

REVIEWS

Helen HARDACRE, *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997. 310 pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN 0-520-20553-7

THE TERMS *MIZUKO*, literally “water child,” and *mizuko kuyō*, the religious rites performed for them, are most often linked to abortion, and, thus associated, have received a significant amount of attention in the popular press and academic writings. It is not too often that the same topic should be taken up by two major scholars, and that their books should appear within five years of each other. William LaFleur’s *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* (Princeton University Press, 1992) and Helen Hardacre’s provocatively titled book are major studies on the relationship between religion and abortion, a subject that can generate heated debate.

Whereas LaFleur kept his focus on abortion and Buddhism, Hardacre moves within a wider context that includes other religious traditions such as Shinto, Shugendo, New Religions, and spiritualism, as well as the arenas of gender relations, reproductive life, and sexual culture. When viewed through this wide-angle lens, *mizuko* and *mizuko kuyō* lose their singular association with abortion. As Hardacre points out, the definition of *mizuko* ranges from the narrow to the broad (p. 2), and is best explained as fetuses, infants, and young children who die from any number of causes, only one of which is abortion. Hardacre thus treats *mizuko kuyō* not only as a ritual means for dealing with abortion but also as a subset of memorial and ancestral rites that often have little or nothing to do with abortion. The association with abortion is so strong, however, that it is easy for the reader to follow Hardacre’s own tendency to make those associations even when there are none.

The first two chapters, for example, discuss a pattern of the ritualization of pregnancy and childbirth (food taboos, belt tyings, etc.), the alternative ritualization of Nakayama Miki, their subsequent deritualization through the displacement of traditional midwives with medical professionals in the Meiji period, and the modern ritualization of the abortion experience, all of which are causally linked to each other insofar as “*mizuko kuyō* fills the space created by the deritualization of reproductive life” (p. 14). The ritual patterns concerning pregnancy and childbirth are interesting, but it is difficult to see how the loss of the rituals for birth provide a proper context for understanding the development of the rituals for death. What is germane is Hardacre’s observation that, except for the anomalous case of St. Yuten (pp. 30–45), the “ritualization of abortion was extremely rare in the Edo period” (p. 43). This rarity forces us to conclude that the vacuum filled by *mizuko kuyō* was created not by deritualization but by nonritualization. In discussing the development of *mizuko kuyō*, which she claims began from the 1970s, Hardacre’s own data shows no evidence that it responded to the deritualization of pregnancy and childbirth. What she demonstrates is that *mizuko kuyō* arose in response to the postwar increase in abortions, the Callous Man and Foolish Woman syndrome, new ideas of fetocentrism, the economic difficulties of some religious institutions, and the media campaign. Not everything in this broad context is

associated with the abortion experience.

While the tabloid campaign to publicize the gruesome effects of spirit attacks (*tatarī*) is exclusively tied to the abortion experience, the same cannot be said of *mizuko kuyō*. Hardacre is certainly aware of this, but her discussion of *mizuko kuyō* in the context of the media campaign gives the impression that a primary reason for performing the ritual is the fear of spirit attacks. To cite statistics about the level of participation in *mizuko kuyō* in this context suggests that the media marketing of the menacing fetus was significantly successful in persuading people to engage in the ritual to placate the anger of aborted souls. On the basis of surveys carried out in 1983–1984, Hardacre reports that “over 70 percent fear that they will suffer a spirit attack if they do not perform rites for *mizuko*,” and refers the reader to Table 9 about the respondents’ beliefs concerning the personal meaning of the rite. But the respondents represented in Table 9 apparently did not fear spirit attacks, since that category does not even appear on the chart at all (p. 96). It is methodologically precarious to assume that the vicious media campaign is valid evidence for ascertaining what women thought and felt, and, despite the extensive fieldwork done on temples, shrines, and their priests, little was done in the way of interviews and surveys of women to determine the extent to which they actually feared spirit attacks. The association between *mizuko kuyō* and spirit attacks is thus unclear (or clearly tenuous), and the effectiveness of the media campaign, despite its own hype, is questionable.

Equally uncertain is the level of participation in *mizuko kuyō* by women who had abortions. Hardacre admits that it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions on the basis of the available data, but speculates that “15 to 20 percent of people who have contact with abortion (not only the client herself, but female relatives, male partners, and children)...are inclined to ritualize the event in some way” (p. 99). If we exclude everyone besides the client herself, the participation rate of women who have had abortions drops considerably, perhaps down, in my speculation, to the level of around 10 percent. If this is correct, the picture that emerges is fairly clear: abortion, hardly ritualized in the past, is barely ritualized in the present.

The narratives presented in Chapter 3 confirm this picture. The testimonies of the five women who experienced abortion do not mention *mizuko kuyō* and hardly show any awareness of fetocentrism. Of the accounts by the three men, only one mentions the desire to perform *mizuko kuyō*, a reference that Hardacre notes is “unique in these texts” (p. 136). While the narratives are extremely effective and quite moving in telling about the hardships of having and avoiding children in certain situations, they show “overall, almost no evidence of *mizuko kuyō*’s influence” (p. 153).

Chapter 4 examines several religious institutions and entrepreneurs who offer *mizuko kuyō*, and presents testimonies by three women patrons of the rites. Here, too, it is clear that abortion plays only a limited role. On one level, however, the priest Morita Guyō would seem to be placing abortion at the center of his stage since he blames all personal and social problems on wrathful fetuses and the women who aborted them. His generalization is nevertheless so sweeping as to make almost an abstraction of aborted fetuses, and

he aims at a market of all people, not just women, let alone women who have had abortions. In a similar fashion, Miura Dōmyō, another priestly purveyor of *mizuko kuyō*, ascribes a wide variety of problems to the failure to perform *mizuko kuyō* to placate the souls of fetuses who are, in his view, murdered by women. The testimonials by three women tell of the wonderful benefits they received from the rite: business success, cures of illnesses, and resolution of family problems. The first woman does not mention a *mizuko* at all, the second is probably referring to an abortion, and the third may have had a miscarriage or an abortion. It is not clear how many of the participants in Miura's *Mizuko* Festival came to memorialize an abortion, or whether they came as members of the Living Posthumous Name Club, which has little to do with abortion. Given the diverse facets of Miura's enterprise, it is perhaps not surprising that in his sermon he "did not mention *mizuko kuyō*" (p. 180). The *mizuko kuyō* practiced in the new religion Bentenshū is not just for *mizuko*, which consist of the souls of aborted, stillborn, and miscarried fetuses, but for the salvation of humanity and this-worldly benefits as well. In all of these cases, *mizuko kuyō* thrives, if it does, on much more than the abortion experience.

On the basis of fieldwork carried out at various locales, Hardacre charts important regional variations in the institutional practices of and attitudes about *mizuko kuyō*. In Tōno, a new Sainokawara, a symbolic replica of the afterworld for dead children, was established purely as an economic scheme plotted by the mayor in collusion with a stonework company. Resented by residents who were forced to support it, the project bears little relationship to people's religious beliefs, except for their interpretation that the mayor died because of spirit attacks (p. 215). In Tsuyama, *mizuko kuyō* is practiced but there is a strong critique of it and it does not seem to be a major source of income. Despite their sect's official ban of the rite, twenty percent of the Jōdo Shinshū temples in Yukuhashi perform it, but they do so discreetly and on demand. While one Sōtō temple does not perform it all, another does, but only as one part of a wide-ranging rituals-for-fee menu (p. 231). In Miura, the high rate of male participation is a result of sponsorship by households (*ie*) that have to pay an assessment for the rites out of a sense of duty to support the temple "rather than because they have an interest in, anxiety about, or experience of abortion" (p. 236). At Shinto shrines, euphemisms such as *chigo* and *hiruko* (Leech Child) are used in rites for *mizuko*, but at the Ichihime Shrine it is not very prominent, and the Katsube Shrine accedes to requests that number only five or six per year. The rite does not play a major role in Shugendō temples. Again, the pattern is clear: *mizuko kuyō* is not a major rite, and even when it is performed, it serves many other objectives besides the ritualization of the abortion experience. And yet Hardacre ends this informative chapter with a chart showing rates of abortion, and attempts to explain *mizuko kuyō* in terms of it.

Fetocentrically titled, *Marketing the Menacing Fetus* is only peripherally about marketing the menacing fetus. It is instead a study set within the complexities of reproductive practices, sexual culture, parenthood, gender relations, religious institutions, priestly entrepreneurs, *mizuko kuyō*, and of course

abortion. Any one of these items can be privileged as the lens through which the book can be read. Read through the lens of abortion, the book gives the misleading impression that *mizuko kuyō* is mostly related to it. Read as a study of *mizuko kuyō* within the broad context Hardacre provides, the book liberates the ritual from its restrictive association with abortion and Buddhism, and, thereby, from much of the popular and academic hype that makes students of Japanese religion mistakenly think that *mizuko kuyō* is an important ritual tied to abortion.

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