

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Same-Family Case of the Reincarnation Type in Japan

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Submitted September 1, 2016; Accepted October 27, 2016; Published December 15, 2016

Abstract—In prewar Japan the idea of reincarnation was prevalent, and it was widely believed that a deceased person would often come back to the same family. There appears to have been many same-family cases of the reincarnation type (CORT), which have been anecdotally reported by monks and folklorists (e.g., Takatsuka 2005, Yanagida 2013). Generally speaking, the possibility of reincarnation is not seriously considered in contemporary Japan,¹ but some family CORT do occur. In this article, a same-family CORT with two notable features is reported: (i) The cause of death of the past-life personality was suicide; (ii) The child claimed to have life-between-life memories,² which might be regarded as one important source of information about what can happen after one commits suicide (Klimo & Heath 2006).

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

This is a case in which a young man who had passed away by committing suicide appears to have come back to his mother by being born to his half-sister. I came to know the case through a Japanese documentary movie titled *A Promise with God*, featuring children claiming to have prenatal memories including life-between-life and past-life memories (Ogikubo 2013), in which 9-year-old Kazuya talked about his experiences after he died in his previous life. The producer/director of the film allowed me to watch the original interview video with Kazuya, which lasts about two hours. In the video, Kazuya did not talk about his past-life memories in detail, so it is mainly a source of his life-between-life memories. Before the interview, the main source of information about his past-life was a book written by Kazuya's grandmother, Minamiyama Midori (hereafter Midori), who is a counselor and therapist.³ The book (Minamiyama 2014) contains stories of children claiming to have prenatal memories, one of which is Kazuya's. After Skyping twice with Midori and once with Kazuya, I interviewed with them on February 13, 2016, when Kazuya was 11 years and 10 months old. On that day I also interviewed with Kazuya's mother Izumi, and also three

other children and their mother Toko. These children, Masatoshi (male, born in 2002), Haruka (female, born in 2004), and Soshi (male, born in 2008) are of no direct relevance to Kazuya's past-life memories reported here, but they claim to have been with Kazuya in the life-between-life state. So, I will discuss their memories in the section that reports Kazuya's life-between-life memories. Two of the three children, Masatoshi and Haruka, also appeared in the movie and talked about their life-between-life memories with Kazuya.

After completing and submitting the first draft, I heard from Midori that Kazuya had met two women whom Jun had trained in basketball when they were sixth-graders. I had telephone interviews with the women and Kazuya about the incidents, so I will also report about them.

Previous Personality

Jun was born as the second son of Midori and her first husband on September 21, 1975. Their first child and Jun's elder brother Makoto had been born on March 11, 1973. Soon after Jun was born, Midori got a divorce and her parents (Jun's grandparents) helped Midori raise Jun and his elder brother. Because of this, Jun particularly loved his grandparents. Later, Midori married another person and a daughter Izumi was born on February 1, 1980. When Jun was 5 years old, he collapsed from an epileptic seizure and started taking medication. He was medicated until he was a little more than 20 years old. In 1997, when he was 21, he tried to help Izumi's classmates when they got into trouble with gangsters and were badly hurt in a fight.⁴ After that he began to reluctantly associate with the gangsters. His family, especially his mother Midori, made every effort to put an end to their relationship. Jun promised Midori a couple of times to break off relations with them, but the promise was not fulfilled. On December 19, 1997, Jun made another promise to Midori to put an end to his relation with the gangsters and left home to meet them. At that time, Midori, who had quit the job she had had, went to a work-skill training institute. While she was at the institute, Midori received a telephone call from a man who had claimed that he would be able to help Jun leave the group. He was with Jun and told Midori that his attempt was unsuccessful. Midori was upset and told Jun via the man to come to the institute to discuss the issue with her. When Jun unwillingly came there, Midori severely criticized him. Overwhelmed by her fury and his own sense of guilt, Jun dashed away from the institute. On the night of the same day, Midori received a telephone call from the police, who told her that Jun had committed suicide by jumping from a bridge over a highway. The estimated time of his death was 11:45 p.m.

Some Incidents Suggesting the Survival of Jun's Consciousness

After Jun's death, Midori was suffering from a deep sense of remorse that her words had triggered her son's suicide. She even felt: "I would willingly sell my soul to the devil if I can see Jun again." On the seventh day after Jun's death, a little past 11:00 p.m., Midori heard a loud knocking at the front hall door. The dog they kept at that time dashed under Midori's bed and was shaking with fear. Midori felt instinctively that Jun had come back. Despite herself she said: "Jun, go back. This is not where you belong." Midori, who had been so longing to see Jun, did not understand why she had said that. As if responding to her words, the loud knocking ceased. After the incident, Midori came to be overwhelmed by an additional sense of guilt: She felt she had severed her tie with her son for the second time.

About half a year after Jun's death, Jun began to appear in Midori's dreams and admonish her. Night after night he said: "You should forgive them. You should not blame anyone." Her reply in her dream was always: "No, I can't forgive them," to which Jun said: "You should forgive them. It was my own fault that I committed suicide, not theirs. Seeing you lament like that makes me sad, and I can't go back to the Light. So, please don't blame anyone."

Midori did not remember when the conversations with Jun in her dreams ended, but she said that his words had gradually calmed her down.⁵

Kazuya's Statements and Behaviors

Kazuya was born to Izumi, Midori's daughter (Jun's half-sister), and her husband on April 8, 2004, 50 days before the estimated date of confinement, weighing 1,198 grams (2 lbs., 10.5 oz.), and he was immediately admitted to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU). He was discharged after 50 days, but was asthmatic as well as atopic (developing allergic hypersensitivity reactions), and had to see a doctor regularly. He also had cryptorchidism and underwent surgery when he was one year old. Shortly after Kazuya was born, Izumi and Kazuya came to live with Midori, so Midori has had ample opportunity to observe Kazuya's development.

Kazuya's statements and behaviors suggestive of his previous personality, Jun, are summarized in Table 1.

The incident described in **Item 11 in Table 1** was a crucial one to Midori. Because of the statements and behaviors Kazuya had shown so far, Midori had become almost convinced that Kazuya had been Jun reborn. Kazuya's statements endorsed Midori's conviction, but at the same time reminded Midori of the fact that Kazuya is not Jun and that she should treat him as an independent person.

To Izumi, Kazuya's mother, the evidence of her half-brother Jun coming back as Kazuya has been abundant, but especially overwhelming was the incident described in **Item 9 in Table 1**. Both Midori and Izumi were present when Kazuya called Jun's best friend by the nickname Jun used to call her, which Kazuya had had no way to know. The three of them (Midori, Izumi, and Jun's friend) could not hold back tears.

At the time of the interview, Kazuya (11 years and 10 months old) said that his memories as Jun had faded and he did not remember specific details of his statements and behaviors (listed in Table 1), except the incident described in **Item 14 in Table 1**, which happened shortly before the interview. However, he said that he still had memories of the place where he had stayed after his death in his past life, which we will discuss in the next section.

Kazuya's Life-Between-Life Memories

Children with past-life memories sometimes claim to have life-between-life memories.⁶

Kazuya also had such memories, which he talked about in the 2013 documentary movie (Ogikubo 2013). At the time of the interview, he still had the memories, which are summarized as:

After I died, I regretted committing suicide and entered the 'reflection room,' a dark room for the dead who regrets what s/he has done while s/he was alive. I was there for a while, reflecting on my past conduct, and when I felt I would be able to start over again, I decided to be born to my Mama. I have come here to give 'presents' to those who I had hurt before [= to make those I had hurt before happy].

Midori also recalled that when they went to Asahina Kiridoshi, one of the seven old passes in Kamakura for the first time, Kazuya said to Midori: "Here, here. I was looking at this place from the sky!" He also said: "I have been here before."⁷ Kazuya was three years old at that time. When Kazuya was five years old, Midori again took him to the place, and he repeated that he had been looking at the place from the sky.

As for suicide cases he investigated, Stevenson (2001:219–220) states:

Twenty-nine of the approximately 2,500 subjects remembered the lives of persons who had killed themselves. Four of these deceased persons had accidentally shot themselves (two when they grasped a loaded gun by the barrel and it discharged, and two while cleaning a loaded gun). Two others had killed themselves rather than be killed by police or soldiers

TABLE 1
Statements and Behaviors Related to Kazuya's Past Life

Item	Age	Kazuya's Statement/Behavior
1	8 months old	On December 19, 2004, at about 11:45 p.m. (the month and day and estimated time of Jun's death), he started to cry and with a gesture urged his mother to take him upstairs to the room where Jun had lived. When taken there, he stopped crying and smiled.
2	1 year old	Suddenly stopped crying when he saw a drawing of a scene from <i>Suho's White Horse</i> drawn by Jun when he was in second grade.
3	Around 9 months to 2 years old	Showed great affection to his great-grandfather, reminding Midori and Izumi of the affection Jun had shown him. From about 9 months old, he visited his hospitalized great-grandfather every day and wiped his face as shown in Figure 1 until his death.
4	1 year to 2 years old	Called his great-grandfather <i>otosan</i> meaning "father," as Jun had done.
5	1 year to 11 years old	Showed great affection to his great-grandmother, reminding Midori and Izumi of the affection Jun had shown her. Figure 2 shows Kazuya celebrating his great-grandmother's birthday at the nursing home. See Item 14 .
6	1 year to 11 years old	Called his great-grandmother <i>okasan</i> meaning "mother," as Jun had done.
7	1 year to present	Called/calls Midori (Jun's mother/Kazuya's grandmother) "mama," not "grandmother" as expected. When told by her mother that Midori was his grandmother, he insisted that she was his mother.
8	1 year to present	Called/calls Izumi (Jun's half-sister, Kazuya's mother) "lichen" as Jun called her, not "mama" as expected.
9	2 years old	When Kazuya met Jun's best friend, who kept coming to his home on the anniversary of his death, he called her by the same nickname as Jun had.
10	2 years old	During an asthma attack, he said to Midori: "I can't breathe, but I won't die. I will live this time."
11	3 years old	In response to Midori's question: "Were you Jun?", he said "When I was born from Mama [= Midori], I was Jun. But now I am Kaju [attempting but unable to say "Kazu"]. I am Kaju, now."
12	5 years old	Kept his medications organized, which reminded Midori of Jun's way of organizing his medications.
13	9 years old	Said: "I could have died of a disease, but I wanted to die early. I didn't face my disease at that time, so I'm now facing it."
14	11 years old	After the funeral and cremation of his great-grandmother (in February 2016), he insisted on carrying the urn in which the ashes were placed until he and his family were back home. He said: "I have finally fulfilled the promise with my mother [Kazuya's great-grandmother, Jun's grandmother] I couldn't fulfill before," which means: When he was Jun, he promised his grandmother that when she became too old to walk, he would carry her on his back, but because of his early death he couldn't fulfill his promise. Now as Kazuya he is carrying her [= her ashes in the urn] and has fulfilled the promise.

who were about to capture them. The remaining twenty-three persons took their own lives when a social situation, such as a bankruptcy or a thwarted love affair, seemed to them worse than death.

If we regard reincarnation as the best interpretation for these cases, they disprove the belief expounded in some religions that persons who commit suicide live in Hell for centuries or even for eternity. They also offer for a person considering suicide the thought that it would not end their troubles but only change their location.

Several of the subjects of this group of cases had phobias about the instrument of the suicide, such as guns or poison. The memory of the suicide did not necessarily extinguish the inclination to suicide. For example, three of the subjects, when frustrated as children, made threats of committing suicide to their parents; a fourth actually killed himself in middle life; and a fifth told me that he would probably commit suicide if he found himself in a situation he judged intolerable. On the other hand, another subject (of an unverified case) told me that the memories of a suicide in a previous life had deterred her from killing herself.

Kazuya's case seems to be more in line with "unfinished business" cases than the suicide cases.

Dr. Ian Stevenson pointed out that past-life personalities in CORT often have "unfinished business," which refers to "someone like a mother who dies and leaves an infant or small children needing her care" (Stevenson 1980:355–358), or "some persons who had debts to pay (or to collect) when they died" (Stevenson 2001:212). It seems that Kazuya's emotions can also be classified as an instance of "unfinished business": He [= Jun] had not shown enough affection toward those who were close to him while he was alive; also, he had hurt them badly through his misconduct culminating in his suicide, but had not compensated them. His sense of "unfinished business" seems to be especially apparently in **Item 14 in Table 1**.

Haraldsson and Matlock (in press, chapter 29), who analyzed in some detail 10 suicide cases reported by Ian Stevenson, Dieter Hassler (2013), and a case they came to know through Facebook, pointed out that the intermission period (from the death of the past-life personality to the birth of the subject) in suicide cases is unusually short: 2 days; 4 weeks; 5 weeks; 4–8 weeks; 8 weeks; 4 months; 10 months; 17 months; 18 months; and 5 years and 9 months. It is longer in Kazuya's case: 7 years and 8 months. However, this longer intermission period may simply be because Jun, Kazuya's past-life personality, who intended to come back to Midori, had to wait for his half-sister's pregnancy.

Another interesting feature of Kazuya's life-between-life memories is that the three children I interviewed all claimed that they had been with Kazuya in the life-between-life state and had promised one another to be

together when they were born. Although neither Midori nor Toko (the mother of the three children) remembered exactly when, by July 2008, when Kazuya was four years old, Kazuya had met them. Midori and Toko remembered that when the three children first met Kazuya (possibly at a seminar for counselors which Midori held), Masatoshi (the eldest of the three children) said: “When we were up there, we promised to be together (on earth),” and the other three seemed to agree with him. According to Midori, Izumi, and Toko, they are so close to each other, and the three children regularly come to Midori’s house to be with Kazuya. Also to the author, who spent more than 6 hours with them, they looked happy about being together.⁸

Although Kazuya and the three children’s life-between-life memories concerning their promise to be together on earth did not have any verifiable elements, two of the three children also had memories comparable to Kazuya’s. Just like Kazuya, Masatoshi (13 years and 9 months old at the time of the interview) and Haruka (12 years and 1 month old at that time) claimed that before they came to the place where the four of them met and promised to be together after they were born, they had spent some time in the ‘reflection room.’ They talked in detail about those memories in the 2013 documentary film, but at the time of the interview they appeared to have faded away and they only remembered the fragmentary impression of the dark place and the sense of guilt due to their misconduct in their past lives. In the movie, Haruka (female) talked about her past-life memories as an egoistic woman living in an Asian country, possibly Mongolia, who was busy spending her family’s money to dress herself up and did not care for her family members at all. After her death, she saw that no one in her family was mourning her death, and she regretted the way of life she had led. So, she entered the ‘reflection room’ and reflected on her past conduct. When she felt she should start over again, she decided to be born again. She also talked about coming to her mother with a ‘present’ to please her. According to her mother, when Haruka was a small child, she was always trying to please her by giving her ‘presents’ such as beautiful leaves, flowers, and stones. In the movie, Masatoshi did not talk about his past-life memories but about the ‘reflection room’ in detail. He emphasized that nobody is forced to enter the room, but those who feel that they did something wrong deliberately enter it to reflect on their conduct. At the time of the interview, he said he vaguely remembered he had participated in war combat in his past life, and what he had done then would probably have been the cause of his entering the ‘reflection room.’ Neither Haruka nor Masatoshi remembered whether their present mother has any connection with anybody in their past-lives.

Kazuya's Birthmark

Children with past-life memories often have birthmarks and birth defects corresponding to wounds, often fatal ones, or other marks on the past-life body (Stevenson 1997). Kazuya had a clear birthmark on his left arm, which was still visible at the time of the interview, as shown in Figure 3. According to Midori, the place of the birthmark corresponds to the burn Jun suffered when he accidentally touched the exhaust pipe of a motorbike at the age of 18 or 19. Kazuya himself did not have any memory of the event, but it is not known whether he had had the relevant memory before since Midori had never asked him about the birthmark.

“Reunion” with Former Students

Jun was a good basketball player, and when he was a high-school student he went to the elementary school he graduated from once or twice a week to train school children in basketball. Among the students trained by Jun in 1994 were twin girls named Mikoto and Tomomi, who were sixth-graders at that time. They both greatly admired Jun, who did not treat them as small kids, like most adults around them did, but as independent persons. Tomomi was especially fond of him and was carrying a picture of him as a kind of charm. After graduating from elementary school, they did not have a chance to meet Jun. Naturally, they were greatly shocked when they heard from their mother in 1997 that Jun had committed suicide. Tomomi kept the picture until she was 19 years old (in 2001). At that time, they did not know Midori. Midori only indirectly knew them. Her first son was a classmate of their older brother, and Midori's mother worked at the same hospital as their mother, but Midori had never met them.

On July 17, 2016, Mikoto, one of the twins, who was now 34 years old, had a “welcome baby” session held at a clinic, where her son had been born two days before. Midori, a counselor and a therapist, was in charge of the session. In a chat with Midori after the session, Mikoto realized that Midori was Jun's mother and talked about her memories of Jun when she was a sixth-grader. Midori talked about the story of Jun and Kazuya.

Mikoto owns a farm, and on September 17, 2016, Midori and Kazuya visited the farm. In a telephone interview on October 17, 2016, Mikoto talked to the author about the meeting:

I was told by Midori that Kazuya was Jun reborn, but it was unbelievable. Jun was tall, and Kazuya is a sixth-grade kid. They were just so different. But during a chat, when I looked at Kazuya's eyes at a close distance, I felt I knew these eyes. Then, I got overwhelmed and I was unable to look at them. I was convinced that Kazuya was Jun.



Figure 1. Kazuya (9 months old) wiping his great-grandfather's face (January 1, 2006).



Figure 2. Kazuya (4 years, 2 months old) celebrating his great-grandmother's birthday (March 8, 2009).



Figure 3. Kazuya's birthmark on his left arm.

About this meeting, Kazuya told the author over the phone on October 18, 2016:

When I first met Mikoto, she told me :“It’s nice meeting you.” I didn’t say that to her because I thought I had met her before. I didn’t recall details, but I felt I knew her very well.

On September 22, 2016, Mikoto’s farm held a harvest festival and her twin sister Tomomi as well as Kazuya and Midori visited her. In a telephone interview on October 17, 2016, Tomomi told the author about the meeting:

I met Kazuya for the first time, but I felt I knew him very well. It might have been because I was told that Kazuya was Jun reborn. But it was such a strange feeling. After the meeting, I did something very strange. It was October 14th. I had a chance to visit the city where Kazuya’s elementary school is located. I went to the school to meet Kazuya and gave him my contact information. I’m an artist. I like being alone, and I don’t usually give my address to anybody, but this time I felt I had to be kept connected with him.

TABLE 2
Criteria for Registering CORT

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| 1. | Prediction of rebirth—not just “I will be reborn” but with some specifying details; for example, selection of next parents |
| 2. | An announcing dream |
| 3. | Birthmarks or birth defects related to previous life—not just any nevus or other blemish; also the birthmark/birth defect should be noticed immediately after birth or within a few weeks |
| 4. | Statements by the subject, as a child, about a previous life—the record of these should not depend on the subject alone: At least one other older person (for example, a parent or older sibling) should corroborate that the subject spoke about a previous life as a child |
| 5. | Recognitions by subject of persons or objects with which the previous personality was familiar |
| 6. | Unusual behavior on the part of the subject—that is, behavior that is unusual in subject’s family and that apparently corresponds to similar behavior shown by the presumed previous personality or that could be conjectured for him/her (for example, a phobia of firearms if the previous personality was fatally shot) |
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In the telephone interview with Kazuya mentioned above, he said: When I first met Tomomi in Mikoto’s farm, I felt I knew her, just like I felt when I first met Mikoto. But I deeply felt so when Tomomi told me to come to her to take a picture.

As for Tomomi’s visit to his school, Kazuya said:

Teachers were making a fuss. An unknown woman, who is not a relative of mine, came to meet me. They appeared to have been asking many questions, but when I entered the room where Tomomi was questioned, the teachers became silent, and it was funny. The meeting with Tomomi was natural to me.

Although Kazuya did not give specific pieces of information that he could not have come to know in the present life, Mikoto and Tomomi’s reactions are noteworthy. It is especially so because neither Mikoto nor Tomomi had ever been acquainted with real cases suggestive of reincarnation.

In this connection, it is worth pointing out that Kazuya, who had never been trained in basketball, is an unusually good basketball player, and according to him he was often asked by his friends why he was so good at playing basketball.

Conclusions

Tucker (2005:27–28) presents six notable features of CORT as shown in Table 2.⁹

The case of Kazuya has **features 2, 3, 4, and 5 from Table 2**, and can be regarded as a good instance of same-family COURT. In addition, the present case involves life-between-life memories of a person who committed suicide in his past-life. As shown above, Dr. Ian Stevenson and his colleagues have collected 29 suicide cases, but none of them report memories in the life-between-life state. This also holds true of the other suicide cases analyzed by Haraldsson and Matlock (in press, Chapter 29). Thus, the present case presents a precious piece of information about what might happen after one commits suicide.

Notes

- * Following the convention in Japanese, the name of the author is written in the order of the family name followed by the given name.
- ¹ To the author's knowledge, there had been no academic papers or books published until 2009 in Japan, when the author presented a case of xenoglossy occurring under hypnotic past-life regression, at a conference.
- ² The term "life-between-life memory" also used in Ohkado and Ikegawa (2014) is slightly different from the term "intermission memory" used by Dr. Ian Stevenson (e.g., Stevenson 1980:50) and others. The former refers to memories of the period between the death of a past-life personality to conception, whereas the latter refers to memories of the period between the death of a past-life personality and birth. I think the term "womb memory" is more appropriate to refer to memories of the period between conception and birth.
- ³ Again, following the convention in Japanese, the name is written in the order of the family name followed by the given name.
- ⁴ The children were also students in a private school Midori managed at that time.
- ⁵ Midori wrote about her dream in her 2013 book. Kazuya's statements and behaviors **2, 7, 10, 11, and 13 in Table 1** were also reported in the book.
- ⁶ Sharma and Tucker (2004) discuss cases of children with past-life memories who also have intermission memories. Ohkado and Ikegawa (2014) argue that children with these memories are to be viewed as subgroups of children with prenatal and perinatal memories in a broader sense. Ohkado (2015) presents results of an Internet-based survey from that perspective. Matlock and Giesler-Petersen (in press) compare intermission memories of Asian and Western children, revealing universal features and cultural variations.
- ⁷ Midori had come to the place a number of times with Jun. So his remark here might have meant that he had been here in his past life as Jun.
- ⁸ I know of two other cases in which girls from different families talked

about their life-between-life memories, saying they had promised to be together on earth. There are many cases in which siblings say they promised to be together on earth while they were in the life-between-life state.

- ⁹ These are used as criteria for registering a given case in the files at the University of Virginia. For registration, a case should meet two or more of the six criteria.

Acknowledgments

This study is approved by the Chubu University Institutional Review Board (#260100). I would like to thank Dr. James Matlock, who read an earlier version of this paper and gave invaluable comments, and two anonymous reviewers of this journal for their helpful comments. I am also grateful to the Helene Reeder Memorial Fund for Research into Life After Death for their financial support and to Ogikubo Norio for allowing me to watch the original interview video with Kazuya. I am particularly grateful to Midori, Kazuya, Izumi, Toko, Masatoshi, Haruka, Soshi, Mikoto, and Tomomi for sharing their time for the present research.

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