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The Cloth Bridge Consecration rite

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APPENDIX 2: THE CLOTH BRIDGE CONSECRATION RITE

There were 85 participants in the rite in 2014. In the morning between 7:00 and 9:00, all the participants gathered in the gym of the local elementary school. NHK television journalists were waiting in front of the school entrance to interview the participants.

In the gym, we were changed into the white robes with the help of local women. Each of the participants was assigned a number which we found with white garments and belts prepared for us on the floor of the gym. The belts were of green, blue, orange and burgundy colours. We brought our own undershirt *hadajuban* 肌襦袢, prayer rosary *juzu* 数珠 and special socks for the sandals *zōri* 草履. Those who were dressed were waiting at a table with drinks. Some of participants asked me to take pictures with them.

Later we encountered a Shingon Buddhist priest who instructed us about the ritual. He explained how to respond to the prayers during the rite in the Enma Hall and how to cross the bridge in a three-steps-pause pace. Then we were divided into two groups and at 9:15 a bus took us to the Enma Hall. There we encountered journalists again. They were asking about our impressions and where we come from.

The rite began in the Enma Hall. We entered the Enma Hall and sat in *seiza* 正座 position (with legs folded underneath one's thighs) on designated spots marked by our numbers. The ritual in the Enma Hall lasted twenty minutes, from 10:20 to 10:40. There were eight Buddhist priests present in the Enma Hall. Two of them handed to each of us a spice seed which we inserted between our teeth. They also distributed among us spice powder which we placed into our left palm. We covered the powder inside our palms with our right hand and flipped our palms over three times. Then we spread the powder over our chests. This was a purification part of the *zange* 懺悔 (confession) ritual. We departed Enma Hall and gathered outside. Then we formed three rows, put on straw hats and covered our eyes. However, by looking down we could still have a glimpse of the pathway. We proceeded from the Enma Hall down the stone stairs known as *Myōnen saka* 明念坂 to the



Fig. 39: Ritual in the Enma Hall. Photograph provided by the Tateyama town office.



Fig. 40: Participants led by the indō group. Photograph provided by the Tateyama town office.



Fig. 41: Encounter of the indō group with the raigō group. Photograph provided by the Tateyama town office.



Fig. 42: Ritual in the Yōbōkan. Photograph provided by the Tateyama town office.



Fig. 43: Participants receiving kanjō 灌頂. Photograph provided by the Tateyama town office.

Cloth Bridge. Assistants were guiding our steps all the way down the stairs. After a short stop in front of the bridge we began to walk across the bridge led by a group of priests, a *yamabushi* and musicians. We were walking according to the instructions in a three steps pace 'left-right-left' accompanied by *gagaku* music and chants. Between 11:00 and 11:30 we met with a group of priests coming towards us from the other side of the bridge. We crossed the bridge led by the group and proceeded to the Yōbōkan 遥望館 (another hall). There we sat on the floor in *seiza* position and took off the straw hats. Our eyes were still blinded by the cloth. This time we could not see anything as it was dark inside the room. At that point the hall resonated in chanting of *nenbutsu* 念仏 and other prayers – based on which prayer the participants felt comfortable with (this was in accordance with the instructions given to us by the Buddhist priest in the morning). The chanting and the sounds of instruments grew stronger until the point when a bell rang quietly. Then we were allowed to take off the cloth wrapped over our eyes. At that moment the wall of the hall rose up revealing the view of the Tateyama Mountain Range. After a short contemplation, two Buddhist priests approached each participant with a stick to provide a powder *kanjō* (consecration). The ceremony in the Yōbōkan was performed from 11:45 to 12:10. After a short speech by a priest, we were led across the bridge back towards the Enma Hall where we came across the journalists again.

We were transferred to the elementary school around 12:30 by buses. After that, we changed our clothes and ate a lunch-box. The food was a special vegetarian meal made from vegetables and rice. As we were ritually re-born, it was prepared in the same style as a *hōji* 法事 – burial feast. Each of us received amulets and cookies depicting an image of a blindfolded woman participant in the straw hat with the bridge in the background.

