

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Case of a Japanese Child with Past-Life Memories

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Abstract—This article presents the case of a Japanese child who claims to remember his past-life memories. The case shows the pattern frequently observed in Cases of the Reincarnation Type (CORTs) extensively investigated by Dr. Ian Stevenson and others: At the age of three, the child started to talk about a life he claimed to have lived before, and showed behavior that is unusual in his family and unexplained by his current life, but that apparently matches the “past life;” he also showed a strong desire to go back to his previous mother. His memories, however, began to fade at about the age of seven and were almost completely gone when the child was interviewed at the age of nine. The unusual character of the present case is that the place the child claimed to have lived in is far away from his current place of residence. Despite the detailed information the child has given, the case is unsolved at present. The main contribution of this paper will be to report virtually the first Japanese CORT since the 19th century case of Katsugoro, one of the 44 cases that inspired Dr. Ian Stevenson to begin researching the topic.

Introduction

Dr. Ian Stevenson and his associates, as well as other independent researchers, have now found more than 2,700 cases of children who claim to remember their past lives from all over the world, including India, Thailand, Burma, Lebanon, Turkey, Sri Lanka, the UK, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, Austria, Portugal, Hungary, Iceland, Finland, Canada, and the United States of America. However, virtually no cases from Japan have been reported in a scientific journal, which is regrettable considering the fact that the 19th century case of Katsugoro was one of the strong cases that inspired Dr. Ian Stevenson to research the phenomena.¹

This article reports the case of a Japanese child who claims to have lived in Edinburgh, Scotland, in his past life. His statements are basically compatible with a possible life in Edinburgh, and some of them are quite striking. He shows a strong desire to go back to his previous mother. The

search for the past-life personality has not been successful and the case is at present unsolved. However, the present article shows the existence of a clear Case of the Reincarnation Type (CORT) in Japan.²

Summary of the Case and Its Investigation

The subject, Tomo, is a Japanese boy living in the Kansai region. He was born in January 2000.³ When the subject was 11 months old, he began to show behavior that can be interpreted as related to his past-life personality. When he was 3.11 years old, he started talking about his past-life memories as a boy living in Edinburgh and continued to do so until his father took him to Edinburgh to look for the mother of his past-life personality when he was 7.6 years old. Although their search was not successful, the visit to Edinburgh seems to have soothed the subject's intense desire to go back to his "mother," and he gradually stopped talking about his past-life memories.

I came to know of the case through Dr. Ikegawa Akira, who conducted a large-scale questionnaire-based survey on children's birth and "in the womb" memories (Ikegawa 2005). I conducted two interviews, one with the subject and his mother on June 22, 2010, and the second time with the subject and his father on July 2, 2010. At the time of the interviews, the subject, who was 9.5 years old, no longer recalled any specific memories. Therefore, the information about the subject's statements and behavior came from the subject's parents, especially his mother, who kept a detailed diary. The authenticity of the essential part of the subject's statements, however, is not questionable because a psychiatrist who examined the subject wrote an essay about the subject's past-life memories in relation to autism (Miyao 2007).⁴

It is worth pointing out that at the time of the first interview, the subject was saying "I still have a visual image of my British mother," "I still want to go to the UK to meet my mother," and "You'll see, when I become old, I'll go there myself." He also remembered a phrase "John, John, very my John, John," which he repeatedly said when he recalled a dog he kept in his past life.

The Subject's Statements and Behavior

When the subject was 11 months old, he was very attracted by the roman letters he saw on TV commercials such as "AJINOMOTO," "TOYOTA," etc. Before he learned any Japanese letters, he learned some roman letters. At the age of 2.9 or 2.10, he signed his name as "tomo" using roman letters, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Also around this time (at the age of 2.9 or 2.10), when he heard the English song "Top of the World" for the first time, he was able to sing along, which greatly surprised his mother.



Figure 1. A picture drawn by the subject.



Figure 2. A second picture drawn by the subject.

At the age of 3.11, the subject and his mother had the following conversation (as recorded in the diary):

- Subject: I want to peel garlic.
 Mother: Why do you want to do that?
 Subject: I did this before I came to be called “Tomo.”
 Mother: What? What do you mean?
 Subject: I was a child of a restaurant in the UK before I came to be called “Tomo.”
 Mother: When was he born?
 Subject: He was born on August 9th, 1988. I was called ‘Geiris.’⁵
 I lived in a seven-story building.
 Mother: Where is the former “Tomo” [referring to the past-life personality] now?
 Subject: He had a high fever of 45 Celsius [113 F] and died.

Because the subject insisted on peeling garlic, the mother bought and handed garlic to the subject the next day. Then, the subject very skillfully peeled the garlic. The garlic he peeled at this time is shown in Figure 3. Also, as shown in Figure 4, he peeled garlic with his left hand, which is surprising because he is right-handed. He became left-handed only when he peeled garlic. The mother recorded the conversion he had on that day as follows:

- Mother: Tomo, have you ever peeled garlic?
 Subject: Yes. I have done this when I was “former Tomo.”
 Mother: Who is “former Tomo?”
 Subject: Tomo who was born on August 9th.

At around the same time, (a) the subject, who had never taken a pill, said to the mother, “‘British Tomo’ was taking a pill, called EMD.”⁶ When asked by the mother “What pill?” he replied “Yellow and round;” (b) he said, when his mother read a picture book before he went to bed, “My British mother said, ‘This much for today,’ and did this [touching his forehead with a finger].” The mother interpreted this to indicate a good-night kiss, which Japanese mothers rarely do; and (c) when he saw a globe at a store, he pointed out the UK (the upper region) and said “Tomo lived around here.” When they went back home and his mother showed him a map of the UK, the subject pointed to around Edinburgh and said “I lived in ‘Edinbia.’”

After the above-mentioned event, the subject started to talk about his past-life memories intensively, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Statements the Subject Made between 4 and 5.6 Years Old

Age	Statement
(1) 4 years old (written 3x in the diary)	"I had a dog called John. He had yellow or golden hair with a long nose. His ears were on the upper head. We slept in the same room."
(2) 4 years old (written 3x in the diary)	"British Tomo went to a school, not a kindergarten [as the subject does now]. My teacher was a male. I had a friend called 'Suimenli.'"
(3) 4 years old	When he talked about the dog, John, he started to say "John, John, very my John." He kept on saying this for a long time. (As stated above, he remembered this phrase even when the author met him.)
(4) 4 years old	When he saw salmon eggs at the dinner table, he said "Gungu!" This might have implied "gungo peas," (or "pigeon peas") which he might have been familiar with if he was a child of a restaurant.
(5) 4 years old (cf. (22))	"When British Tomo died between 24th and 25th of October 1997, British mother looked troubled. She was saying, 'Now there are only five of us.' When the surprised mother asked him, 'What? Did you see that?' he replied, 'Yes. They buried me.'"
(6) 4 years old	"There was no time before I was born. British Tomo had a watch."
(7) 4 years old	"British mother often said 'I love you.'" [Japanese mothers rarely say this.]
(8) 4 years old	(Pointing to his own legs) "I had a lot of hair here."
(9) 4 years old	"In the UK, I bathed in milk (bath)."
(10) 4 years old	Pointing to the washbasin, the subject repeatedly said "Washbasin" in English. He also said "Pleasure."
(11) 4 years old (cf. (15))	"In the UK, I took 'healing herb.'" Making his mother hold him, and imitate as if she gave a glass of healing herb to him, he said, "British mother said to me 'Take this, take this. It will help you feel better.' The herb was like trefoil, and it was green liquid when I took it. My (older) brother took leaves. We also used it like this (pretending to put a leaf on his forehead)."
(12) 4 years old	The subject tried to explain what he ate in his past-life. "With chopped carrots and Japanese radish-like vegetables, with cheese. We heated it for about 4 minutes and when the cheese melt, we eat it." When the mother asked "Is it gratin?," the subject said, "Oh, it's difficult to explain."
(13) 4.1 years old	"When I was British Tomo, on February 16th, white liquid came out of my penis for the first time." When his mother asked "What do you mean?" he said, "From the penis of British Tomo yellow pee and white juice came out." ¹ (Surprised at the subject's remarks, the mother asked kindergarten teachers if they gave sex education. The answer was naturally negative.)
(14) 4.1 years old	"I got on a double-decker bus. The money I used was not yen, but pound."
(15) 4.2 years old (cf. (11))	"My mother made me drink 'healing grass' mixed with pineapple juice, but I knew it was medicine."
(16) 4.2 years old	"There was a special shopping mall in front of our restaurant. They sold Japanese soy sauce." (His mother thought this statement remarkable because it was unlikely that the subject, who had never been abroad, would know that soy sauce is Japanese seasoning.)

- (17) 4.2 years old
(cf. (18), (24), (25)) "British Tomo was hospitalized at 'Muginba Paresu' [as transcribed in the diary in Japanese letters] hospital.² At first no room was available. When room 4 on the 13th floor became available, four of us, father, mother, (elder) brother, and me went there by car. It was 115 kilometers from my house to the hospital. Since it was far away, we used a highway. My brother was five years older than me and 14 at that time. In the hospital, there was a place like a bath, and there was a doctor who put powder medicine into hot water and massaged me. The treatment didn't work and I had an operation. I had a fever of 40 Celsius [104 F] [figure different when he first stated about his death] and died."
- (18) 4.7 years old
(cf. (17), (24), (25)) Subject: (Seeing a picture in a picture book titled *Human Body*, in which food sticks in a person's throat) "Oh, no! This guy has become British Tomo!"
Mother: "Did British Tomo die because something stuck in his throat?"
Subject: "I had throat disorders. I was hospitalized and stayed on the seventh floor of a 13-story hospital. I felt so sick and died."
Mother: "Did you die of asthma, perhaps?"
Subject: "Yes. The healing herb didn't cure me, either. The former Tomo was weak and died young. So, this time I chose a strong body."
- (19) 4.7 years old
(also 5.6 years old)
(cf. (24)) (Watching news of a train crash) "There was also a train accident in the UK, in Southall. I watched the news on TV. It said 'Accident! Accident!' Two trains collided, and a fire occurred. Eight people died."
- (20) 4.7 years old Subject: "The blood type of British Tomo was B. I was weak and couldn't exercise, and there were many things I wanted to do."
Mother: "Why did you recall British Tomo?"
Subject: (Crying) "I want to meet my British mom."
- (21) 4.9 years old (About a meal the subject ate in his past-life) "I ate Chili Con Carne. Red kidney beans were in it and it was hot." [He had never eaten the dish in the present life.]
- (22) 5 years old (cf. (5)) Subject: "I died between 24th and 25th of October, 1997."
Mother: "How did you know that you died?"
Subject: "My British mother looked troubled. She said 'Now only five of us were left.'"
Mother: "Did you see that?"
Subject: "Yes, I did."
Mother: "Then, what did you do?"
Subject: "I was doing something like riding on a slide or on the escalator of a 25-story building."
- (23) 5 years old When the subject's family had a coffee break, the subject pointed out that what they drank is different from what the family of the past personality drank. "In the UK, I drank black coffee, my father with milk, and my mother with milk and sugar. Now, I can't drink coffee, but dad and mom can. You (dad and mom) drink coffee with milk."
- (24) 5.6 years old
(cf. (17), (18), (19), (25)) (After a thunderstorm at night) "British Tomo was hospitalized in Muginba Paresu hospital. At first there was no room available. Then, room 4 of the 13th floor became available, so my father, mother, brother, and I went there. We used a highway because the hospital was far away. It was located 115 kilometers to the north from my house. My brother was 5 years older than I, 14 years old. In the hospital, in a bath-like place, a doctor poured powder medicine into hot water and massaged me. It didn't work and I had an operation. But I had a high fever of 40 Celsius [104 F] and died. My house was about 30 seconds away from the station. There was news of a train crash. TV said 'News! News!' and I saw crashed trains on TV."
- (25) 5.6 years old
(cf. (17), (18), (24) (25)) From room 4 on the 13th floor, I could see fireworks. The hospital had a bath.

¹ See Note 7.² See Note 5.



Figure 3. The subject peeling garlic skin.



Figure 4. The subject peeling garlic skin with his left hand.

Like many other CORTs, the subject showed a strong emotion to go back to see his “previous” mother (= (20)). Also, like other CORTs, the subject states that he had some unfinished job in his past life (= (18), (20)).

The subject’s statements about his body (= (8), (13)) suggest that he indeed felt that his present body was different from the one he used to have.

Most of the statements listed in Table 1 concerning his life in Edinburgh seem to be compatible with a possible life in Edinburgh and beyond the knowledge an ordinary Japanese person, including the subject’s parents, would have. Especially striking is the subject’s statement about the train accident that occurred at Southall station in the UK (= (19)), which did take place on September 19, 1997.⁸

The subject’s father, who had regarded the subject’s statements as mere imagination, changed his attitude when he searched for the information about the train crash and found that there was an incident in the Southall station in 1997. He decided to take the subject to Edinburgh to look for his “British mother.” From August 1st to 8th, 2008 (when the subject was 90 months old), the subject and his father went to the UK. The subject’s mother didn’t go with them because the subject’s brother was too young (born on July 1st, 2005). They stayed in Edinburgh for three days, looking for the past-life personality’s house in vain. The subject’s father said, “I thought my son would easily find the way to his house once we got to Edinburgh. If I had known that this would not necessarily be the case, I would have made more preparation.”

The notable points the subject’s father told me about this trip is that (1) on the first day in Edinburgh, they found that Chili Con Carne is served in many pubs in town, which confirmed the subject’s statement (21) in Table 1, and (2) on the morning of the second day in Edinburgh, the subject jerked awake and said “I have just felt my mother. She must be in this town!”

Although the trip was not successful in the sense that they could not find the subject’s house from his past life, it seems to have somehow soothed the subject’s desire to go back to his “former house,” and the subject began to talk about his past life less and less, and soon stopped talking about it entirely.

The Investigation Concerning the Subject’s Past-Life Personality

The investigation concerning the subject’s past-life personality included an Internet search based on the subject’s statements, calling for information from people connected to the UK, including members of the Society for Psychical Research and the Scottish Society for Psychical Research, and visiting Edinburgh myself in 2011. At present, however, the search for the past-life personality has been unsuccessful.

It turned out that no death comparable to the present case seems to be recorded in the city of Edinburgh. Since the subject clearly stated the specific dates of his birth and death, I expected that the Internet genealogy database service such as “ScottlandsPeople” or “Ancestry.co.uk,” a subdivision of “Ancestry.com” would easily trace the past-life personality. However, contrary to my expectation, these types of service require the name of the person you are looking for, and, since the subject did not give the exact name of his past-life personality, they were not very useful. Finally, I consulted with the National Record of Scotland, whose role includes the administration of the registration of births, deaths, marriages, divorces, and adoptions in Scotland, and Mr. Blair Kane helped me with this search and checked all the death books for the Edinburgh area for the year 1997. According to Mr. Kane, there were no deaths of children in that age range. Nor were there any cases of asthma-related deaths in those months. He states that “It could well have been he died in the Edinburgh area but his death was registered in a different district.”

Some of the Discrepancies

There are some discrepancies in the subject’s statements. According to the subject, he was hospitalized in a 13-story building (= (17), (18), (24), (25)). According to Dr. Ian Tierney of the University of Edinburgh, there are no 13-story residential buildings in Edinburgh, nor have there ever been. The only 13-story buildings are a University research building and an office block built since 2000.

If the subject’s statement concerning the hospital location in relation to the residence of the subject’s past-life personality is correct (= (17), (24)), and the hospital is indeed in Edinburgh, despite the above-mentioned discrepancy, the place his past-life personality lived cannot have been Edinburgh. On the other hand, if the residence was indeed in Edinburgh, the hospital should be somewhere in the Highlands.

An Exceptional Character

The present case falls into a category of long distance cases, in which the subject’s family belongs to a different community from the past-life personality’s family (Stevenson 2001). The subject’s family has no connection to the UK, nor were they in the country around the time of conception, which echoes the following words of Stevenson (2001:238): “[F]or the majority of long-distance cases I have no clues whatever as to why the subject was born in his family. Nor have the informants for the cases.” Concerning long distance cases Stevenson also (2001:242) says that

“[t]he majority of the subjects of cases in which the two families are not related or acquainted speak of a life that was lived within a radius of twenty-five kilometers from the subject’s home.” The distance between Edinburgh and the subject’s present residence (9,154 kilometers) is unusually long.⁹ This exceptional characteristic makes the case all the more interesting.

Conclusion

This article reports a case of a Japanese child who claims to remember his past life. Despite the subject’s detailed statements concerning his past life, the search for his past-life personality has not been successful and the case is “unsolved.” However, some of the highly specific information the subject gave and the unusual behavior the subject showed are strongly indicative of the paranormal nature of the present case. The overall pattern of the development of the case shows that CORTs can be observed in modern Japan.

Notes

- ¹ Stevenson (1997:519–520) reports a Japanese case in which the subject has a birthmark behind his right ear that corresponds to the scar of an operation for otitis media that one of his older brothers, who had died before the subject was born, had undergone. The subject, however, has no memories of a previous life and the birthmark is the “sole item of evidence.”
- ² The present case is also reported in Ohkado (2011) in Japanese in a different form.
- ³ With the consent of his parents, part of his real first name is used here, which is of direct relevance to a piece of evidence for the subject’s statements: The subject started signing his name as “Tomo” in roman letters before he began to write Japanese letters, as we will see below.
- ⁴ The mother worried about the subject’s unusual statements including past-life memories, and consulted the psychiatrist, who diagnosed him with Asperger’s Syndrome.
- ⁵ In the diary, the name is written as “ge-i-ri-i-su” in Japanese letters. The subject’s mother, who does not speak English, naturally chose to write it down in Japanese, and if the subject had pronounced the word in English (or English-like pronunciation), the transcript might not be very reliable. It could have been even “James.” Also, see item (17).
- ⁶ There is a pharmaceutical company named EMD Serono, but it appears to only produce injectable medications, not pills.
- ⁷ If Tomo’s statement is correct, the previous personality died at the age of 9, which is unusually early but not impossible. Kinsey, et al. (1975:186)

state that “[e]ight, however, is the earliest age of first ejaculation known for apparently normal males.”

⁸ See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Southall_rail_crash. However, the number of the casualties the subject reported is larger than the actual number by one.

⁹ I used the homepage “Ke!san” to obtain the figure: <http://keisan.casio.jp/exec/system/1257670779>.

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