

## Indebtedness and Comfort: The Undercurrents of *Mizuko Kuyō* in Contemporary Japan

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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* 水子, 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. Undeniably there are many people who, due to various circumstances, could not avoid losing their child through an abortion. To prey on people's suffering and weakness by advertizing an association of a "curse" with these *mizuko*, while being fully aware of such circumstances, 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 *mizuko* (*mizuko kuyō* 水子供養) so popular in Japan today, and what is it about them which appeals to contemporary Japanese?

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. The roots of this problem are too deep to be explained simply by the sexual habits of the younger generation. Instead this trend is closely connected to the religious views of the Japanese people, especially their concept of the spirits of the dead (*reikonkan* 靈魂觀), 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

<sup>1</sup> This article was translated from the Japanese by Paul L. Swanson. See Hoshino and Takeda 1985.

a step back and examine the background of this situation.

### *The Japanese Concept of the Spirits of the Dead*

As we have already mentioned, *mizuko kuyō* is closely connected to the Japanese concept of the spirits of the dead. While we cannot fully explicate this topic here, it is the accepted opinion of most scholars that the animistic nature of Japanese religion is an important factor in this concept. We do not intend to discuss here whether animism is the belief which attributes a soul or spirit even to inorganic entities, as defined by the 19th century anthropologist Tylor (1958, Chapter 10), or the belief which attributes some more general “power,” including some soul or spirit, even to inorganic entities. Here we are referring to an animism in the later broader sense of attributing an ambiguous “power” to certain objects.

Traditional Eastern religions such as Hinduism in India or Mahāyāna Buddhism, unlike the monotheism of Christianity or Islam, have an emphatic “animistic” coloring, with strong polytheistic or pantheistic tendencies. The particularly polytheistic Japanese myths are well known, but in this article we are interested more in the relation of *mizuko kuyō* to Japanese Buddhism. On this point Nakamura Hajime says:

For the Japanese of old, even the grasses and trees had a spirit (*seishin* 精神), and it was generally believed that these inanimate objects could become enlightened and thus be saved. In other words, the idea that even “non-sentient” (*hijō* 非情) objects could attain Buddhahood, based on the Tendai concept of the ultimate reality of all existences (*shohō jissō* 諸法実相), was very strong in Japan.

. . . The idea of attributing a spirit to even grasses and trees can be found in Indian Buddhism. . . . However, according to many Indian philosophies, living beings attain liberation through knowledge (*vidya*), and the idea that grasses and trees could attain enlightenment was not developed (Nakamura 1961, p. 18).

This idea was traditionally expressed through such phrases as “the grasses, trees, and land all without exception attain Buddhahood” (*sōmoku kokudo shikkai jōbutsu* 草木国土悉皆成佛) and “the mountains and rivers and grasses and trees all have the buddha nature” (*sansen sōmoku shitsu'u busshō* 山川草木悉有仏性). Even non-sentient entities such as grasses and trees or mountains and rivers can attain Buddhahood; how much more so can sentient beings. This is the ultimate expression of the Buddhist belief that “all sentient beings have the buddha nature.” Of course this “buddha nature” is not, Buddhologically speaking, equivalent to the spirit which is pacified through *mizuko kuyō*, because at least this spirit is the spirit of the dead. However, it is very doubtful that this academic distinction was regarded as

important by the general populace.

The fact that the framework for allowing this sort of development was provided by Buddhism does not mean that Buddhism generally handled the memorials for the spirits of the dead as in the present from an early historical period. It is well known that from the time before the introduction of Buddhism the Japanese felt an intense aversion toward corpses or anything associated with death, and that there were many taboos associated with death. Death was a central item in the list of defilements. Neither Shinto nor other elements of folk religion would deal with the bodies of the dead, whether they were those of human beings or animals, and even today anything associated with death is taboo to a Shinto shrine. No one in mourning can participate in a shrine ceremony.

In the case of contemporary Japan, one can get the impression that Buddhism has acquired exclusive rights for handling 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 7th century did not bury their dead in graves but rather discarded corpses by the side of the road (Shimode 1972, p. 14). During the mid-Heian period, a story is told of Fujiwara no Tadahira (880–949), the head of the northern branch (*hokke* 北家) 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* 太政大臣 and *kanpaku* 関白. Even such a man as this was not sure of the location of the family graves. It is clear that even members of high society like him were not particularly zealous in honoring their ancestors (Takatori 1969, p. 29).

It was not until the late Kamakura and Muromachi periods (13th–14th centuries) that Buddhism begin 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 which 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 truly the case that Buddhist priests did not settle down in village temples around Japan until the 16th 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* 寺請制度). 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 anti-Buddhist government policies such as the forceful separation of Shinto and Buddhist elements (*shinbutsu bunri* 神仏分離) after the Meiji Restoration (late 19th 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 which 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 “funerary Buddhism” (*sōshiki bukkyō* 葬式仏教). 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 stillborn (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 which were different. In general, graves were not built for *mizuko* or children and there were no memorial services held for them in particular. In some parts of the country, however, there were separate graveyards for children called *kobaka* コバカ. 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, pp. 20–24, pp. 137–142).

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* 念仏講) 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* 精霊棚 during *o-bon* お盆. The offerings to these spirits are also placed under rather than on this ancestral shelf.

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 (*ningyō kuyō* 人形供養) or needles (*hari kuyō* 針供養), or for victims of one’s profession such

as eels (*unagi kuyō* 鰻 供養) or whales (*kujira kuyō* 鯨 供養) reveals the Japanese belief that such beings, whether animal or inanimate, have some sort of “spirit” (*reikon* 靈魂) or “soul” (*tamashii* たましい). Chart I 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).

Chart I. Types of Spirits		
human spirits	<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 suffered an un-natural death ( <i>ōshi</i> 横死), <i>mizuko</i> , or stillborn children
spirits of sentient beings	animal spirits	domesticated and work animals, laboratory animals, hunted game, pets
	fish spirits	fish caught or farmed for consumption
	others	insects and other bugs
spirits of non-sentient beings		needles, dolls, and so forth

*Uenrei* 有縁霊, the spirits of those who have some relations left in this world to perform their ancestral rites, are the normal, most common type of human spirit. Having lived a full life, this spirit has descendants who after one's 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 on *Senzo no hanashi* 先祖の話 (Tales of the ancestors, 1973, pp. 1–152), this

is the “normal” ancestral spirit of the Japanese.

The *muenrei* 無縁靈 (spirits with no relations) are the opposite of the *uenrei*. They have no direct descendants to perform rites for them. It was believed that as a result these spirits could become vindictive (*onryō* 怨靈) 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 which had performed some useful service for human beings. Examples would include the memorials for cows and horses by farmers or horse traders; memorials for fish, porpoises, or whales by fishermen or whalers; or mounds (*senbikizuka* 千匹塚) 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 watch-dog, 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 which have been captured and killed. The more traditional Buddhist ceremony of releasing captured birds or fish (*hōjō-e* 放生会) 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 indirectly beneficial entities.

Chart II. Annual Abortions by Age Group

1955, 1960, 1965–1981

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	138,073	56,379	6,024	197	920
1972	732,653	14,001	148,943	181,291	186,379	137,432	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

Chart III. Percentages of Abortions by Age Group

1981

	Under 20	20–24	25–29	30–34	35–39	40–44	45–49	Over 50
100.0	3.7	15.2	20.8	31.0	19.9	8.5	0.9	0.0

Memorial services for needles and dolls have been performed at places such as Sensō-ji 浅草寺 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 by temples performing *mizuko kuyō* in newspapers and weekly magazines, 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 the Shiunzan Jizō-ji, the numerous temples of various Buddhist sects which have traditionally performed *mizuko kuyō* as one of many activities, and the Benten-shū 弁天宗 which 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 which, though they do not adopt the form of building *mizuko* Jizō statues, offer comfort from 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 which 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* 間引き) 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 優生保護法 (Charts II and III). These statistics are based on official reports submitted by doctors, and it is believed that the actual number 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 which experiences the most abortions would be most active in performing *mizuko kuyō*.

Chart II shows the total number abortions according to age group, and Chart III shows the percentage of total abortions according to the same age groups. One striking point is that although the general trend for the past thirty years is for the number of abortions to decline, the trend among women



30–35 years of age has reversed and the number of abortions by women in this age group has increased steadily since 1977. Abortions had decreased steadily and were about the same number as for those 25–29 years of age, but since 1978 the two groups have headed in opposite directions and now women between the ages of 30–34 have a much larger number of abortions. 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 and topped 20,000 for the first time in 1981. However, this still accounts for only 3.7% of the total number of abortions, and other than the worrisome fact that the numbers are increasing steadily, it cannot be considered the major group involved in having abortions. In fact it is the age group of women around thirty years of age (25–34), the majority of which are probably married women with children, which forms the dominant group of people who have abortions. In 1981 they had 51.8% of the total number of abortions in Japan.

#### *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 situation of married women in traditional society and those in modern society whose 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 seems very crude and unreliable methods, often placing the mother in danger of losing her life (see Onshizaidan Aiikukai 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 the increase of population 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, pp. 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, p. 14). Brooks writes of “those persons who seem to abort their children because of self-centered materialistic aspirations” (1981, p. 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 the feeling of indebtedness (*fu no seishinsei* 負の精神性) in the title of this article, 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* 神霊)” (1983, p. 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 which is given by the *kami*, it can be returned in case it is not needed at that time, and received again when it is required” (1983, pp. 141–142). 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 Ōtsu 1983, p. 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* 戒名 or *hōmyō* 法名) 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 first, the differences in 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 which 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 more and more, along with increasing industrialization and urbanization, 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 this situation in which 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, p. 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, pp. 133–137). 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 which finds the reason for one’s happiness or unhappiness in the fact of an abortion.<sup>2</sup> 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 contemporary *mizuko kuyō* has the purpose of providing comfort from the feeling of indebtedness and anxiety which 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* 想い出草 (unpublished reminiscences) by pilgrims to Jikishi-an in Kyoto, or the pamphlet *Yasuragi* やすらぎ (Comfort) published by the Benten-shū. For one concrete example, let us look at some 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

<sup>2</sup> Brooks, referring to Nakamura (1967, p. 143), attributes this to the “non-rational or non-scientific habits . . . among many Japanese” (1981, p. 134).

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* 一時的) relationship. A relationship which does not continue steadily for a long period, but is a temporary relationship based on a short-term need.
2. Surface (*hyōmenteki* 表面的) relationship. A merely outward or superficial relationship which does not penetrate to the deepest dimension of the personality.
3. Beneficial (*kōriteki* 功利的) relationship. A relationship based on worldly benefits (*gense niyaku* 現世利益).
4. Liberated (*kaihōteki* 開放的) relationship. A relationship which is not restrictive but is liberated from the narrow confines of the traditional family temple relationship (1981, p. 93).

These relationships to religious institutions that Morioka points out as indicative of a nuclear-family based society 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 of this article, memorials for animals and tools which 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 believe that memorial services carried out in contemporary Japan for pets and dolls are fundamentally different than 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 issue of the Asahi newspaper. 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 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 facts that 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 that there are now an increasing 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 practice of traditional society, or in the countryside, where pets were privately buried in one’s garden or back yard.

The same can be said for the memorial services for dolls. Since ancient times dolls were considered vehicles for spirit possession, and often services (*ningyō okuri* 人形おくり) 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 which 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.

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