

# Religion and Society in Modern Japan

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might have been the case otherwise. The representativeness or otherwise of this case study can only be determined by further empirical studies.

### CONCLUSIONS

Three theoretical comments may be made on the basis of the above data:

1. *Safety* as a theme is conspicuous in both religious and nonreligious contexts in Japanese factory life, permeating both aspects so that they become mutually complementary rather than contradictory.

2. *Secularization* hypotheses predicated on an assumption that the nonreligious aspects of industrial society are essentially antagonistic or contradictory to religiosity break down in the light of this kind of data from Japan. Rather than declining in an urban industrial context, it is clear that in Japan religious rites have not only survived but may have even increased in both number and variety through factors such as fires and other disasters in the industrial context.

3. *Scepticism* about the efficacy of the rites is nevertheless present, at least privately among some participants. They perform the rites out of a sense of obligation or duty, as part of their work, and they perform the roles of "vicars" as vicarious representatives of their department, union, or neighborhood association in relation to the deity. However, when most of those supposed to be represented before the gods know nothing or next to nothing about even the existence of most of these rites, and those who represent are often sceptical about the efficacy of the rites themselves, it would seem to be difficult or impossible to apply a Durkheimian type of sociological analysis to such a situation.

### NOTE

\* This article first appeared in the *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 13/4: 261-75, 1986. David C. Lewis is an honorary Research Associate at the Mongolia and Inner Asian Studies Unit, University of Cambridge.

<sup>1</sup> My research on this firm was conducted during two periods of anthropological fieldwork from 1981 to 1982 and 1983 to 1984, during the second of which I was able to observe and conduct interviews about the religious rites conducted in the plant.

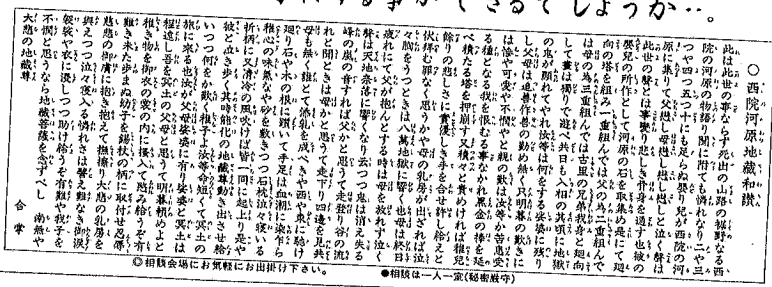
## Mizuko Kuyō and Abortion in Contemporary Japan

HOSHINO Eiki  
TAKEDA Dōshō

IT IS DIFFICULT to recall exactly when weekly magazines and T.V. programs began to take up and sensationalize the theme of a curse associated with *mizuko*, that is, aborted or stillborn children. It is manifestly clear that the pain and sorrow of losing a child is most directly realized by the would-be mother. It is also undeniable that losing a child through abortion is unavoidable for many mothers, because of a variety of circumstances. However, to prey on people's suffering and weakness by advertising that you can remove such a curse, or at least alleviate its effects, such as guilt feeling, strikes one as a pernicious business. Nevertheless, there are a large number of people who respond to these solicitations. Why are these memorials or offerings for aborted or stillborn children (*mizuko kuyō*) so popular in Japan today, and what is it about them that appeals to contemporary Japanese?

水子供養

There are some who believe that the large number of abortions carried out in Japan today, and the increasing demand for *mizuko kuyō*, are due to the deluge of sexual information and the shameless profusion of the so-called sex industry, and that abortion is most common among the younger population. However, as we shall see in more detail later, the available data does not support this theory. Instead, this trend is closely connected with the religious views of the Japanese people, especially their concept of the spirits of the dead, and in this sense *mizuko kuyō* is an important topic for those interested in Japanese religion. In this article we will examine *mizuko kuyō* and the related subject of memorials for pets (*petto kuyō*) from the perspective of religious studies. Since the subject encompasses a number of sensitive issues, we will first take a step back and examine the background of this situation.



ding matters associated with the dead. Some may think that this was always the case for Buddhism in Japan, but this opinion is mistaken. It is now believed that the common people in Japan around the seventh century did not bury their dead in graves but rather discarded corpses by the side of the road (SHIMODE 1972: 14). During the mid-Heian period a story was told of Fujiwara no Tadahira (880-949), the head of the northern branch (*hokke*) of the Fujiwara family, who once visited his father Mototsune's (826-891) grave and mentioned that the graves of his grandfather-in-law Yoshifusa (804-872) and his ancestor Uchimarō were also nearby, but that he himself was not sure exactly where they were. At the time Fujiwara Tadahira was at the peak of his powers, one who held posts such as the *dajō daijin* and *kanpaku*. Even a man of his high position was not sure of the location of the family graves. It is clear, then, that even members of high society were not particularly zealous in honoring their ancestors (TAKATORI and HASHIMOTO 1969: 29).

It was not until the late Kamakura and Muromachi periods (13th-14th centuries) that Buddhism began to play a role among the common people in providing funeral and memorial services. According to Takeda, most of the ordinary temples in Japan were either founded or restored after A.D. 1501. Even those that claim to have been "restored" have no clear records before this time, and it is safe to say that there were no permanent resident priests in these temples before the time of their "restoration" (TAKEDA 1971, Chapters 1-4). If it is true that Buddhist priests did not settle down in village temples around Japan until the sixteenth century, it must have been from this time that Japanese in general began to perform funeral services and to diligently observe memorial rites for their ancestors. It was on this basis that the Edo shogunate found it easy to establish the family temple system (*terauke seido*). The relationship between Buddhism and the general populace, supported by the central pillar of funeral services and ancestral rites, has thus continued to this day, despite such anti-Buddhist government policies as the forceful separation of Shinto and Buddhist elements (*shinbutsu bunri*) after the Meiji Restoration (late nineteenth century). The Meiji constitution, based on the patrilineal system, has passed into history, and there was talk for a while after the Pacific War that under the new democratic constitution such

ancestral rites would disappear, taking with them the Buddhism that depends on such activity to survive. However, this prediction has not materialized, and even today there is no sign that the Japanese concern for their ancestral spirits has diminished.

## SPIRITS AND THEIR MEMORIALS

Buddhism in Japan today is so closely affiliated with ancestral rites that it is often called "funeral Buddhism" (*sōshiki bukkyō*). That does not mean that all spirits of the dead are treated in the same way. Two good examples are the spirits of the *mizuko* and the spirits of dead children. *Mizuko* refers to children who die shortly after birth and fetuses who are still-born (including both natural miscarriages and "artificial" abortions). "Children" refers to those of seven years of age or younger.

The spirits of the *mizuko* and dead children were, in traditional Japanese society, not treated the same as the spirits of dead adults. Chiba and Ōtsu have written extensively about the differences in funerary rites for these different subjects. It was not only the funerary rites that were different. In general, graves were not built for *mizuko* or children and there were no memorial services held especially for them. In some parts of the country, however, there were separate graveyards for children, called *kobaka*. One can also find such customs as the placing of sardines or some other fish in the mouth or in the casket of the *mizuko* or child before burial. According to CHIBA and ŌTSU, however, the purpose of this practice was to prevent the *mizuko* or child from "attaining Buddhahood" after death and to allow them to be reborn in this world (1983: 20-24, 137-42).

In any case, it is undeniable that throughout Japan the spirits of dead children and *mizuko* were handled differently than the spirits of adults. One example of this point is the practice of having the village *nenbutsu* association (*nenbutsu kō*) perform a funeral service for a dead child rather than calling a Buddhist priest from the temple. It is also not unusual to place the "ancestral" tablets of the dead children and *mizuko* under, rather than on, the shelves of the *shōryōdana* during *o-bon*. The offerings to these spirits are also placed under, rather than on, this ancestral shelf.

葬式仏教

念仏講

精霊棚

寺請制度

神仏分離

FIGURE 1  
TYPES OF SPIRITS

human spirit	<i>uenrei</i>	has a direct descendant who performs ancestral rites
	<i>muenrei</i>	has no direct descendant to perform ancestral rites, e.g., people who suffer an unnatural death, <i>mizuko</i> , or stillborn children
spirit of sentient being	animal spirit	domesticated or work animal, laboratory animal, hunted game, pet
	fish spirit	fish caught or farmed for consumption
	others	insect or bug
spirit of a non-sentient being		needle, doll, and so on

We have mentioned above how in Japanese Buddhism not only sentient beings but also non-sentient beings possess the buddha nature. The custom of offering memorials for inanimate objects such as dolls or needles, or for victims of one's profession such as eels or whales, reveals the Japanese belief that such beings, whether animal or inanimate, have some sort of "spirit" (*reikon*) or "soul" (*tamashii*). Figure 1 is an attempt to categorize "spirits" on the basis of such memorial rites (or, more specifically, as the objects of memorial rites performed under the aegis of Japanese Buddhism).

*Uenrei*, the spirit of one who has some relations left in this world to perform the ancestral rites, is the normal, most common type of human spirit. Having lived a full life, this spirit has descendants who after its death will perform the proper rites. It will thus become an ancestral spirit who protects its descendants. As YANAGITA Kunio has shown in his work *About Our Ancestors* (1970), this is the "normal" ancestral spirit of the Japanese.

The *muenrei* (spirit with no relations) is the opposite of the *uenrei*. It has no direct descendants to perform rites for it. It was believed that as a result, this kind of spirit could become vindictive (*onryō*) and bring about misfortune to those still living in this world. However, as we mentioned above, the *muenrei* of those who died as adults and those of children and *mizuko* were traditionally handled differently.

The spirits of animals were traditionally handled through special memorial ceremonies for animals. In such cases, the

animals being memorialized were invariably those that had performed some useful service for human beings. Examples would include memorials for cows and horses by farmers or horse traders; memorials for fish, porpoises, or whales by fishermen or whalers; or mounds (*senbikizuka*) built by professional hunters in honor of their game. Each of these involved certain ceremonies to be performed by a Buddhist priest, and often included the establishment of a memorial tower or mound.

Companies and research facilities use a large number of guinea pigs and other small animals for scientific experiments. Many companies perform a regular memorial ceremony, usually once a year, in honor of these animals. There are many towers built as memorials to animals in the famous graveyard on Mt. Kōya, the headquarters of the Shingon school.

In contrast to the longer tradition of memorializing all these animals, memorial services for pets is a recent phenomenon. These pets do not perform a useful service to their owners in the traditional sense. They are not work animals. In the past, dogs performed various services, such as that of a watchdog, and cats were kept to catch mice and thus to a certain degree were "economic animals." Modern pets, however, play a different role. The recent use of the English loan word "*petto*" for pets signifies the change in status for these animals from a traditional, economically useful role, to that of a "humanized" role as a member of the family. In fact, "*petto*" has become a Japanese word and the traditional word for "pet" in Japanese is already obsolete.

Memorial services for fish are commonly performed by fishermen. A fishing village almost certainly has a stone memorial tower or monument dedicated to the fish that have been captured and killed. The more traditional Buddhist ceremony of releasing captured birds or fish (*hōjō-e*) is closely related to this practice.

The memorial tower for white ants on Mt. Kōya is the most famous example of memorials for insects or other bugs. This tower was built by a major company involved in the extermination of white ants. For most people these white ants are harmful vermin, but for exterminators it is possible to say that they are a source of business and thus are indirectly beneficial entities.

千匹塚

放生会

靈魂

有緣靈

無緣靈

怨靈

Memorial services for needles and dolls have been performed at places such as Sensō-ji since the Edo period. This type of memorial, such as the one for needles, is often sponsored by those involved in the production of such materials or by professionals who use them in their work.

# RECENT TRENDS

As we mentioned in the introduction, the topic of *mizuko kuyō* and the curse associated with *mizuko* is brought up almost weekly in the mass media. Advertisements in newspapers and weekly magazines by temples performing *mizuko kuyō*, and those distributed through the mail, reach a peak around the *higan* periods of the spring and fall equinox, when the Japanese traditionally visit the ancestral graves. The practice of *mizuko kuyō* is best represented by the building of *mizuko Jizō* (Skt. Kṣitigarbha) statues. The large numbers and energetic activity of those involved in using Jizō include temples specializing in *mizuko kuyō*, such as Shiunzan Jizō-ji; the numerous temples of various Buddhist sects that have traditionally performed *mizuko kuyō* as one of many activities; and the Benten-shū movement that encourages performing *mizuko kuyō* by building an enormous Jizō tower. Recently more and more Buddhist temples are building new *mizuko Jizō* statues and encouraging *mizuko kuyō*. There are also many new religions that, without encouraging people to build *mizuko Jizō* statues, offer spiritual comfort and nullify the guilt and curse associated with the spirit of a *mizuko*.

In light of this religious situation, one has reason to suspect that it is not merely the promiscuous sexual habits of the younger generation leading to increased abortions that accounts for the recent popularity of *mizuko kuyō*. There is no doubt that *mizuko kuyō* is closely related to the Japanese concept of spirits. We will now clarify the contemporary situation with regard to *mizuko kuyō* by comparing it to the infanticide (*mabiki*) and abortions practiced during the Edo period (16th–19th centuries).

The first point that must be clarified concerns the subject who practices *mizuko kuyō*. Let us take a look at the statistics on abortion compiled by the government under the Eugenics Protection Act. These statistics are based on official reports submitted by doctors, and it is suspected that the actual num-

CHART 1. ANNUAL ABORTIONS BY AGE GROUP 1955, 1960, 1965–1991

Year	Total	Under 20	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45–49	Over 50	Unknown
1955	1,170,143	14,475	181,522	309,195	315,788	225,152	109,652	13,027	268	1,064
1960	1,063,256	14,697	168,626	304,100	278,978	205,361	80,716	9,650	253	875
1965	843,248	13,303	142,038	235,458	230,352	145,583	68,515	6,611	237	1,151
1966	808,378	15,452	136,143	226,063	220,153	141,002	61,602	6,537	211	1,215
1967	747,490	15,269	124,801	199,450	204,257	138,570	57,367	6,391	177	1,208
1968	757,389	15,668	133,206	203,004	202,307	139,320	56,495	6,030	182	1,177
1969	744,451	14,943	137,354	201,821	192,913	135,269	54,793	6,105	166	1,087
1970	732,033	14,314	141,355	192,866	187,142	134,464	54,101	6,656	162	973
1971	739,674	14,474	152,653	184,507	186,447	137,432	56,379	6,024	197	920
1972	732,653	14,001	148,943	181,291	186,379	138,073	57,801	5,668	153	985
1973	700,532	13,065	134,053	177,748	179,887	131,010	57,658	5,985	151	975
1974	679,837	12,261	119,592	177,639	181,644	125,097	56,737	5,816	127	924
1975	671,597	12,123	111,468	184,281	177,452	123,060	56,634	5,596	208	775
1976	664,106	13,042	108,187	190,876	168,720	121,427	55,598	5,386	155	715
1977	641,242	13,484	99,123	175,803	165,923	123,832	56,573	5,774	157	573
1978	618,044	15,232	94,616	159,926	167,894	120,744	53,431	5,614	169	418
1979	613,676	17,084	94,062	145,012	173,976	125,973	51,521	5,228	124	696
1980	598,084	19,048	90,337	131,826	177,506	123,277	50,280	5,215	132	463
1981	596,569	22,079	90,525	123,825	185,099	118,528	50,724	5,246	141	402
1982	590,299	24,478	90,257	113,945	181,148	121,809	53,133	5,095	127	307
1983	568,363	25,843	89,235	103,597	165,680	126,215	52,862	4,539	104	288
1984	568,916	28,020	90,293	101,304	155,376	135,629	53,571	4,366	117	240
1985	550,127	28,038	88,733	95,195	142,474	139,594	51,302	4,434	94	263
1986	527,900	28,424	84,931	90,479	130,218	141,675	47,299	4,511	121	242
1987	497,756	27,542	81,178	86,633	117,866	131,514	48,262	4,408	105	248
1988	486,146	28,596	82,585	83,734	110,868	123,387	52,477	4,241	83	175
1989	466,876	29,675	83,931	79,579	103,459	111,373	54,409	4,237	72	141
1990	456,797	32,431	86,367	79,205	98,232	101,705	54,924	3,753	58	122
1991	436,299	33,286	88,217	75,446	90,803	92,676	52,203	3,538	44	86

CHART 2 TRENDS IN THE % OF ABORTIONS BY AGE GROUP							
	Under 20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49
1955	1.2	15.5	26.4	27.0	19.2	9.4	1.1
1960	1.4	15.9	28.6	26.2	19.3	7.6	0.9
1965	1.6	16.8	27.9	27.3	17.3	8.1	0.8
1970	2.0	<b>19.3</b>	26.3	25.6	18.4	7.4	0.9
1975	1.8	16.6	<b>27.4</b>	26.4	18.3	8.4	0.8
1980	3.2	15.1	22.0	<b>29.7</b>	20.6	8.4	0.9
1985	5.1	16.1	17.3	25.9	<b>25.4</b>	9.3	0.8
1990	7.1	18.9	17.3	21.5	22.3	<b>12.0</b>	0.8
1991	7.6	20.2	17.3	20.8	21.2	12.0	0.8

ber of abortions may be close to twice the reported figures. We are not concerned here with the exact totals, but rather with the percentages and trends according to age groups. Also, it is safe to assume that the age group that experiences the most abortions would be most active in performing *mizuko kuyō*.

Chart 1 shows the total number of abortions according to age group and Chart 2 shows the percentage of total abortions according to the same age groups. Chart 3 shows the actual number of abortions per thousand women within each of these age groups.

A quick glance at Chart 1 shows that in the years for which we have statistics, i.e., from 1955 to 1991, the total number of abortions shows a steady decline, from almost 1,200,000 in 1955 down to less than 440,000 in 1991. The only exception is the age group of those under 20, which shows a slow but steady annual increase. Chart 2 shows that peak percentages reached by each age group follow a set pattern: peaks are reached by the age group of 20-24 in 1970 at 19.3%; by those 25-29 in 1975 at 27.4%; by those 30-34 in 1980 at 29.7%; by those 35-39 in 1985 at 25.4%; and by those 40-44 in 1990 at 12.0%. This five-year trend reflects the advancing wave of the baby-boomers, resulting in an inflated figure for that time period. In other words, as the members of the baby-boomer generation reach a certain age, their larger numbers are reflected as a peak percentage, resulting in a temporary reversal of the general trend toward a reduced number of abortions.

CHART 3 NUMBER OF ABORTIONS ACCORDING TO AGE GROUP (PER THOUSAND PEOPLE)							
	Total	-20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44 45-49
1955	50.2	3.4	43.1	80.8	95.1	80.5	41.8 5.8
1960	42.0	3.2	40.2	73.9	74.0	62.7	29.4 3.8
1965	30.2	2.5	31.1	56.0	56.0	38.8	21.2 2.5
1970	24.8	3.2	26.4	42.2	44.7	32.9	14.7 2.1
1975	22.1	3.1	24.7	34.3	38.4	29.2	13.8 1.5
1976	21.8	3.4	25.2	33.8	38.5	28.3	13.4 1.4
1977	21.1	3.5	24.2	32.3	36.4	28.2	13.5 1.5
1978	20.3	3.9	23.8	31.2	34.9	26.8	12.7 1.4
1979	20.1	4.3	23.8	30.5	34.5	26.8	12.4 1.3
1980	19.5	4.7	23.3	29.3	33.2	26.8	12.0 1.3
1981	19.5	5.5	23.5	28.9	32.8	27.1	11.9 1.3
1982	19.3	6.0	23.2	27.9	33.3	26.8	12.2 1.2
1983	18.5	6.1	22.8	26.1	32.7	26.3	11.8 1.1
1984	18.5	6.5	22.9	25.8	32.7	26.9	11.5 1.1
1985	17.8	6.4	22.0	24.6	31.5	26.2	11.2 1.1
1986	17.1	6.1	21.3	23.5	30.4	25.2	10.9 1.1
1987	16.0	5.8	19.8	22.4	28.9	24.3	10.7 1.0
1988	15.6	5.9	19.6	21.6	28.0	24.1	11.0 1.0
1989	14.9	6.1	19.5	20.4	26.4	23.5	10.8 0.9
1990	14.5	6.6	19.8	19.7	25.4	22.7	10.3 0.8
1991	13.9	6.9	19.1	19.1	23.7	21.7	9.3 0.8

With regard to the age group most likely to be involved with *mizuko kuyō*, it is significant that ever since the statistics have been gathered in 1955, the age group that almost invariably has the highest number of abortions is that of women between the ages of 30 and 34. The age group 35-39 has usually been the third highest group, until it took the top spot in 1986 (due to the wave of baby-boomers). As we can see from Chart 2, the second highest group of those 25-29 fell to third place in 1985 (in 1982 according to Chart 1), and then was overtaken by the even younger group of those 20-24 in 1989 and is now ranked fourth.

Thus the trends that one can see from these statistics are, on the one hand, the increasing age of those who are having abortions, and on the other hand, the gradual increase in the number of abortions by those in the youngest age group

under 20 years of age. As for the theory that abortions have increased among young people due to their sexual promiscuity, we can see that the number of abortions by those under twenty years of age has indeed shown a steady increase. However, in terms of percentages of total numbers of abortions, this age group cannot be considered the major group of those having abortions. This conclusion is also supported by Chart 3. This chart shows the number of abortions per one thousand women of that age group, and the fact that the age group 30-34 has the highest figures, followed by that of the age group 35-40, has not changed since the statistics began to be compiled in 1955. A significant difference from Charts 1 and 2 that can be noted from the statistics in Chart 3 is that there has been a steady decline in the number of abortions per population in all but the under-20 age group. It can be seen that women in their thirties have always been the age group demanding the most abortions. Thus it is women approximately 30 years of age, the majority of which are probably married women with children, that forms the dominant group of women who have abortions.

#### ABORTIONS IN TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY JAPAN

We have seen that the majority of abortions in Japan are performed on married women. The same could be said of infanticide and abortions during the Edo period. Let us then analyze the differences between the circumstances of married women in traditional society and those in modern society, where the basic unit is the nuclear family:

1. *Pregnancy*. In traditional society one lived in a closed, communal society. The fact of pregnancy soon became common public knowledge. In contrast, in the contemporary situation pregnancy is an individual or family affair and not a matter of public concern.

2. *Performance of abortion*. In traditional society abortion was performed with what now seem very crude and unreliable methods, often placing the mother in danger of losing her life (see ONSHIZAI DAN AIKUKAI 1975). Today, under the Eugenics Protection Act, anyone can freely choose to have a safe abortion. The medical techniques have advanced to the point where it is not even necessary to be hospitalized. Therefore, the most important point is that it is possible to keep the fact secret.

3. *Reasons for abortions*. In traditional society infanticide and abortion were common but the reason for this was poverty, and to some extent an act of rebellion by the agricultural class against the feudal order. It is said that this practice was an important factor contributing to stagnation in population growth during this time. CHIBA and ŌTSU argue, in contrast, that infanticide was not a common practice but was resorted to only in times of famine or other crisis (1983: 14-110). In either case, infanticide and abortion were silently accepted and justified by society only in times of natural calamity or as an unavoidable means of survival.

In modern times abortion is a result of "a strong emphasis on birth control or a general heightening of a preference for fewer children" (MURAMATSU 1983: 14). BROOKS writes of "those persons who seem to abort their children because of self-centered materialistic aspirations" (1981: 133). It is a fact that there is no poverty in Japan today (compared with that of the past), and even though people have more than enough of the necessities of life, they constantly seek to improve their economic condition. Since any more than the minimum number of children would hinder this quest, it is commonly believed that many people immediately choose to have an abortion as soon as pregnancy is discovered. In this sense, contemporary abortions are performed for individual reasons, and each must be justified by individuals.

4. *Responsibility for abortions*. It is clear that responsibility for abortions in traditional society was not merely that of the individual. Responsibility was shared by the community in general, or there may not have been any sense of responsibility at all. In contemporary Japan the responsibility must be borne in secret completely by the individual. This is the basis for a feeling of indebtedness, which will be discussed in more detail later.

5. *The concept of the spirits of children*. According to CHIBA and ŌTSU, in traditional society there were definite differences in funerary practices between those performed for adults and those for children. Since "the life of a newborn child was sent into this world from the spiritual realm of the kami (*shinrei*)" (1983: 37), a Buddhist funeral was denied children, but prayers were added by relatives that they would be reborn in this world. CHIBA and ŌTSU extrapolate the idea that "since the spirit is something that is given by the kami, it

神霊



can be returned in case it is not needed at that time, and received again when it is required" (1983: 141-42). In contemporary Japan, however, there is no belief in a special or different kind of spirit belonging to children. At the risk of being misunderstood, it could be said that children have now been included in the same group as that of adults. The next point is related to this one.

6. *Naming of children.* In traditional society, as mentioned above, children who died under the age of seven were not buried in a grave, and thus lost any further direct connection with the village or temple. This indicates that these children had not yet become full-fledged members of the group or society (CHIBA and ÔTSU 1983: 167), and that, according to the concept of spirits expressed in section 5, they would have another chance to be reborn and join that society. The particular characteristic of these children, including aborted and stillborn children, was their namelessness. In contemporary Japan, on the other hand, children (including stillborn children) are buried with the same formal funeral ceremonies as adults, even though these are admittedly more toned down than a funeral for an adult. Usually posthumous Buddhist names (*kaimyō* or *hōmyō*) are given. A problem arises with aborted children. In general, funeral ceremonies are not performed for them and they are not given posthumous Buddhist names. However, the namelessness of *mizuko* is based on the fact that the abortion was carried out in secret, hidden from society in general. The fact still remains that for the person who aborted the child a life had been harbored in her body and that this life was rejected by her. The memory remains and cannot be easily dismissed. From the perspective of the Japanese concept of life and spirits, the aborted child in contemporary society should have a name.

#### ABORTION AND RELIGION

In light of the above analysis, there are clearly at least two definite differences between the two societies. These are the differences, first, in the social system and, second, in the concept of spirits with regard to children. Both of these differences are well illustrated by the attitude taken by these two kinds of societies toward abortion.

The traditional, local community, with its strong interpersonal relationships and restrictive local mores, had a concept of spirits that distinguished between those of adults and those of children. Therefore infanticide and abortion could be justified to some extent among the community as a whole. To that extent the responsibility was also shared by the community, and an individual did not have to bear the burden alone. In addition, the belief that the child could be reborn spared the individual and community from suffering guilt for having performed infanticide or abortion. There is also the fact that the life expectancy of children in general was very uncertain at this time, and the death of a child was easier to accept.

Contemporary society, on the other hand, has evolved, along with increasing industrialization and urbanization, more and more toward being centered around small families and the nuclear family. Now abortions are carried out in a milieu wherein the spirits of adults and children are not distinguished, and so the aborted child is considered a living entity entitled to life. In such a society the individual seeks to have an abortion alone and in secret, and thus must also bear the responsibility alone and in secret. It is in this situation that a conscientious person will suffer self-recrimination and a feeling of indebtedness. As ONO has written, "Instead of the offering of a memorial for all spirits (in the traditional local community) in which the unhappiness and suffering of others, and one's own distress, is shared, could it not be said that the popularity of *mizuko kuyō* is an individualization of suffering?" (1982: 25).

Given this structure of contemporary society, the causes for the popularity of *mizuko kuyō* become clear. As Brooks has pointed out, behind this increasing popularity are the "conflicting feelings" of those who undergo abortions. On the one hand there is the feeling that abortion goes against the principle of respect for life. On the other hand is the belief that spirits of *mizuko* who are not memorialized are potentially dangerous, i.e., there is a fear of suffering from a "curse" (BROOKS 1981: 133-37). Abortion in contemporary Japan is not unavoidable or necessitated by natural calamity, but is carried out by individual will in the midst of material prosperity, against a child whose probability of dying before reaching maturity is otherwise extremely low, and who has

become "humanized" in contemporary society. This results in a feeling of indebtedness and self-recrimination and a search for a cause and effect relationship that finds the reason for one's happiness or unhappiness in the fact of an abortion. In addition, anxiety of a possible curse from an aborted baby, based on this feeling of indebtedness, comes from the aforementioned development that children are now considered as being in the same category as adults (the "humanization" of children). In traditional society the spirits of the children were not considered as possible purveyors of a curse, whereas in contemporary society the spirits of children are treated the same as the spirits of adults, and thus have the potential for casting a curse.

We can thus say that the purpose of contemporary *mizuko kuyō* is one of providing comfort from the feeling of indebtedness and anxiety that comes from a fear of this curse. Examples to illustrate this point are easily found, such as the writings of Hashimoto Tetsuma of the Shiunzan Jozō-ji on the transformation of such curses to worldly benefits through performing memorial services, notes such as *omoidegusa* (unpublished reminisces) by pilgrims to Jikishi-an in Kyoto, or the pamphlet *Yasuragi* (Comfort) published by the Benten-shū. For one concrete example, let us look at one of the unpublished notes known as *omoidegusa*:

After having one miscarriage and aborting one child, we were blessed with two children—one boy and one girl—and I am now living happily with both my husband and aunt.

However, I feel heartbroken when I think of that child (which I aborted) and think of what it would be like if the child was alive.

I am now thirty-six years old, and I think that many different experiences, though some are very sorrowful and painful, help one to grow and mature.

I also had a romantic relationship [when I was young] which ended with me crying the night away, but this experience has made me stronger. I want to tell young people to face life resolutely, and not be disheartened.

I look forward to continuing self-improvement.

Finally, a few words on *mizuko kuyō* and the practice of religion in general in contemporary Japan. MORIOKA categorizes the relationships between contemporary people and religious institutions as follows:

- 1 Temporary (*ichijiteki*) relationship. A relationship that does not continue steadily for a long period, but is a temporary relationship based on a short-term need.
- 2 Surface (*hyōmenteki*) relationship. A merely outward or superficial relationship that does not penetrate to the deepest dimension of the personality.
- 3 Beneficial (*kōriteki*) relationship. A relationship based on worldly benefits (*genze riyaku*).
- 4 Liberated (*kaihōteki*) relationship. A relationship that is not restrictive but is liberated from the narrow confines of the traditional family temple relationship (1980: 93).

一時的

表面的

功利的  
現世利益  
解放的

These relationships to religious institutions that Morioka points out as indicative of a society based on the nuclear family in this age of urbanization are very pertinent to *mizuko kuyō*. For example, *mizuko kuyō* is in almost all cases a temporary relationship. There is no formal funeral, and any follow-up services are done at the discretion and convenience of the individual. It is a superficial, surface relationship, because it ends as soon as one is set free from any possible curse and is thus comforted. It is a mutually "beneficial" relationship for the same reason. It is a "liberated" relationship because in most cases the person seeking to offer a memorial service does not go to the family temple but to a place with which one has little or no previous connections. We can conclude that *mizuko kuyō* fits right into the pattern defined by Morioka as typical for contemporary religious activity in Japan.

## MEMORIALS FOR PETS AND DOLLS

Finally, some comments concerning memorial services for pets and dolls. As we mentioned at the beginning, memorials for animals and tools that are beneficial to human society have traditionally been the objects of "memorial" services. This practice continues today, in a sense, in the form of memorial services for pets and dolls. Of course, memorial services for useful animals, such as farm animals, and tools used in one's work, also continue as before.

The belief that animals and even inanimate objects possess some form of "spirit" or "soul" is as common among the Japanese today as it was in the past. How does this relate to the current cases of memorial services for pets and dolls? We



A memorial for dolls near Ōsu Kannon temple in Nagoya.

believe that memorial services carried out in contemporary Japan for pets and dolls are fundamentally different from those carried out in the past for animals. On the one hand the belief in the presence of spirits in these objects is the same. This is illustrated by the following story printed in the 9 September 1984 edition of the *Asahi shinbun*. The residents of Urawa City in Saitama Prefecture had submitted a petition to the city government that the dead bodies of animals not be disposed of and burned with regular waste material, and the city was considering the construction of a separate furnace specifically for the cremation of pets. According to our

finding, about twenty of the cities in a certain suburban area of Tokyo do not at the present time burn the bodies of pets along with the garbage, but have commissioned the handling of such pets to a certain private dog-and-cat cemetery. It is clear that even government agencies in Japan are not comfortable with the idea of handling the bodies of pets as just so much garbage. The idea that "all sentient beings possess the buddha nature" is alive and well in modern Japan, but a fundamental difference has arisen in contemporary society concerning the place of animals. The basic unit for society today is the nuclear family, and these families have fewer members. Since there are fewer children, those children have fewer brothers and sisters, and often animals—pets—have become substitutes. In the case of older couples, animals become substitutes for children. The fact that animals are becoming "humanized" is reflected in the way their sphere of life is widening into areas formerly reserved only for human beings, such as their being considered a member of the family, and in the growing number of magnificent cemeteries and family columbariums run by pet professionals specifically for dogs, cats, or other pets after they die. This trend cannot be explained merely by the lack of space in the city to continue the practices of traditional society, or in the countryside, where pets were privately buried in one's garden or backyard.

The same can be said for the memorial services for dolls. Since ancient times dolls were considered vehicles for spirit possession, and often services were held to send the doll's "spirit" on to the next world, but in the present day we find a tendency to consider a doll as a member of the family, just as "animals" became "pets." The same "humanization" has occurred.

These animals and dolls, which in traditional society were considered by the community and workers as objects that contributed to the welfare of human society, are in contemporary society considered the private possessions of individuals, and are gradually becoming "humanized." It is at this point that we find commonality with *mizuko kuyō*. The characteristic relationships between contemporary people and religion outlined by Morioka can be seen here in that the funeral services for these pets are conducted by the individual owner apart from the aegis of the family temple; the relationship is temporary, as seen in the typical contract with a

pet cemetery for only three years; and so forth.

We can conclude with the comment that, although memorials for animals and tools by communities and professional groups continue as in traditional society, these kinds of memorials have split into two streams. The fact that memorials are now for pets and not merely "animals" is the most conspicuous aspect of such memorials in contemporary Japan.

#### NOTE

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## Pokkuri-Temples and Aging

### Rituals for Approaching Death

Fleur Wöss

TO DIE OR NOT TO DIE—that is *not* the question. Do what we will, death is an inescapable accompaniment of life. The question of *how* we will die is one that all of us think about from time to time, however; not so much while we are young, with death a distant reality hidden by our future hopes and plans, but increasingly so as our remaining time grows short and the end of life confronts us. Interests gradually shift from the occupational to the personal, especially after retirement and the completion of child-raising duties. Declining health and the deaths of relatives and friends bring the old face-to-face with the possibility of long-term illness and suffering, and lend immediacy to the question of how they themselves will die. Such concerns are reflected in the following poem by Nonagase Masao, which depicts a comfortable life and death:<sup>1</sup>

Longing for the western capital

My teacher in Kyoto

lived in a house in the woods

What has he been doing lately?

When you eat, eat amply

When you sleep, sleep leisurely

When you die, die suddenly.

This is a "saying of Yamato," handed down from times past

My teacher wrote it for me once

My teacher, Master Shinyoto

I follow the saying when I eat and sleep

But how about when I die?

Ample eating, leisurely sleeping, and sudden death (*kuu toki nya tappuri, neru toki nya yukkuri, shinu toki nya pokkuri*)—these are the components of a happy life. What concerns us