report, aired on 18 September 2005, and in the BBT Toyama Television program entitled *Nunohashi kanjō—Jidai o koete*, broadcast on 28 November 2005.

70. According to Mr. Arai, the Yōbōkan service was based on an opening ceremony for a *hibutsu* 秘仏. At its end the women were given *denbō kanjō* 伝法灌頂 (Dharma-transmission initiation).



FIGURE 6. The 2006 *ibento* poster (2).

(leading) *indō-shū*, and proceeded to the Enmadō where the rite was concluded at 12:25. The participants were then taken to lunch, and to the concert.

THE 2006 *IBENTO*

In the following year, the ritual was repeated with an even stronger emphasis on its new goals. The posters for the 2006 reenactment went further in putting the women in the center: one poster featured an image of the *Nunohashi* rite in the upper part of the page, under the floating snow-capped Tateyama range (see FIGURE 5 on previous page). Below the bridge, the main image of the woman in pilgrim attire and devotional posture is accompanied by the slogan: “This day, Mt. Tateyama is there just for me” (*kono hi, Tateyama wa watashi no tame ni aru* この日立山は私のためにある).

In a second poster (FIGURE 6, above), the woman occupied most of the white page, this time her image floating above the Tateyama range. The slogan is written in large red letters over her figure, saying: “Beyond the bridge, there is the new me!” (*Hashi no mukō ni atarashii watashi ga imasu* 橋の向こうに新しい私があります).

It seems that the focus on the participant's personal experience (*taiken*) has reached its peak here, with both slogans emphasizing the word “me”—*watashi*.

The *Nunohashi* rite of 2006 was performed on 17 September, in a similar manner to the previous one: the day *ibento* included a Tateyama *taiko* presentation, a *gagaku/bugaku* concert by the Yōyukai ensemble, and a daylong fair. There were also some inevitable changes. First, the overall scale of participation was smaller. This time there were only sixty-five initiates who gathered from Toyama, Tokyo, Ibaragi, Chiba, Gifu, Kyoto, and Hyōgo prefectures, ages ranging from twenty-one to ninety.⁷¹ There were also fewer spectators: only thirty-three hundred people came to watch the rite that year, and only two hundred and fifteen of them chose to cross the bridge in the initiates' footsteps. The unstable weather must have been the cause: it rained the night before, and until the very last minute the organizers were not sure if they could go ahead with the planned *ibento*. Luckily the weather held, and though it was a grey day, it remained dry throughout.

Also, this time they relied on a local Shingon *shōmyō* ensemble, the *Shōmyō no kai HARUKA* (声明の会 HARUKA, from Takaoka city, Toyama) to perform the ritual. Since the local priests belong to a different Shingon branch they had to master the Kōya-style ritual and adapt the Tendai rites, but the sound of their *shōmyō* differed somewhat from previous years. There was also a difference in the priests' appearance: except for the *indōshi* who wore his finest red and gold attire, both “leading” and “welcoming” groups wore common priestly dark purple (*raigō-shū* adding a mustard-color overlay), so as not to spoil their finery in the rain. Some ritual banners and staffs were covered with nylons. The whole image of the rite was thus less colorful (though to some eyes it gained the look of a “real” Buddhist ritual).⁷²

The day program of the 2006 *ibento* followed its predecessor.⁷³ The opening ceremony started with the sound of five *yamabushi* conches and the beat of Tateyama *taiko*. The line of speakers mimicked that of the previous year: the head of the organizing committee, Saeki Nobuharu, emphasized again the importance

71. Initially they tried to limit the number to fifty participants from Toyama, but then added fifteen from other prefectures. The previous year they priced the three-day stay at ¥60,000 per person, and found themselves in the red. This time they offered only a two-day stay for ¥40,000, and discounts for the mountain tour on the following day (Mr. Minabe, in an interview conducted on 17 April 2006; *Asahi shinbun* 18 September 2006).

72. As it was the first time for these priests to perform the complex rite, they had a moment of comic confusion on the bridge about when and where to turn. The priests were apparently not too comfortable with the spectacle dimension of the rite.

73. The following description of the day *ibento* is based, among others, on the NET 3 television program *Iyashi motome Nunohashi kanjōe* (The Cloth-Bridge Initiation Rite, Seeking Spiritual healing).

of Tateyama as a center of “healing culture” (*iyashi no bunka*), and the need to preserve it; the new Mayor of Tateyama, Funabashi Takayuki, commented on the significance of Mt. Tateyama; Governor Ishii spoke about the need in today’s “stress society” for such heart-healing rituals like the *Nunohashi kanjōe*. Members of Toyama prefecture and of Tateyama town councils remarked how the Edo period’s religious ritual had now been turned into a powerful traditional ceremony (*dentō gyōji* 伝統行事). The last to speak was the representative of the *nyonin-shū*, Henmi Jun, who ten years before performed this part in the original reenactment. Outside the Enmadō, the procession started towards the bridge under a grey sky. The TV camera rested on the women’s hesitant steps down the slippery *Myōnen-zaka*, and showed them supporting each other through the hazardous walk. The ceremonial step of crossing the bridge changed this year to a two-step gait, right foot starting, left joining. This time the cameras followed the women into the Yōbōkan with greater intent than before. They paused on the silent moment of the rising wall, lingering on the women’s faces with close-up shots, again showing some staring at the view with astonished expressions, some smiling with teary happiness, some praying with eyes closed, self-absorbed. Most of the women were seen crying, and in the silence one could hear sniffles and gasping.⁷⁴

Thus we can see how the media responded to the dramatic shift in purpose of the *Nunohashi* rite. In 2006 the reporters knew what to look for, and their cameras focused on the women’s faces, thirsty for their tears. While in 1996 they tried to hide those very tears, now they zoomed in on them. Thus, in a complete reverse of attitude, the rite’s power and effect was now acknowledged and broadly advertised.

THE 2009 *IBENTO*

Due to financial considerations, the next reenactment of the *Nunohashi* rite was originally planned for 2010. However, new government sponsorship prompted the organizers to reenact it a year earlier. In a newspaper interview, the director of the Tourism Office of Tateyama Town, Mr. Ino, disclosed that while seeking recognition as a World Heritage site, it was recognized that Tateyama’s faith and its *Nunohashi* rite are the “core of Tateyama’s cultural heritage” that should be preserved. And, as the newly-revised national budget for 2009 included a project to promote regional culture and arts, the Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Bunkachō* 文化庁) issued a grant of ¥6,000,000 to support the *Nunohashi* rite at Tateyama, causing the town officials to hurriedly advance its reenactment to 2009 (*Asahi*

74. After a brief shot of the quick return over the bridge, the movie concludes with the “public crossing” that included many men, among them the aforementioned dignitaries: the mayor, the governor, council members, and other guests.

FIGURE 7. The 2009 *ibento* poster.

shinbun, 28 September 2009, 33).⁷⁵ The *ibento* took place on 27 September, under clear skies, and attracted some three thousand guests. It was cosponsored by the local newspaper *Kita Nippon shinbun* 北日本新聞.

As before, the *Nunohashi* rite was officially presented as a traditional healing ceremony that can serve a contemporary purpose.⁷⁶ Also, the *Nunohashi* rite was now referred to as “The Heisei-era *Nunohashi* rite” (*Heisei no Nunohashi kanjōe* 平成の布橋灌頂会), emphasizing its contemporary characteristics

75. The national sponsorship raised some concern among local officials (*Asahi shinbun*, 28 September 2009, 33). However, it made possible the production of the 2009 *ibento*.

76. For one example see *Toyama shinbun*, 28 September 2009. Town officials also emphasized the rite’s relevance for today’s anxieties and its merit as an opportunity for “self-reflection” (see *Kita Nippon shinbun*, 24 September 2009).

(for example, in the *Kita Nippon shinbun* series of 24–26 September 2009). This designation ties it with the two previous reconstructions of the Heisei era as forming a renewed tradition.

The 2009 poster (FIGURE 7) put its emphasis on the rite itself. It featured a group of (white) women crossing the (red) bridge against the greenery in the background.

While including the former familiar slogans aimed at individual women (“Touching the traditional culture of healing” and “Beyond the bridge there is the new me”) in smaller print, the main catchphrase above the bridge now read: “A Vermillion Hanging-Bridge to the Pure Land” (*Jōdo e no akai kakehashi* 浄土への朱い架け橋). An increase in the use of Buddhist terms was also seen in the media.⁷⁷

Even with the tight schedule, the rite drew aspiring candidates from around Japan, and the organizers had to choose the participants by lottery from among one hundred and thirty-three requests. They finally chose seventy-one participants from Toyama, Kyoto, Aichi, Chiba, and Ishikawa prefectures, ranging in age from eighteen to eighty. In this year too, the media never failed to mention the emotional reactions of the women, quoting them even in the shortest of reports (for example, in the *Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 September 2009).⁷⁸

For the most part, the 2009 *ibento* maintained the former form. The original *shōmyō* ensembles of Shingon and Tendai priests that conducted the rite in 1996 and 2005 were called again to perform the 2009 rite, as was the Yōyukai *gagaku* group. The *ibento* followed the familiar schedule: in the opening ceremony (10:00–10:25), the Head of the Executive Committee, Mr. Saeki Nobuharu, again emphasized “the importance of preserving our forefathers’ legacy of the traditional culture of Tateyama faith” (*Kita Nippon shinbun*, 28 September 2009, 1). Then followed greetings by Tateyama’s Mayor, Mr. Funabashi, the Vice-Governor

77. The terms *jōdo* ([Amida’s] Pure Land), *gokuraku* (paradise), and *ōjō* 往生 (birth in a Buddha [Amida] land) appeared in newspaper articles in previous years as well. This time, however, explicit Buddhist terms like *bonnō* 煩惱 (evil passions that hinder the human mind) are used to describe the rite’s efficacy in preventing them. For example, in the article titled *Iyashi: bonnō ya fuan mitsumenaosu* 癒やし：煩惱や不安見つめ直す (Healing: Facing one’s own hindrances and anxiety) in *Kita Nippon shinbun*, 28 September 2009), and in other article texts (for example, *Asahi shinbun*, 28 September 2009, 33; and *Yomiuri shinbun*, 28 September 2009). Referring to the Pure Land on the official poster indicates a growing ease in using Buddhist terminology as “traditional culture.”

78. As before we see descriptions of tears and overwhelming emotional reactions (among others, see *Asahi shinbun*, 28 September 2009; *Kita Nippon shinbun*, 5 October 2009). This time, however, a number of women remarked that they wanted to participate and use it as a memorial service (*kuyō* 供養) for dead relatives (for example, for dead mothers: in *Kita Nippon shinbun*, 24 September 2009 and 28 September 2009; for dead students and relatives: in *Asahi shinbun*, 28 September 2009).

Mr. Uede, members of the prefecture and town councils, and the mayor of the twin city. The last to offer greetings this time were the vice president and the chief editor of the cosponsoring newspaper, *Kita Nippon shinbun* (there was no woman representative this time). As before, a Tateyama *taiko* performance accompanied the opening ceremony. The day-long food fair was now called *Gottsō matsuri* ごっつお祭り (Delicacies Festival), adding a local flavor to its name. The *Nunohashi* rite itself replicated the 2005 reenactment. The *nyonin-shū* and priests gathered in the Enmadō for the funerary rite (from 10:30–10:55). The bridge-crossing process (11:00–11:25) presented the same colorful image, and the procession walked across the bridge in the three-step-pause pace, the same as that of 2005. Following the initiation rite in the Yōbōkan (11:30–11:50), the procession returned to the Enmadō around 12:00. Thereupon followed the “public crossing,” in which one hundred and twenty people participated. This time it was guided by the *shōmyō* chanters and accompanied by a CD recording of *gagaku* music.

In 2009, the Tateyama Museum offered a special exhibition dedicated to “Tateyama’s Earth Goddess Onbasama” (*Tateyama no chibojin Onbasama* 立山の地母神おんばさま). The exhibition was opened to the public between 26 September (the day prior to the *ibento*) and 3 November 2009. It featured a partial reconstruction of the Edo-period inner hall of the Unbadō, and displayed eleven *ubason* statues, along with various historical documents and ritual implements. On the day of the *ibento*, following the *Nunohashi* rite, two guided tours and lectures were offered for free in the museum (at 13:00 and at 14:00).

REACTIONS TO THE “HEISEI REENACTMENTS” OF 2005, 2006, AND 2009

Not surprisingly, in 2005 and 2006, and again in 2009, the women’s reactions were almost identical to those of 1996. The same words were repeated, and the same feelings were expressed, with even greater enthusiasm. Again, the participants felt a strong sense of *communitas* with their fellow initiates, a sense of purification (*kiyomareru* 清まれる) and spiritual cleansing (*arawareru* 洗われる), and a surge of energy. Some felt becoming “no-mind” (*mushin* 無心), or experienced “emptiness” (*kū* 空); and some were moved by the beautiful natural scenery. There was elation, a feeling of mystery (*fushigi na kanji* 不思議な感じ); there was renewal of the soul; renewal or a change of life (*iki naoshi* 生き直し; *yomigaeru* 蘇る); a feeling of being born again (*umare kaware* 生まれ変われ); a sense of experiencing paradise (*gokuraku*; *anoyo* あの世), of meeting dead relatives. They all reported that their hearts filled with emotion (*mune ga ippai* 胸がいっぱい) and that their tears flowed out of control (*namida o nagashita* 涙を流した) as a reaction to a deeply moving (*kandō* 感動), unforgettable, life-changing experience. Many said they had a chance to reexamine and better themselves (*jibun o mitsume naoshi* 自分を見つめ直し); and all were thankful and expressed gratitude (*arigatai kimochi* 有難

い気持ち or *kansha* 感謝) for the experience, and wished for the rite to be continued. Interestingly, many now reported being spiritually healed (*iyashi*).⁷⁹

All this attests to the fact that the rite was successful and it still worked its power, in the same way it did before. Only now, in 2005, 2006, and 2009, the ritual was performed with the intention of having this experience occur. The women hoped for it and expected it, and the media reporters were waiting for it.

Let us look at some of these reactions. At the end of the outdoor *gagaku* performance in 2005 I talked with a few participants, who seemed energetic even after their long day in the hot sun. Asahina Yōko told me: “At first I did not believe there is any value in that *ibento* and wondered if I should participate. But when I did, I felt my heart revealing itself (*kokoro wa arawareta* 心は現れた) and I shed tears.” Shimizu Katsue (77, from Aichi) told me: “My heart was pounding so much that I was at a loss for words.”⁸⁰ Their friend added, “I felt I went to the other world (*ano yo e ikimashita*).”

Okada Kyōko (in her 60s), a second-time participant, granted me a phone interview (on 22 September 2005). Nine years later she still recalled her past experience vividly. At that time she was told it would be only an *ibento*, a show for the cultural festival, so she did not expect to feel anything. But when she wore white and crossed the bridge she had a very powerful experience. She felt like being born again (*iki naoshi*). When the wall was raised in the Yōbōkan she felt as if she was a “baby in her parents’ hands,” and her tears poured down, her heart filled till she choked with tears. She was moved in the same way this time as well. She said she became close friends with other participants, they felt like sisters who shared the same path under the kami and Buddha. For them, it did not feel like an *ibento*.

Similar reactions were recorded in the media. In one television program, the reporter asked an elder woman how she felt, and she answered, “I felt like I was cleansed from inside, purified.” He then asked her, “how was the feeling of the other world (*anoyo*)?” And even before he finished his question she exclaimed happily: “It’s paradise! I went to paradise! (*Gokuraku desu! Gokuraku e ikimashita!*)”⁸¹ This

79. These expressions were recorded in the newspapers and the media: for example, in the NET 3ワイド program (aired 18 September 2005) one woman said: “my heart jumped, I felt I was going to the other world (*anoyo*), it was a mysterious feeling (*fushigi na kanji*).” In the same program, the *indōshi* Mr. Arai remarked that he was very moved and felt renewed by crossing the bridge (interview conducted 23 May 2006).

80. Elsewhere she said she felt a sense of “no-self” (*muga* 無我) and was filled with emotions she could not explain. Though she was not particularly religious, she said she felt the sacredness of the mountain and the kami presence there (see also *Yomiuri shinbun*, 14 October 2005, and *Asahi shinbun*, 19 September 2005, 29).

81. From the KNB TV (Kita Nippon hōsō) program *Nyūzu purasu 1* (News Plus 1), broadcast 19 September 2005.

is a significant point to note, because here the reporter asked the woman a leading question, anticipating her “feeling of the other world”: that is now expected. In the BBT (Toyama Television) program *Nunohashi kanjōe—Jidai o koete*, some women said they came to renew themselves; personal renewal is now expected. Others expressed emotions: one woman said through her tears that she met her deceased mother on the bridge. A sobbing Fukami Takako said that she could not stop her tears and did not know why.⁸² The narrator remarked that this rite grants great emotional energy to women, even today.

The print media followed this new attitude as well, and newspapers now reported on the revival of the “*Nunohashi* rite of healing and spiritual renewal.”⁸³ Again, most newspapers reported the women’s reactions emphatically, noting that they “welled up with tears.”⁸⁴ I briefly quote a few representative examples: The actress Ms. Tsurugi said that she had a chance to “reexamine and better herself”; and Imabori Tomoko, 22, a student from Tenri University who is studying the rite for her graduation thesis, said that when she walked on the bridge, she “sensed the boundary between this and the other world” (*Kita Nippon shinbun*, 19 September 2005, 28). Nakada Mutsuko (73), who participated in 2005 for the second time, said that when she crossed the bridge she felt the existence of hell and paradise. In the *Yōbōkan* she felt that something profound lying deep inside of her was called to awaken, a feeling that could not be explained by reason (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 14 October 2005). In 2006, at age seventy-four, she participated for the third time. In a newspaper interview (*Asahi shinbun* 18 September 2006) and in a letter to the organizers she discloses that, having the experience of being “born again,” she can now reflect on herself and on her past.⁸⁵

82. The program followed Fukami Takako and her husband Hideshi (see note 20). A few months after the rite the reporter visited their residence to examine the rite’s long-lasting effect, and found that Ms. Fukami had since undergone a cancer operation, and that participating in the ritual had helped her endure it mentally.

83. See the *Yomiuri shinbun*, 19 September 2005, 27. Also: “The *Nunohashi* rite... enacted today as a healing (*iyashi*) place for modern stress-ridden women” (*Asahi shinbun*, 19 September 2005, 30); “Women who reexamine and better their lives” (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 14 October 2005), the first title in Mr. Fukushima’s series “Tateyama Faith Alive Today” (*ima ni ikiru Tateyama shinkō* 今に生きる立山信仰), published in the *Yomiuri shinbun*, 14–19 October 2005. For this article he interviewed Nakada Mutsuko, Shimizu Katsue, and Noma Kiyomi (see below). I am grateful to Mr. Fukushima for sharing his in-depth interviews with me.

Since 2005, the phrase *iyashi no dentō gyōji to shite okonawareta* has been commonly attached to announcements or reports about the rite (for an example see *Toyama shinbun*, 28 September 2009).

84. For example, Funasaki Setsuko (62, from Uotsu City): “I was profoundly moved and my heart welled up” (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 19 September 2005, 27).

85. Ms. Nakada remembers the mandala *etoki* in her home from age eleven. Even as a child she was shocked by the pictures of hell and enraged at the thought that women were unclean and could not climb the mountain. In the Ashikuraji of 1954, women still did not cross the bridge to the

Noma Kiyomi (54), the principle of Ashikuraji's municipal elementary school,⁸⁶ remembered her dead mother on the bridge, and cried. In the dark Yōbōkan she felt like “a protected baby in the womb.” When she took off her blindfold, she felt “it is good to be alive!” She adds, “I felt a moment of awe, a numinous feeling unrelated to any particular religion” (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 14 October 2005).

If media attitudes had changed drastically in 2005, they did so to an even greater degree in 2006. As mentioned, almost identical reactions were reported in 2006. By now, however, the women's experiences in the *Nunohashi* rite had obviously become a popular media item. The emotional reactions and feelings of spiritual elation during the rite became a focus for many reports, again dwelling on tears. Expressions repeated themselves, some becoming more emphatic:⁸⁷ “I felt happiness at being alive” (*ikiru yorokobi o kanjita*); “I was confronted with myself (*jibunjishin to mukiaeta* 自分自身と向き合えた).” All detailed their deep emotions (and their tears), which they now expected, as testified by Ikihara Chisato: “I was very moved just as I hoped” (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 18 September 2006).

The oldest participant, ninety-year-old Ikehata Kiko (from Toyama), was naturally a media darling in 2006. Excited and spirited, she talked to the camera just after the conclusion of the rite,⁸⁸ conveying gratitude to kami and Buddha. In a newspaper interview she described how she felt engulfed and drowned by the wave of music in the Yōbōkan: “I became *mushin*. It was a feeling of happiness. When the light came in, my tears flowed without control.”⁸⁹

graveyard; so to walk beyond the graves was “a treasure” (*takaramono* 宝物) for her. She now sees Tateyama as a sacred mountain. From her ritual participation she learned that it is not enough to understand this world through reason; one must understand it through experience (*taiken*).

86. Ms. Noma climbed Mt. Tateyama several times, but its constant presence in her school window makes her feel that “the mountain is always watching,” and she understands why people worshiped it. For her the rite was a good chance for self-introspection. She said that most of the women she talked to felt the same.

87. Most of the following reactions are summarized from several newspaper reports from the day following the rite, 18 September 2006: *Kita Nippon shinbun*, *Hokuriku Chūnichin shinbun* 北陸中日新聞, *Toyama shinbun*, *Yomiuri shinbun*, *Mainichi shinbun*, and the *Asahi shinbun*. *Kita Nippon shinbun* ran additional, longer articles on the 25 and 27 September 2006. Some of these newspapers sponsored the *ibento*.

88. As seen in the NET 3 program *Iyashi motome Nunohashi kanjōe*, 癒し求め布橋灌頂会 (The Cloth-Bridge Initiation Rite, Seeking Spiritual Healing). Broadcast October–November 2006.

89. She is quoted on 18 September 2006 in *Kita Nippon shinbun* and *Asahi shinbun*. There was a discernable difference in the reactions according to age. Older women expressed feelings of repentance and elation, while younger ones used more sober expressions (though they too were “deeply moved”). A student from Toyama University offered the youthful “I did it! (*Yatta ne!*)” One exceptionally skeptical view was that of young Shimoda Sanae. In a newspaper article she recounted, tongue in cheek, her bridge-crossing experience: stumbling, being pushed from behind, her hat hitting the one before her, thereby gaining no chance for enlightenment on the path. She did not

Henmi Jun, the second-time representative of the women participants, commented on her experience. In those ten years that had elapsed since her first visit, she had lost her parents and her health had deteriorated. Compared to the 1996 *bunkasai* where she participated as an organizer, this time her heart had “expended its borders,” and she felt something so deep that she could not convey it in words. Like Ms. Henmi, several women commented on how their lives were changed by their powerful experience. To give one example, Suzuki Takako (58, housewife), confessed that she used to be an uncompromising, angry person, but thanks to her wonderful experience she had changed her outlook on her daily life (*Kita Nippon shinbun*, 25 September 2006).⁹⁰ Those feelings were also reflected in private letters to Tateyama’s municipal offices.⁹¹ Again, in both 2005 and 2006, these individual letters reflected reactions and themes similar to those reported in the media, only with somewhat greater intimacy. All letters expressed gratitude for the rare opportunity to gain such a wonderful experience. Some intimated that it pushed them to become better people. All reflected on their powerful experience with the same descriptions of soul renewal, of being healed, of a physical sensation of elation, and of flowing tears. Some even related significant religious experiences. For example, one writer described how during the rite she miraculously “rose above the road and above the cedars, and felt mystical (*shinpiteki* 神秘的) peace and harmony.”

By 2009, the strong emotional reactions had become reportable facts, and as expected identical to those in previous years.⁹² Again, participants recalled dead relatives, felt that they had “confronted themselves,” or told how moved they were in the Yōbōkan where their hearts overflowed with emotion and their tears were shed uncontrollably.⁹³ They felt grateful, and purified; and of course, they spoke of feeling renewed, and of being reborn.⁹⁴

share the other’s feelings, and was told by her fellow initiates that, at age twenty, one has no regrets yet; only after fifty does one have reasons for repentance (*Asahi shinbun*, 18 September 2006).

90. Ms. Suzuki could not find words to describe her feelings. When she put on her blindfold all sounds around her became far, her strength disappeared, and her heart became “*ssuuuuuuun*.” In the Yōbōkan she was so moved that her tears poured ceaselessly, and she remained dazed like this for a while.

91. These private letters of thanks to the organizers must remain anonymous here.

92. These reactions were reported in articles that appeared in the *Kita Nippon shinbun*, *Hokuriku Chūnichi shinbun*, *Toyama shinbun*, *Yomiuri shinbun*, *Mainichi shinbun*, and *Asahi shinbun* in the days following the rite, from 28 September 2009 and onwards.

93. For example, see Nakaya Yoshiko (78), quoted in the *Asahi shinbun*, 28 September 2009; Arisawa Michiko (62), in *Kita Nippon shinbun*, 28 September 2009, 28; and Yamada Emiko (74), in *Kita Nippon shinbun*, 5 October 2009.

94. Tanabe Teruko (61) had a “strong sense of being alive”; Takahashi Setsuko (61) said, “I felt that I was born again, and with this feeling I want to go on living” (*Kita Nippon shinbun*, 28

Judging from the reactions of 2005, 2006, and 2009, we see that the ritual had acted upon its participants in the exact same manner it had a decade before, in 1996: it had created a deep spiritual experience in most of the participants. The only difference was in the expectations: in 1996, the great emotional wave came as an overwhelming surprise, while in 2005, and even more so in 2006 and 2009, the participants expected to be spiritually affected. Furthermore, they participated in the *Nunohashi* rite with the expressed intention to experience its effect of spiritual renewal. Even for those who came without such expectations and ended up feeling moved by the rite, it was not so surprising anymore. As we saw, it was the ritual transformative mechanism itself and its structure as a “rite of passage” with its powerful symbolism of death, change, and rebirth that made this ritual into such a significant experience for its participants.⁹⁵ Thus, as we have seen, whether someone intends it to work or not, the *ritual works*: the *Nunohashi* rite worked its power even in 1996, when it was made to fit into an *ibento* spectacle; and it surely worked in 2005, 2006, and 2009, when it was performed in its full scope and with the expressed intention to enact and enable its powerful transformative effects.

Finally, let us return to the question of the use of a religious ritual in a secular *ibento*, and to the delicate issue of the relation of state and religion, as revealed in the three “Heisei reenactments” of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* at Tateyama.

Tradition, Culture and Religion: What's in a Name?

In the previous pages we saw how the town of Tateyama had devised an ingenious method to circumvent the law separating religion and state, and to enact a Buddhist ritual under the rubric of “traditional culture,” thereby enabling the use of public funds for it, whether municipal, prefectural, or recently even national.⁹⁶ As mentioned, the reenactment of the *Nunohashi* rite in both its ear-

September 2009, 28); Yamada Emiko, a fourth-time participant, said she felt she was born again each time she came (*Kita Nippon shinbun*, 5 October 2009).

95. It is interesting to note that most women pointed to two instances of special emotional impact: one was in the Enmadō, when they put on their white funerary attire and felt detached, separated from the world; and the other was in the Yōbōkan, when they saw the light and were “born again,” and almost universally moved to tears.

96. In 2005 and 2006 the total cost of the *ibento* was twelve million yen, with three million paid by the city of Tateyama, one million by the prefecture, and the rest by participants and sponsors (*Asahi shinbun*, 18 September 2006; the *ibento* of 1996 was sponsored solely by Toyama prefecture, at a higher cost). In 2006 Mr. Funabashi, the then-Mayor of Tateyama, decided after long and heated deliberations that due to financial difficulties in attracting commercial sponsorship the rite would not be performed annually but once every four years (quoted in *Asahi shinbun*, 18 September 2006). In 2009, the *ibento* was made possible by a generous grant of six million yen from the national Agency for Cultural Affairs (*Asahi shinbun*, 28 September 2009).

lier and later versions revealed a fascinating issue: it illuminated the innate tension between the need to declare that the rite was not religious, and between the obvious fact that it was.

To recapture briefly the progress of the reenactments: in 1996 it was Toyama prefecture's turn to celebrate the National Cultural Festival. For that festival they decided to reenact the *Nunohashi kanjōe*—an obsolete ritual that had not been performed for one hundred and thirty years—and present it as their unique local tradition. They chose to reenact the ritual as a spectacle for an audience, in the secular context of an *ibento*. The reenactment was indeed successful, but being embarrassed by the overexcited reactions to it, at that time the organizers decided never to perform it again. However, during the following years the women residents in the area persistently demanded to renew it. So after nine years, the mayor of Tateyama town decided to enact it again, only with a different purpose: it was now to be performed as an experience (*taiken*) ritual, for the sake of the participant women themselves. As we have seen, in 2005, 2006, and 2009 the organizers of this rite redefined their goals, and changed their slogans, their attitude, their advertisements, and the media coverage. They now put emphasis on the “new woman” that awaits beyond the bridge, and on the “healing tradition” this ritual preserves.

The organizers of the reenactment of the *Nunohashi* rite were faced with the question of its religiosity even as they tried to recruit the priests for its performance. As mentioned,⁹⁷ they first turned to the Jōdo Shinshū priests in the area, but they declined the offer. Their refusal was on the ground that the *Nunohashi* rite, the way it was intended to be presented as a spectacle in an *ibento*, was “not religious,” and they did not want to be associated with a show-off production. They would have agreed to perform it only if conducted as a proper religious ritual, a condition that the organizers could not accept.⁹⁸ The organizers then had to look further afield, to Tokyo and Kyoto, this time turning to the Shingon and Tendai *shōmyō* masters to help reconstruct and perform the complex ritual. For both Shingon and Tendai priests, a joint ritual performance is less problematic. And as to the “nonreligious” context of the rite, Arai Kōjun, the Shingon *shōmyō* master, took a different view on the matter: for him it was a rare opportunity to perform a unique, forgotten ritual, and a way to honor Mt. Tateyama and its tradition. As for the demand to make the rite “nonreligious,” we have already seen that for their part, Mr. Arai and his fellow priests performed a proper religious

97. Much of the following information was obtained during an interview conducted on 17 April 2006 with Minabe Hidenori, a Tateyama town official, at that time in charge of the *ibento* in Tateyama's Industrial Tourism Section.

98. In addition, it is also not natural for Jōdo Shinshū priests to accommodate rites from other Buddhist schools, as is required in the case of the *Nunohashi* rite.

ceremony, and gave the women participants a proper *kanjō* initiation. In Mr. Arai's view, he agreed to perform a religious ritual even in the nonreligious context of an *ibento*, and let the organizers worry about the matter.⁹⁹

For the organizers, the choice to enact the rite as a joint Shingon-Tendai performance turned out to be most helpful, for in this way they could consciously sponsor a religious ceremony, but one that does not belong to any one particular sect. This of course opened a range of possibilities to circumvent the problem of the separation of state and religion. The issue returns to the definition of "religion" (*shūkyō* 宗教) in Japanese that usually refers to the institutional dimension of "religion." In Japan, people who define themselves as "religious" are members of a particular religious organization or church (KISALA 2006, 6; READER 1991, 5–12). Thus a ritual combined from several different schools and performed by priests from more than one sect can theoretically "pass" as "nonreligious" (or rather, "not particularly religious"). In this way, while admitting it includes "religious elements" (*yōsō* 様相), the organizers of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* could label the rite as "nonreligious."

At first, to make sure that was indeed the case, the organizers went to all effort, as we saw, to turn the ritual into an *ibento* spectacle. They soon realized that they were playing with fire, because their "nonreligious" ritual ended up inducing powerful religious experiences. This was the cause for the organizers of the 1996 *bunkasai* to decide they would not repeat it; and, as we saw, it was precisely this powerful spiritual effect of the rite that encouraged the Tateyama town officials to try it again, this time as a "traditional ceremony" (*dentōteki gishiki*), in 2005, 2006, and 2009. Thus relying on its mixed-sectarian content and performers, the Tateyama officials regarded this ritual as "nonreligious." In 2005, 2006, and 2009 the *Nunohashi kanjōe* became a "traditional ceremony" enacting the "healing culture" (*iyashi no bunka*) of Mt. Tateyama. Seen as a ritual of healing, it could pass as "tradition," and thus as "culture," and facilitate the use of public funds for its enactment. However, it was still a risky undertaking, for the question of whether the *Nunohashi* rite, even with its multi-sectarian character, is "religious" or not is still debatable.¹⁰⁰

99. Mr. Arai, during an interview conducted on 23 May 2006. This split between the aims of the performers and the audience is a product of the modern-age industries of tourism and entertainment. Richard SCHECHNER (1988, 136–38) has commented on this phenomenon, pointing to instances where performers might conduct a religious rite while their audience attends staged entertainment, as was the case of Buddhist monks performing *shōmyō* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. As a *shōmyō* ensemble leader who performed abroad, Mr. Arai was no doubt familiar with such situations.

100. Mr. Arai recounted that he suggested advertising the *Nunohashi* rite by performing it on the National Theatre (Kokuritsu Gekijō) stage, but was turned down by the Ministry of Education on the grounds that it is a "religious ritual." However, he did succeed, after a long struggle, to

The solution to the problem has been at work for some time now. I refer to the familiar trend of using a different label in order to come to terms with the dilemma of religion and state. It has by now become a commonplace practice in Japan to make a traditional *matsuri* into an *ibento*, or to translate community rituals into “cultural festivals.” As is well known, so much was traditional *matsuri* taken out of context that the word itself has long since lost its exclusive religious meaning and has come to include all manner of secular celebrations. And although many local folk events still retain their old powers, it is no longer strange to harness the kami to sponsor weekend bazaars. Local *matsuri* are not organized by a “church” or by a specific religious institution, so their status is more fluid. Thus we encounter many *kami matsuri* that feature forms of dance, music, and theatrical performances—labeled as “folk performing arts” (*minzoku geinō*). These folk “performing arts” often consist of a ritual, in which officiating priests summon kami and worship them to gain their blessings, the performing arts constituting this very worship. It’s all in the name: “folk performing arts” are not “religion”; as “arts” they are “culture,” and therefore can enjoy government funding—this has become government policy in preserving its own traditional culture (while circumventing its own laws).¹⁰¹ However, the case is different when it comes to Buddhist rituals, for these are considered to be “religious,” and the state does not sponsor religious activities.¹⁰²

As FORMANEK rightly remarked (1998, 184), getting rid of its Buddhist heritage and turning its worship into a spiritual tradition devoid of religion would prove difficult at Tateyama. However, contrary to her former observation, the Japanese may no longer try to cleanse their holy mountains of religion, especially of Buddhism. In fact, we have just described at some length the appearance of a new reverse trend at Mt. Tateyama: to revive its lost tradition and adapt it to modern-day ends, both economical (encouraging tourism) and spiritual (healing).

The organizers of the reenactment of the *Nunohashi kanjōe*, in their endeavors to harness its powers for contemporary needs, used the catchy New Age concept of “healing” (*iyashi*). We have already noted how this new attitude was

persuade the ministry to include *shōmyō* as part of the traditional music curriculum in schools. The ministry first objected to that on the same grounds that it was “religious music,” but finally allowed it, providing it would be instructed jointly by two or more sects (for example, a joint Shingon-Tendai instruction), thus avoiding a particular religious affiliation (Mr. Arai, in an interview conducted on 23 May 2006).

101. For a summary of national policies on cultural preservation see HASHIMOTO 1998.

102. A documentary film producer once told me that he encountered a similar attitude from the ministry when he applied for financial support: his requests were easily approved if it was a *matsuri* he wished to document, but refused if it was a Buddhist event. He bitterly observed that it was “as if State Shinto was still alive.”

variously reflected in the media: in the focus and way of presentation, in the titles of articles and televised programs, and in the questions asked by reporters. The *Nunohashi* rite was now taken as a ritual for healing the hearts of modern-day women in their stressful lives.¹⁰³ The organizers emphasized this new characteristic in every public speech and media interview. For one example, Saeki Nobuharu (head of the organizing committee) stressed the contemporary importance of this rite, saying that nowadays, with the bleak daily news, “it is just the time when healing of the heart is needed.” A healing, he believes, that can be found in Ashikuraji’s unique cultural tradition, and thus must be preserved (*Kita Nippon shinbun*, 27 September 2006).¹⁰⁴

The idea that there is a need to “return to the spiritual heart of Japan” was heard already in the *bunkasai* of 1996 (TFH 1997, 15; 22; 27). In the later *ibento* of 2005, 2006, and 2009 the idea was still maintained, but from a different angle. Now the emphasis was put on the healing of the hearts of *individual* Japanese women in this stressful modern world, and it presented the *Nunohashi* rite as a traditional Japanese healing technique, that only Ashikuraji, at the foot of Mt. Tateyama, could offer. In other words, the *Nunohashi* rite is “traditional ceremony,” and thus “traditional culture,” meaning it is *Japanese* traditional culture. From this it follows that this “traditional culture” does not belong solely to Mt. Tateyama: rather, Mt. Tateyama is the stage where the Japanese traditional culture of healing is played out. Still, as Mr. Saeki emphasized, this tradition is to be found uniquely in Tateyama. Thus the universal (Japanese) and local (Tateyama town) stages of “traditional culture” are conceptually united here, in a new and sophisticated mandalic reasoning.

Credit is thus due here: to reenact the *Nunohashi* rite and harness it for modern-day aims was indeed a bold and daring move on behalf of the Tateyama town organizers. However, we must not forget that this “New Age” move (in 2005, 2006, and 2009) to turn the women’s salvation ritual into one of women’s “spiritual healing” in fact draws a full circle “return to origins.” It brings the

103. For example: *Kita Nippon shinbun*, 18 September 2006: “Crossing the vermilion bridge seeking healing: conducted again this year as a modern healing rite” (*iyashi motome shuhashi watari: kotoshi mo gendai no iyashi no gyōji to shite okonawareta* 癒し求め朱橋渡—今年も現代の癒しの行事として行われた). See other examples in note 83 above.

104. He repeated this in 2009 (*Kita Nippon shinbun*, 28 September 2009). Another passage reads: “The *Nunohashi* rite was renewed for the health and pacification of the heart. The organizers allowed spectators to cross the bridge as well because they wanted to do it not as a religious ritual but as a rite of self introspection” (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 19 September 2005, 27). Again, Tateyama Museum’s Curator, Yonehara Hiroshi, said in his closing speech at the 2005 symposium that it was now the time for investigating human emotion, and learning about Tateyama might lead us to better the world (*Yomiuri shinbun*, 14 October 2005). In 2009, Mr. Ino of Tateyama’s Tourism Office remarked that personal anxiety has not changed in the modern age, and therefore Ashikuraji’s “healing tradition” is still potent today (*Kita Nippon shinbun*, 24 September 2009).

Nunohashi rite back to its historical, original purpose and function: to use the religious promise of birth in Amida's Pure Land in order to economically enliven the area of Ashikuraji. As Professor Fukue has remarked,¹⁰⁵ this is the way it was in the Edo period: the *Nunohashi* rite was originally an *ibento*, performed for economic reasons—to sustain the village of Ashikuraji—at the very same time that it was a salvific ritual, performed for deprived women who wished to calm their troubled souls and be assured of a blessed afterlife. The modern-day adaptation of “spiritual healing” echoes that ancient promise of salvation.

In light of this, we could coin the reenactment of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* as a “discourse of the reappearing.” Having been extinct for one hundred and thirty years, it underwent a gradual process of revival: it was first reenacted as a display of local heritage in 1996; then in the first decade of the twenty-first century it was refitted to suit modern demands and conducted for its old-new purposes. The rite has thus revolved into its (almost) original form of transformatory ritual, performed for its (almost) original functions, both economic and spiritual. The *Nunohashi* rite may thus be seen as a “reappearing tradition.”

In the modern reenactment of the *Nunohashi kanjōe* at Mt. Tateyama we witnessed an attempt to sponsor a Buddhist ritual through government funding, by shifting its categorization from “religious ritual” to “traditional culture.” As far as I know, it is the first attempt of this kind in Japan. Will it remain a lonely incident, unique to Tateyama? Or are we witnessing the emergence of a new trend of transforming Buddhist rites into “traditional culture”? In other words, will Buddhist institutions follow in the footsteps of the shrines and turn their equivalents of *minzoku geinō* into *iyashi bunka*? This, time will tell, and we should be watching.

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105. Fukue is quoted in the 2005 BBT (Toyama Television) program *Nunohasho kanjōe—Jidai o koete*; also personal communication, September 2005.

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