

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Same-Family Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Japan

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* Following the convention in Japanese, the name of the author as well as other Japanese names appearing in the article are written in the order of the family name followed by the given name.

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Abstract—This article reports five same-family cases of the reincarnation type occurring in contemporary Japan. The discussion will be within a set of widely adopted operative assumptions set out by Dr. Ian Stevenson and his colleagues: Streams of consciousness survive death of body and become associated with another body at another time, During the intermission period between lives, the discarnate mind retains the ability for psi perceptions and interactions, and may exercise choice in the selection of parents. The theoretical part of the present paper is with the limitation concerning auxiliary assumptions (Sudduth 2016), and the interpretations of the data adopted here (the survival and reincarnation hypotheses) are open to alternative analyses (notably, the Living Agent Psi hypothesis) as pointed out by Braude (1997, 2003, 2013) and Sudduth (2009, 2013, 2016), but it is beyond the scope of the present paper to deal with these issues. Of the five cases, the first three involve a deceased child appearing to be reborn to the same mother. One of the remaining two is a skipped-generation case, in which a deceased mother appears to have been reborn as a child of her daughter. The other is a case in which a deceased child appears to have been reborn as a daughter of his elder brother. This case also involves an “experimental birthmark.”

Introduction

The process of reincarnation may be conceptualized as a stream of consciousness that survives the death of one body and becomes associated with another body at a later time. That this is what is entailed in reincarnation is suggested by memories of the period between lives (the intermission), which are reported in about 20% of cases of the reincarnation type (CORT) (Matlock & Giesler-Petersen 2016, Sharma & Tucker 2004). Intermission

memories portray a continuous experience from death to birth, which may be broken down into three stages: (i) life-between-life, which is further broken down into three stages (from leaving the body and a period closely following death, to a period of time in discarnate existence, to the selection of new parents), (ii) life in the womb, and (iii) birth (Matlock 2017, Matlock & Giesler-Petersen 2016, Ohkado 2015, Ohkado & Ikegawa 2014). During the intermission, the discarnate mind appears to retain the ability to reason and to exercise telepathy, clairvoyance, and psychokinesis (i.e. psi). Veridical perceptions of the material world, sometimes accompanied by interactions with living persons and actions perceived as poltergeist activity, have been reported during the intermission experience (Matlock 2017, Matlock & Giesler-Petersen 2016).

The selection of parents for the next life is a key part of the intermission experience. Stevenson (2001) identified “psychic” and “geographic” factors in the selection of parents. Psychic factors are prominent in cases of reincarnation in the same nuclear or extended family (same-family cases). Geographic factors come into play in many cases in which the previous personality and present family were unacquainted (stranger cases). Although individual choice is common in the selection of parents, there may be spirit assistants in both same-family and stranger cases (Matlock & Giesler-Petersen 2016:19–20).

The version of the survival hypothesis adopted here is the one assuming the strong psychological continuity in the sense of Sudduth (2016). He lists 10 major auxiliary assumptions with some minor additional ones (pp. 220–231). The auxiliary assumptions adopted here are as follows¹: A surviving stream of consciousness of a person P may (i) retain specific memories of P’s antemortem existence, (ii) retain personality traits and skills that characterized P in his/her antemortem existence, (iii) possess knowledge of events taking place in our world after their death, (iv) possess the desire and intention to communicate with the living, and the ability to do so by extrasensory perception and psychokinesis, and (v) produce physical markings associated with important incidents or events in P’s antemortem or postmortem existence. As pointed out by Sudduth (2016), these auxiliary assumptions lack independent evidence so that the reader should understand that the theoretical part of this paper is with this limitation.

With these auxiliary assumptions, we may hypothesize that, especially in societies with strong cultural traditions, culturally prescribed ideas about reincarnation would be carried into death and would influence decisions made in the postmortem state, resulting in observed cultural variations in reincarnation patterns, such as the incidence of same-family vs. stranger cases (Haraldsson & Matlock 2016).²

We may also hypothesize that the way in which a person dies has an impact on his/her mind in death. Thus, while reincarnating in the family and among friends suggests some degree of control over the reincarnation process, there are fewer family and acquaintance cases when deaths were violent, perhaps because violent deaths are unexpected and leave the mind befuddled, unable to make rational decisions after death (Haraldsson & Matlock 2016:270).³ Stranger cases have received the most attention because they are evidentially stronger than family and acquaintance cases, but they appear to be rarer than cases with family connections cross-culturally, and, when geographic factors are taken into account, even in stranger cases we often see a psychic component (Matlock & Giesler-Petersen 2016).

This article reports five same-family cases of the reincarnation type occurring in contemporary Japan. Of the five cases, the first three involve a deceased child appearing to be reborn to the same mother. One of the remaining two is a skipped-generation case, in which a deceased mother appears to have been reborn as a child of her daughter. The other is a case in which a deceased child appears to have been reborn as a daughter of his elder brother. This last case also involves an “experimental birthmark” (Matlock 2017, Stevenson 1997: Vol. 1:803–879, Tucker & Keil 2013).

The Case of Kanon

This is a case⁴ in which a deceased daughter appears to have been reborn as her brother in the same family. I came to know the case through Dr. Ikegawa Akira, an obstetrician and gynecologist, who is the co-author of a paper on “children with life-between-life memories” (Ohkado & Ikegawa 2014). The case involves announcing dreams. Although the child in this case did not claim that he was her sister reborn, he made some striking remarks suggesting that he did have memories as his departed sister. He also played in a conspicuous way so as to remind her mother of the way her daughter played when she was alive.

Kanon was born in the Metropolitan area on July 26th, 2009, and has been living there since. I started communicating with his mother, who is a nurse, via e-mail and Facebook in November 2013, and after a number of exchanges I interviewed Kanon and his parents in person in May 2015. After the interview I talked over the telephone and exchanged Facebook messages with his mother a couple of times. I also talked with one of his mother’s friends (Mikkun’s mother) over the telephone.

The Previous Personality

Kanon has two half-sisters, one named Rika (pseudonym), who was born in January 1995, and Momoka, who was born May 27th, 1997, and died in

January 2004. Kanon appeared to remember the life of Momoka.

Momoka was an active girl who loved to play with her sister using toy rabbits called Sylvanian Families. She often “directed” the play asking her sister to play the role of a certain rabbit figure and to say a certain set of words. For instance, Momoka would say: “Sister, you are this rabbit. Now say ‘Let’s go to the park.’” When her sister said the words, Momoka, acting as a different rabbit figure, would say: “Oh, that’s nice. Let’s go to the park together.”

Her favorite color was pink, which is often regarded as “the color of little girls,” and is the most chosen color in Japan. But in her case, the following fact appeared to make it her particularly favorite color: Her name “Momoka” means the combination of “peach” (= “momo”) and “flower” (= “ka”), and the color pink is also called “peach color” in Japanese, so she regarded pink as her color.

She also loved books, and her mother used to read her a couple of books at bedtime.

When Momoka was three years old, tumors were found in her adrenal glands and she was diagnosed with cancer. After two years of intensive treatment in the hospital, she appeared to have overcome the disease. However, an examination before discharge revealed that she was developing leukemia and she underwent bone-marrow transplantation. Although the operation was successful, in the spring of 2003, the leukemia returned. There being nothing more to do in the hospital, her mother decided to take her home.

In the car from the hospital heading home, Momoka, who her mother believed did not know her real condition, started to say: “I have to go back to the Snow World.” Hiding her shock, her mother replied: “Going back? It’s like Kaguya-hime,⁵ but what will happen if I say: ‘Don’t go?’” Then, she replied: “I will be scolded for being late. But, mom, I will write a letter, saying: ‘Are you OK? Aren’t you lonely?’” It was an unforgettable moment for her mother. After they came home, Momoka’s condition became better for a while, but eventually, on January 24th, 2004, Momoka passed away in her mother’s arms. She was 6 years and 8 months old.

Incidents Suggesting the Survival of Consciousness

A couple of days after Momoka’s funeral, her mother and sister were in the living room together. Suddenly, the room lights went out. The breaker for the living room lights had blown for unknown reasons, but Momoka’s mother and sister interpreted the events as evidence of Momoka’s return.⁶

About six weeks after Momoka’s death, the kindergarten Momoka attended held a graduation ceremony, and Momoka (Momoka’s mother) was

also given a graduation certificate. According to Momoka's mother, some of the graduating children said they could see Momoka. At the ceremony, the names of the graduating children were called one by one. When his/her name was called, the child would make a reply saying: "Yes." When Momoka's name was called, naturally nobody said: "Yes." The ceremony was videotaped by a local broadcasting company and was broadcast in a local TV program. To the surprise of Momoka's mother, a strange noise whose sound tone appeared to correspond to "Yes" (in Japanese) was recorded after Momoka's name was called as if she had made a reply to the call. The present author confirmed this by watching and listening to a video copy of the program recorded by the mother.

Four or five years after Momoka's death, Mikkun (nickname) and his mother had an impressive experience. Mikkun had been with Momoka for a couple of months in the hospital and was discharged a few months after Momoka had passed away. He was still one year old at the time of discharge. Since Mikkun's mother and those around him had not talked about Momoka, apparently he had no chance to get to know about her before her death.

One summer night, Mikkun suddenly told his mother: "Someone has come from the entrance." His mother, who was surprised because she did not see, nor hear anything, said: "Who?" Mikkun replied: "She's saying, 'I'm Momoka. I've come to see you.'" He further said: "There's another [child]." His mother said to him: "Ask for [his/her] name." After muttering something, Mikkun replied: "I asked, but [he/she] wouldn't say," to which his mother replied: "Then, ask Momoka." Then, Mikkun said: "Momoka says [the child is] Yumi." Yumi (pseudonym) was another child who was in the same hospital as Momoka and Mikkun were. Yumi, who was too young to speak, took to Momoka, who often talked to her. Yumi had died about half a year before Momoka, and since his mother had not talked about her either, he had had no way to get to know her. This incident, in which Mikkun talked about Momoka and Yumi, with whom he had spent some time in the same hospital but had had no way to remember, was an unforgettable one to his mother, and when I talked with her over the telephone, she said she still vividly remembered the details of the incident.

Announcing Dreams

Momoka's mother was 35 years old when she got a divorce, and did not expect to remarry nor have another child. However, she received an unexpected proposal and got remarried. One day in November 2008, she dreamed an impressive dream,⁷ in which her favorite band, Mr. Children, played a song with a beautiful melody and lyrics. A couple of days after the

dream, on November 20th, she turned on the TV to find that in a variety program titled *Utaban* the band Mr. Children was about to sing a new song. The title of the song was “Hana no Nioi (The Scent of Flowers),” which she thought was suggestive since it appeared to her to imply that Momoka (“Ka” in “Momoka” means “flower” as explained above) was still present. The lyrics of the song were also suggestive with such phrases as:⁸

Even if this is goodbye forever,
I can hear you breathing
I just know that in some other form, with that same smile
You’ll come to see me again.

Even if this really is goodbye
I hear your warm breathing
I just know that in some other form, with the same gaze
You’ll come to see me again.

Momoka’s mother strongly felt that she would come back. Eleven days after the incident, she found that she was pregnant.

After the incident, her husband also dreamed an impressive dream over and over again, in which two female children were laughing joyfully in the wood. Although he was unable to see them, he thought they were Momoka and Yumi.

Kanon’s Statements and Behaviors

The baby turned out to be a boy and was born on July 26th, 2009. He was named Kanon after Pachelbel’s *Canon*. The name was chosen because it was his parents’ favorite piece of music, but also because they thought that the musical technique of counterpoint used in the piece symbolized reincarnation or spiritual connections.

Although Kanon did not say that he was Momoka reborn and his parents did not make any implication (at least deliberately) that they were thinking about the possibility, he showed a number of characteristics reminding his parents of Momoka and made some impressive statements, which are listed in Table 1.

Kanon’s Life-Between-Life Memories

Kanon also talked about some impressive life-between-life memories,⁹ which are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 1
Kanon's Characteristics and Statements Appearing To Be Related to Momoka

Age	Characteristics/Statements
①	Facial features,* voice, and behavior.
② 1 year old (to present)	Loved flowers and often said: "They are beautiful."
③ 1 year to 5 years old	Pink was/is his most favorite color. Up until 4 years old, the color of the clothes he chose was always pink. At the kindergarten Kanon attended, children make their handprints to commemorate their birthdays. The color for the handprints are either blue or pink, and an unwritten "rule" is that "the blue is for boys and the pink is for girls." However, Kanon insisted on using pink for his 3-year-old and 4-year-old celebrations. But he chose blue for his 5-year-old celebration.
④ 1 year to 5 years old	Showed interest in girls' toys and had a toy cosmetic set with a lipstick, comb, mirror, and ribbons. He sometimes asked his mother to tie his hair with a pink ribbon. (He also loved boy's toys, however.)
⑤ 1 year to 5 years old	Asked to buy toy rabbits of the Sylvanian Families, Momoka's favorite toys. Played with his half-sister in the same way as Momoka used to: "Directed" the play asking his half-sister to play the role of a certain rabbit figure and to say a certain set of words; when she said the words, Kanon, acting as a different rabbit figure, would respond in accordance with his "scenario."
⑥ ? to present	Showed precociousness in reading and writing. He was able to write Japanese letters when he was four years old. He was able to read books for elementary schoolchildren when he was five years old.**
⑦ 4 years, 4 months old	Said: "The wall color of the house used to be different." Then, he elaborated: "It used to be much darker." Indeed, the wall color of the house used to be dark brown when Momoka lived there. It has faded, and the color is now light brown.
⑧ 4 years, 6 months old	Came to his mother, saying: "I have written a letter to mom." The letter had only two horizontal lines. His mother asked him: "What does this say?" He said he had written that: "Mom, are you OK? Aren't you lonely?" These words touched her deeply, reminding her of the conversation she had had with Momoka in the car on the way home from the hospital about 11 years before. They had had snow for a few days, and it was indeed as if Momoka's letter had come from the Snow World as she had promised. Next day, his mother asked him to write a letter again, saying: "Kanon, you can write all the letters. Could you write the letter you gave me yesterday again?" Thinking that she should not guide him in any way, she just said 'write the letter you gave me yesterday.' Upon her request, Kanon wrote another letter, this time with actual letters, which is shown in Figure 1. It reads: "Mom, aren't you lonely? Aren't you lonely?"
⑨ 4 years, 9 months old	Out of the blue he said: "I was once burnt." The surprised parents did not ask for further explanation, thinking that he was talking about the cremation in his past life.

* Facial resemblance in Kanon and Momoka is "objectively" shown by an emerging technology of computer science. The "TwinsOrNot" site (<http://twinsornot.net>), which assesses how similar people in two photos are by giving a score of 0 to 100, gave 82 points to a picture of 5-year-old Kanon and a picture of 5-year-old Momoka. The scores of Momoka's picture and five pictures of other 5-year-old male children, randomly chosen from a kindergarten class the present author is involved in as a volunteer, are 44, 62, 67, 71, and 79 points. At present, since the technology is not yet fully-fledged, the scores are just for reference.

** According to Shimamura & Mikami (1994), none of the investigated 4-year-old children (N = 432) were able to write all the Japanese letters. Kanon's abilities have never been expertly assessed and the judgment should be taken with a grain of salt. In the letter given in Figure 1, mirror writing is observed in two letters: "し" and "く". Yet his precocity is undeniable.

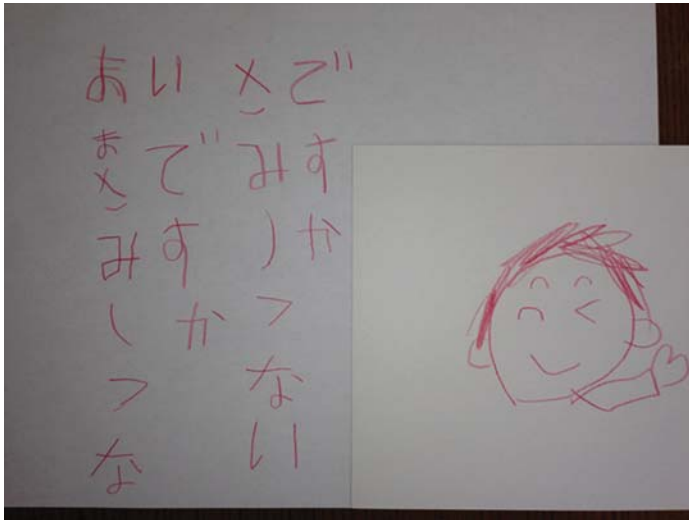


Figure 1. The letter written by Kanon (4 Years, 6 Months Old).

TABLE 2
Kanon's Statements about Life-Between-Life Memories

Age	Statements
① Just 2 years old	At bedtime, he said: "I've come to mom's belly from a faraway place. I've come, hurry, hurry! (I've come in a hurry.)" His mother was 41 years old when Kanon was born, and she interpreted his words to mean that he had cared about her age and had come to her as quickly as possible.
② 6 years, 2 to 3 months old	While lying on the bed and watching the night sky from the window with Kanon, his mother said: "It's beautiful, feels good." To this, he replied: "I'm wondering if there is heaven above clouds. I'm not sure whether it was real or in the dream, but there were so many flowers blooming in heaven and a river was running with glistening water. The flowers and the river were much more beautiful than those you see in this world. The color of the river was like pink and orange, and angels, of the same size as me, are flying. Some were male. God in heaven was sitting on a sort of cushion. There were many masks. You chose your own mask. Some of them were funny like this (he puckered and skewed his mouth to one side). I chose mine and then my face became Kanon's face."
③ 6 years, 5 months old	While taking a bath with his mother, Kanon said: "Do you remember the story of heaven I told you the other day?" (the item above). When his mother talked about the beautiful flowers and the river, he said frustratedly: "That's not all." Then, he talked about the story of God and the masks. His mother felt that he talked about this story again because he wanted her to believe that it was real, not a fantasy.
④ 6 years, 7 months old	When his mother asked Kanon what heaven was like, he replied: "There was a river or a sea, and the water was glittering and very beautiful."

The Case of Takatoki

This is a case in which there appears to be some “spiritual connection”¹⁰ between a female child Kazune, who was stillborn, and her brother Takatoki, who was born two years after Kazune. Although Takatoki has not made any statements suggesting that he was Kazune reborn, he showed some unusual traits that can be interpreted as somehow related to the death of his sister. Their mother Ms. Inoue Fumiko worked as a social worker. I came to know the case through Momoka’s mother, who consulted with Fumiko regularly while Momoka was hospitalized. Fumiko and her husband Dr. Inoue Shuichi, who is a university associate professor of social welfare, published their experience of losing their daughter as a book (Inoue et al. 2010).¹¹ It was co-authored by Ms. Hasegawa Mitsuko, the chief nurse of the hospital where Kazune and Takatoki were delivered, and edited by Takeuchi Masato, an obstetrician. Fumiko and Shuichi contributed essays from the perspective of a mother and a father, respectively, who lost their baby, and the nurse and the obstetrician contributed essays from the perspective of medical experts. After a couple of exchanges with Fumiko over the telephone and by Facebook messenger, I interviewed her in person on April 10th, 2016. I also conducted a telephone interview with Shuichi and the nurse.

The “Birth” of Kazune

On July 25th, 2005, three days before the estimated date of confinement, the doctor in charge of Fumiko found that Kazune, the baby, was dead from an unknown cause, and she was “born” with induced delivery on July 26th. On July 28th, two days after the delivery, and on the estimated date of confinement, she was cremated. In the morning of the day of the cremation, Fumiko and Shuichi noticed that what appeared to be tears were coming from Kazune’s unopened eyes as if she was unwilling to part from her parents.

Kazune and Ave Maria

While Fumiko had been pregnant with Kazune, she had often listened to classical music, believing that it would be good for Kazune’s development. Her favorite song during that period had been *Ave Maria* by Schubert. After the stillbirth of Kazune, Fumiko and Shuichi had a couple of unforgettable moments in which they heard the song played unexpectedly. The first instance was on December 24th (or 25th), 2005. While they were dining at a French restaurant in Tokyo, they said to each other: “What is Kazune doing now?” At that instant, they heard the song *Ave Maria* played, which made them feel that she was always with them. The second instance was on

April 2nd, 2006. After talking about their experience as parents who had lost their child, to young doctors at a hospital seminar, they dropped by at a Ralph Lauren shop, where they suddenly heard *Ave Maria* played. The third instance was in May 2005. They went for a trip to Sedona, Arizona, hoping to figure out the meaning of what they had experienced. Just when they came back to Japan, at the airport, they heard the song *Ave Maria*.

Ms. Hasegawa Mitsuko, the chief nurse in charge of Kazune (and also Takatoki) reported a similar experience. She did not remember exactly when, but after the stillbirth of Kazune, she was cleaning the room at home with the TV on, thought about Kazune, and at that instance she heard *Ave Maria* coming from the TV. She had heard the stories of “spiritual connections” between Kazune and the song from Fumiko, and from this personal experience, she also felt that the soul of the baby was still around there.

Pregnancy and Birth of Takatoki

In the second winter since the stillbirth of Kazune, Fumiko had a dream of a dog giving birth to a puppy. The puppy was dead but the dog did not appear to realize that. When she awoke, she thought that she was pregnant, and indeed she was. Fumiko was surprised when the doctor in charge told her the estimated date of confinement: It was July 26th, the same day as Kazune’s “birth.”

Takatoki was actually born on July 28th, 2007, the estimated day of confinement as well as the day of cremation of Kazune. In the delivery room, merry songs were played by a cable broadcast program dedicated to birthday songs. After Takatoki was delivered, the chief nurse, who was also in charge of Kazune, said: “Kazune must also be here.” In that moment, the people in the delivery room heard *Ave Maria* played.

Takatoki’s Unusual Behavior

Takatoki is an extremely sensitive soul and easily overwhelmed by a scene describing or suggesting death or parting. One of the most impressive instances for his mother Fumiko occurred when he was still under 1 year old. One day she read him a picture book titled *Bye Bye Matane (Bye Bye See You Again)* (Sato 2007), in which six characters say good-bye to the reader one by one. For instance, on the first two pages there is a chick accompanied with the words: “Good morning, chick. Let’s play together.” On the third and fourth pages, the chick is with its mother (chicken) and the words read: “My mother has come to pick me up. Bye bye, see you again.” Every time Fumiko read the parting words to Takatoki, he began to

cry. Another unforgettable moment took place when Fumiko took him to a screening of a documentary movie titled *Umareru (Being Born)*, which features pregnancy and birth, and also miscarriage, stillbirth, infertility, and disabilities (Ushiyama & Goda 2010). It was February 2012 and Takatoki was five years and seven months old. One scene in the movie involved a short animation depicting a deceased baby having wings like an angel who leaves his mother. Watching the scene, Takatoki burst into tears and would not stop crying. Bewildered, Fumiko asked him why he was crying so bitterly, to which he replied: “Poor baby, poor baby.”

The Interpretation of the Case

As a social worker who has seen some cases in which a child who was born after his/her deceased sibling is negatively influenced by parents who treat him/her as the deceased child reborn, Fumiko insists that she would never accept Takatoki as Kazune reborn. Yet she says she cannot deny strong spiritual connections between them in view of the series of incidents she had experienced and described above. Shuichi, her husband, is more open to the possibility of reincarnation and says he half believes the possibility. The same applies to Ms. Hasegawa, the chief nurse.

The Case of Takuma

This is a case in which a child who was born after two miscarriages said that he was the unborn babies.¹² He also talked about womb memories. After talking with the mother over the telephone, I interviewed her and the child on September 9th, 2016. He was six years old and did not remember his remarks, so the source of information is his mother.

Takuma was born on April 18th, 2009, in Aichi prefecture. When he was three or four years old, while he was taking a bath with his mother, he said: “The pool in the belly was small,” apparently referring to his experience while he was in the womb. In October 2015, when Takuma was eating snacks with his mother in the living room, relaxing, he said casually: “I entered mom’s belly twice, but died. But I looked for it again, and I was so happy that I was able to find it.” His mother had two miscarriages: once in 2012 and once in 2014. In both cases the babies were about two months old when they were miscarried. Takuma had no way of knowing about them and the surprised mother just replied: “Oh, really. It’s good to see you again.”

According to the mother, the third pregnancy with Kazune was different from the preceding ones in that she felt a baby did come to her.

As stated above, Takuma did not remember these remarks at the time

of the interview, but he claimed that he remembered being in the womb and often hiccupping.

Although this has no direct relevance to the memories Takuma talked about, Takuma appeared to be unusually intelligent,¹³ and I was impressed with Takuma's knowledge about yoga postures. According to the mother, he obtained the knowledge from a TV game, but the way he talked about them and instructed me to strike some Yoga poses, and the way he analyzed them reminded me of a real Yoga instructor.

The Case of Tae

This is a case in which a mother appears to have come back to her daughter about three years after her death as her daughter. The two people involved in the case accept the reincarnation interpretation. I came to know this case from the director of a hospital I became acquainted with at a private meeting in which people remembering their past lives talked about them. After exchanging a couple of e-mail messages with the child's mother Atsuko, on August 11th, 2015, I conducted an interview with her and her daughter Tae, whom Atsuko regarded as her mother Midori reborn.

Midori and Atsuko

The previous personality Midori, who was born in 1930, was a housewife of a town councilor in the Chubu region. She had two sons and one daughter. According to the daughter Atsuko, she was so congenial and kind that everyone loved her. Because of her husband's important position within the community, the house was frequently visited by guests, and Midori made every effort to entertain them with foods and gifts. When she was 63 years old, she was diagnosed with acute leukemia and soon passed away on June 11th, 1993. At that time, her daughter Atsuko had been suffering from depression and Midori had shown great concern for that. Midori was really sorry that she had to die, leaving Atsuko in that condition.

Tae

One year after the death of Midori, Atsuko, whose mental condition had improved, got married, moved to another area, and on May 28th, 1996, a female child Tae was born. Tae turned out to be a congenial baby and she reminded Atsuko of her mother. When Tae was about two years old, Atsuko happened to show Tae a picture of Midori, saying: "This is your grandmother." In reply Tae said: "It's Tae [= me]." Upon hearing her say so, Atsuko instantly thought that Tae was Midori reborn. The religion Atsuko was brought up with was the Rinzai school, one of the major zen

TABLE 3
Characteristic Traits of Tae That Reminded Atsuko of Her Mother Midori

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- | | |
|---|--|
| ① | She had fastidious taste in clothes, and even as a kindergartner would insist on choosing what she wore. |
| ② | She was fond of and good at drawing pictures. |
| ③ | Whenever the house hosted a guest, she was excited and gave a big welcome to him/her. |
| ④ | She expressed great “mother-like” affection to Atsuko. |
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schools in Japan, and the concept of reincarnation was familiar to her. She had occasionally heard a family member say something like: “He was too stubborn, so I don’t want him to be reborn to our family while I’m alive.” Although this was the only occasion when Tae explicitly said that she was Atsuko’s mother reborn, she showed some characteristics that confirmed Atsuko’s belief, which are summarized in Table 3.

Related to ④ in Table 3, there was a very impressive incident that further confirmed Atsuko’s conviction that Tae was her mother reborn. When Tae was three years old, Atsuko was suffering from a relapse of depression. One day, when Atsuko took a walk around the house with Tae, holding her hand, she noticed that Tae was muttering something to herself. Turning an attentive ear, she heard Tae saying: “I have to cheer her up. I have to cheer her up.” Upon hearing this, Atsuko strongly felt that her mother, who had been showing concern about her mental condition, came back to take care of her again.

As for Atsuko’s father (Midori’s husband), who passed away on January 1, 2002, by accident, Atsuko did not talk about her conviction that Tae was Midori reborn, and did not know how he thought about Tae. Tae lived in an area about 30 kilometers away from where Atsuko’s father lived, and they did not have much time to be together. Yet, when Tae was with him, Atsuko felt that they were very close to each other. Tae commented that she had not necessarily been happy with him because he showed too much love to her.

When I conducted the interview, Tae was 19 years old and did not have specific memories as Midori (her grandmother). She was still fond of drawing pictures, but she no longer had fastidious taste in clothes. However, she still remembered how excited she was whenever the house held a guest (= ③ in Table 3), and I felt that she was very friendly and had a glowing personality.

The Case of Tomiko

This is an experimental birthmark case in which a deceased uncle appears to have been reborn as his niece. I came to know this case through Ms. Komiya

Hisako. She is a wife of an offspring of Tozo, the previous personality of Katsugoro, the central figure of the well-known Japanese case, which Dr. Ian Stevenson cited in his groundbreaking 1960 article (Stevenson 1960:65). Tomiko is Hisako's younger sister. I conducted an interview with Hisako and Tomiko on February 21st, 2016, and another with Hisako, her younger brother Isao, and their mother Kie on August 28th, 2016.

Experimental Birthmark Cases in Asia

In cultures where reincarnation is accepted, birthmarks or birth defects are often interpreted as evidence showing a connection between a newborn and a deceased person. In some cultures, relatives or close friends of a deceased person mark his/her body expecting that a birthmark will show at the same site on the body of a baby who will be regarded as the reincarnation of the deceased person. Dr. Ian Stevenson coined the term “experimental birthmarks” to refer to this practice and reported 20 cases he investigated in Burma, Thailand, and Turkey (Stevenson 1997:805–879), and Tucker & Keil (2013) reported 18 cases from Myanmar (Burma) and Thailand. Stevenson (1997:804) provided earlier sources reporting the practice: Tibet (Dalai Lama 1962); China (De Groot 1901/1969); Burma (Khaing 1962); Thailand (De Young 1966, Rajadhon 1961); and India (Gold 1989, Parkin 1988, Parry 1932).

The practice was also reported in Japan. Probably the oldest examples were two stories reported in *Inga Monogatari* compiled in 1661 (*Inga Monogatari* 1661).¹⁴ One is a story of a woman who had a birthmark on her face. Her mother had painted with sumi ink, the ink used for Japanese calligraphy, the face of a child who had been born and died before the woman, hoping that the child would be reborn. The other is a story in which a parent made a scar on the arm of a dead child, and the child was reborn with a birthmark on the same spot. Other sources written in Japanese are provided by Takatsuka (2005).

A Japanese case written in English is the story of Riki-Baka, who was a man of great strength, but intellectually limited (Hearn 1904). When he died young, his mother wrote his name in the palm of his left hand, praying for him that he would be reborn into a happier condition. After a while, a child with a birthmark on his left hand was born in a wealthy family. The birthmark read “Riki-Baka.” As Hearn wrote in the Preface, “[t]he incident of ‘Riki-Baka’ was a personal experience; and I wrote it down almost exactly as it happened, changing only a family-name mentioned by the Japanese narrator.”

Tomiko and Yukichi, Her Previous Personality

Yukichi was born in 1931 as a fourth child and a second son of a family living in Akita prefecture. On August 8th, 1934, he died of dysentery when he was three years old. Since he was a big, healthy child, his family members strongly wished that he would come back, and Isamu, Yukichi's older brother, drew a big circle using sumi on the back of the neck of his deceased brother. In 1950 a daughter, Hisako, was born to Isamu. Then, on April 15th, 1954, another daughter, Tomiko, was born. As the midwife in charge of the birth noticed the round reddish birthmark, possibly about 3 centimeters (1.2 inches) in diameter, on the back of the child's neck, she let out a gasp of astonishment. The mother, who was worried by the midwife's reaction, immediately noticed the birthmark and was scared that the child might have a serious handicap or disorder. Her concern was relieved when she heard from her husband Isamu that the birthmark on the back of Tomiko's neck corresponded with the circle he had drawn on his deceased brother's neck and was possibly a sign of Yukichi's return.

Tomiko turned out to be a big and healthy child just as Yukichi had been, which was another confirmation for Isamu that she was Yukichi reborn. Yukichi appeared to have been totally convinced that Tomiko, although she did not have any memory as Yukichi, was his deceased brother reborn, and whenever the family had a guest, Isamu called Tomiko and showed the guest her birthmark and told the reincarnation story.

When Tomiko was young, she was particularly big and looked a couple of years older than she actually was.¹⁵ One story repeatedly talked about within the family is about an incident that took place at the nearby railroad station. One day when Tomiko was still a kindergartener, Isamu went out with her to Hachirogata station to get on a train bound for Tokyo. At the station, Isamu bought a train ticket only for him because kindergarteners were free of charge. At the entrance gate, however, a station attendant stopped him claiming that the child had to buy a ticket. Isamu explained that she was still a kindergartener, but the station attendant would not easily believe it.

Isao, who is one year younger than Tomiko, told the author that in the elementary school he and Tomiko attended, he had been treated favorably by the people around him including senior students because they respected Tomiko, who was not only beautiful but taller than other students.

It should be noted that since none of the family members except Isamu knew Yukichi, the purported resemblances between Yukichi and Tomiko were solely based on Isamu's observations. Furthermore, since Isamu had passed away in 2010, I was unable to obtain his testimony.



Figure 2. The birthmark of Tomiko.

About the Practice of Marking a Deceased Person's Body within the Family

According to Hisako, her father Isamu marked Yukichi's body simply because he had been told to do so by his father (Hisako and Tomiko's grandfather). He only wished him to be reborn in a good place, but not necessarily to come back to his place. Their family religion has been Ikkoshu or Single-minded school of Buddhism, and the concept of reincarnation was familiar within the household, although none of the members I conducted an interview with knew real examples of CORT. Neither did they know if the practice of marking one's body had been conducted in other families.

Tomiko's Birthmark

Hisako, Tomiko's elder sister, and Isao, her younger brother, agree that the size of the birthmark was about 3 centimeters and that the color was reddish. As for the shape, Hisako remembered that it was round while Isao claimed that it was a bit oval and horizontally longer. As Tomiko grew, the birthmark faded in color although its size did not change. It was still visible when I conducted the interview (see Figure 2).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, I have reported five same-family CORT. The features observed in these cases vary considerably. The case of Kanon is the richest in the sense that it has the largest number of features observed in CORT, with an announcing dream, and statements as well as behaviors appearing to be related to the past life. The poorest is the case of Takatoki with only a kind of announcing dream and behaviors appearing to show the relevance to the girl who was stillborn.

The relative strength of children's claims to remember past lives tends to be weaker in same-family cases than in stranger cases,¹⁶ so that, in general, the former are weaker as evidence for paranormality. Yet, in other respects, they are no different from stranger cases and therefore worth investigating in conjunction with the latter.

The present investigation raises an interesting question, which is to be pursued in future research: How common are same-family cases in Japan in comparison with other cases including stranger cases? Stevenson (1986:209–211) and Haraldsson and Matlock (2016:222–223) demonstrated that the percentages of same-family and other cases differ significantly from country to country (or culture to culture). According to the figures reported in Haraldsson and Matlock (2016:223), the lowest percentage of same-family cases is that of India (16%) and the highest is that of the Gitksan of British Columbia (100%). As discussed in Yanagita (2013), skipped-generation reincarnation might have been considered “normal” in some areas in prewar Japan. With the assumption stated in the Introduction that culturally prescribed ideas about reincarnation would be carried into death and would influence decisions made in the postmortem state, the incidence of same-family cases is expected to be relatively high in such areas.¹⁷

The case of Takatoki, the weakest one, involves interesting “coincidences” appearing to suggest some spiritual connections between the two people involved: The song *Ave Maria*, and the dates of estimated confinement, birth, death, and the funeral. “Coincidence” related to the dates of death and birth is often observed in childbirth as reported in Ichikawa (2014), and the phenomenon may be worth investigating in studying CORT as well.

I hope I have shown that same-family CORT are not uncommon in contemporary Japan, and that they are worthy of further investigation.

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Notes

- ¹ Sudduth's original wording is modified to suit the present purposes.
- ² Stranger cases predominate in places where karma or God are believed to determine the new family, and places where a belief in reincarnation is not part of the culture, but they are the rule in indigenous tribal societies where the individual is thought to have control over the reincarnation process (Haraldsson & Matlock 2016: Chapter 26).
- ³ Matlock (Haraldsson & Matlock 2016: Chapter 29) reaches this conclusion partly from an analysis of 10 solved suicide cases. Although violent deaths in general are associated with stranger cases, the suicide cases occurred in the same family or among acquaintances. Matlock conjectures that this is because the self-killing left the mind in control and less befuddled than an unexpected, violent death would have done.
- ⁴ This case is also reported in Ohkado (2016) in Japanese.
- ⁵ "Kaguya-hime" is the main protagonist in *The Tale of Kaguya* or *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, a 10th-century Japanese folktale. She is found as a baby inside a bamboo stalk by a bamboo cutter, and raised as his daughter. She turns out to be an unworldly being from the moon and eventually goes back to the moon. See Kawabata and Keene (1998).
- ⁶ The phenomena may be accounted for in terms of psychokinesis on the part of a disembodied mind (Matlock 2017).
- ⁷ An announcing dream is one of the central features of cases of the reincarnation type (Tucker 2005:27–28). The phenomenon may be interpreted as a disembodied mind's attempt to communicate with the living through extra-sensory perception (Matlock 2017).
- ⁸ The original lyrics are in Japanese. The English translations are from a fan site with slight modification by the present author:
<https://ijahlovesmrchildren.wordpress.com/2008/11/16/mr-children-hana-no-nioi-the-scent-of-flowers/>

- ⁹ “Life-between-life memory” is different from “intermission memory” used by Dr. Ian Stevenson and others, in that the former does not include “womb memory” included in the latter.
- ¹⁰ Here the term “spiritual connection” is used to refer to synchronic incidents which are not usually counted as features of cases of the reincarnation type, but are often observed and meaningful to those involved. As argued in Ichikawa (2014), such synchronicity is often observed in childbirth, and it will be worth recording and analyzing in conjunction with cases of the reincarnation type. One possible interpretation is that, like electricity-related phenomena observed above, they are attributed to psychokinesis on the part of an disembodied mind.
- ¹¹ The book does not include any parapsychological discussions, and the incidents are just reported as “inexplicable” ones.
- ¹² Tucker (2005:164–169) reports a case of a boy who claimed to have memories as a miscarried baby.
- ¹³ Haraldsson (1995), who compared 23 Sri Lankan children between the ages of 7 and 13 years old who had had past-life memories and 23 controls who had not had such memories, showed that the former had greater verbal skills and better memory than the controls. Tucker and Nidiffer (2014) studied 15 American children who had made repeated statements about remembering a past life and demonstrated that in three of the four subtests their scores are significantly higher than the average and that they also scored higher than the average in the remaining one subtest.
- ¹⁴ I owe this information to Mr. Yanase Hitoshi, a schoolteacher and an author of several biographies including the story of Katsugoro.
- ¹⁵ Tomiko is about 160 centimeters (five feet 3 inches) tall. According to a survey result of the height of Japanese females conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan, the average height of women of Tomiko’s age is 153.2 centimeters (5 feet and 0.3 inches). So she is still taller than the average.
- ¹⁶ Tucker (2000) proposed the Strength-of-Case Scale (SOCS) to measure the strength of children’s claims to remember past lives. A score of –2 is given to a same-family case and a score of 5 to a total stranger case. There are two intermediate levels between the two: Slight association (–1) and knew about each other but no association (0). So scores of the other items being equal, same-family cases are scored lower than stranger cases.
- ¹⁷ In the Internet-based research conducted by the present author, 37 of the 10,000 women reported that their children had ever talked about past-life memories. 28 of them answered the question: “Was the person in

his/her past life identified?” Only 2 (7.7%) answered “yes,” and in both cases the identified person was a family member (Ohkado 2015).

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