Mizuko Kuyō and Japanese Buddhism

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INTRODUCTION

As a result of historical crises, overpopulation, and shifting values within at least the last two hundred and fifty years, the Japanese have practiced both infanticide and abortion, but not without bad feelings and concern for the souls of their babies.[1] In an effort both to resolve those feelings and to do something for their babies, the Japanese have for at least two centuries practiced *mizuko kuyō*.[2]

This article is the result of field study I did in 1979 in Japan. Many people helped to provide a foundation for my understanding of what I observed. I have quoted some of them in this article; other helpful sources were Mr. Ueno Hiroshi, Chief of the International Cooperation Section of the National Diet Library, and Professors Fujii Masao, Hoshino Eiki, Takenaka Shinjō, and Yanagawa Keiichi. Moreover, Professor Saeki Shinkō of Sagami Institute of Technology shared with me all the materials he had acquired on *mizuko kuyō*. I am grateful for the materials and insights provided by these persons even though I must take final responsibility for the interpretations I have made of them. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Joseph Kitagawa for reading my manuscript. I am also grateful for the linguistic assistance provided by two of my colleagues at Eastern Kentucky University, Dr. Un-chol Shin and Mrs. Michiko Kwak.

1. Theoretically, at least, all Buddhist countries accept the *anātman* doctrine, the absence of a permanent, unchanging self or soul. This doctrine has very little effect on ordinary language or thought, however, when questions regarding salvation or life after death are discussed. As Sir Charles Eliot (1953, p. 47) wrote, "this is not unnatural, for there is no intention of denying that a human existence can be continued in another life." That is, the *anātman* doctrine is meant only to assert that no existence in this world or any other world is "permanent, unchanging, simple, and independent."
2. *Mizuko*—also read *mizugo*—is the term which has been used since the Edo period for babies who die in miscarriage, aborted babies, stillborn babies, babies who die a short while after birth and victims of infanticide. *Kuyō*, a Buddhist term, originally meant the giving of alms to a priest for the benefit of the dead; today it means ritual practices to comfort the dead.

In the beginning, *mizuko kuyō* was the practice of making a spontaneous offering to the bodhisattva Jizō, a Buddhist saviour figure who is thought to be particularly concerned with the welfare of children. His images were placed along roadsides and mountain paths. Today, Jizō remains the central figure in *mizuko kuyō*, now a structured memorial rite practiced by traditional Buddhist sects and by other religious groups and organizations which show Buddhist influence.

It is debatable whether or not *mizuko kuyō* is authentically Buddhist, but externally the actual practice of *mizuko kuyō* convinces its observers of its close relationship to Japanese Buddhism. Theoretically, it confirms Kitagawa's thesis that Japanese Buddhists traditionally have "attempted to interpret and appropriate the historic tradition of Buddhism in terms of their particular religious heritage as well as their own concrete experiences" (1965, p. 325). There is no doubt that *mizuko kuyō* is a response to the living experiences of the Japanese and their specific ethical and social concerns. It is my purpose, therefore, to describe and analyze the contemporary practice of *mizuko kuyō* in the context of traditional Japanese Buddhism.

THE PRACTICE OF *MIZUKO KUYŌ* IN JAPAN TODAY

Locations and participants. For about ten years there has been an increasing interest in *mizuko kuyō* in Japan, its popularity having dramatically increased in 1975 after the filming and televising of an actual rite for a program on unusual happenings in local areas. By 1979 there were at least thirty places throughout Japan offering the rites. These can be divided into two types: temples representing various established Buddhist sects (for example, Zōjōji in Tokyo of the Jōdo sect and Ninnaji in Kyoto of the Shingon sect), and religious establishments which show Buddhist influence but are not directly affiliated with any Buddhist sect. Bentenshū, for example, is one of the new religions; there is also the Shiunzan Jizō Temple in Chichibu, which was established exclusively for the practice of *mizuko kuyō*. It has no official affiliation with either traditional

Buddhist sects or with the new religions.

Although most of the places which offer *mizuko kuyō* are on Honshū, by 1979 there was at least one place on both Kyūshū and Hokkaidō (Monjuin in Saga and Gyokuhōji in the Sapporo area). Some hospitals also offer *mizuko kuyō* for their patients as "an extra medical service" (Suzuki, 1979). *Mizuko kuyō* has also reached the United States; a nun serving a Buddhist temple in Hawaii introduced the rite to Hawaii in February 1978 (Nakamaki 1980, pp. 103–104).

Mizuko kuyō is generally included among those practices which are related to the veneration of ancestors. For example, some of the most popular days for *mizuko kuyō* are the traditional Japanese Buddhist holidays when offerings are made to ancestral spirits: *higan*, held in March and September during the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, and *bon*, the festival of the dead, usually held in August, when the ancestral spirits are invited to return to their homes. All temples offering *mizuko kuyō* include aborted babies in these special services for the collective dead. *Mizuko kuyō* differs from these practices, however, in that most temples do not inter the remains of aborted babies.[3]

Mizuko kuyō services are not limited to times for the veneration of the collective dead, however; they are performed both on a regular basis throughout the year and also upon request. The regular services vary from a daily to a monthly basis. In addition to all these services, some temples have also established special services in memory of *mizuko*. I will illustrate this variety of services through the following examples.

Shiunzan Jizō Temple offers *mizuko kuyō* on a daily basis with special services during *higan* and *bon*. Ninnaji has a special service

3. Shōjuin, generally known as *akachan* ("baby") temple, in Tokyo, has been receiving the remains of aborted or miscarried babies since the Eugenic Protection Law of 1948 made it necessary to cremate babies aborted after the fourth month of gestation. At present the bones of about 550,000 babies are kept at the temple. Sōjiji in Yokohama has a tower to house the bones of *mizuko*. See *Shūkyō Kōgei* 15 August 1979, pp. 72–75.

for aborted babies once a month. Once a year Ninnaji also sponsors a very large *mizuko kuyō* service. Adashino Nenbutsuji in Kyoto conducts special *mizuko kuyō* services on the twenty-fourth of each month. At Zōjōji *mizuko kuyō* is offered twice a day and during *higan* and *bon*; in addition, the temple sponsors a Jizō festival on the first Sunday in April. The chief priest at Shōrenji in Fujimi City performs *mizuko kuyō* for anyone who requests it and holds an annual rite on 29 April (*Shūkyō Kōgei* 15 September 1979, p. 64). Keyu City Hospital in Yokohama, which is affiliated with the Kanagawa Medical Association, invites patients, the families of patients, doctors, nurses, and midwives to a Buddhist temple for *mizuko kuyō* generally on the first Sunday in September (Suzuki, 1979).

Men and women of all ages and from various socio-economic levels practice *mizuko kuyō*. Some 6,000 families have erected Jizō statues in memory of their aborted babies at Shiunzan Jizō Temple, and as many as 1,000 come to the temple for *mizuko kuyō* during *bon* (Hashimoto Yōtarō, 1979). It is estimated that about 1,000 persons of all socio-economic levels come to the five hundred branches of Bentenshū each month for *mizuko kuyō* (Kotake, 1979). At Adashino Nenbutsuji in Kyoto, from 10,000 to 20,000 wooden slats (*tōba*), erected in memory of *mizuko*, are burned each year (*Shūkyō Kōgei* 15 July 1979, p. 68). Between thirty-five and forty people request *mizuko kuyō* each month at Ninnaji in Kyoto (Nishimoto, 1979). On an average day two or three new people request the rite at Zōjōji; these include people who wanted to have children and could not, those who lost a child in miscarriage, and those who have had abortions. About thirty people attend services which honor the collective dead at Zōjōji to make offerings and to pray for *mizuko* (Tagaya, 1979).

On some days, more than one hundred people will come to Shōjuin Temple in Tokyo for *mizuko kuyō*. A notebook is provided at this temple in which parents are invited to write messages to their babies. Here are some of the messages from that book: "My baby, I am sorry. You came just too early for us . . . "; "I feel very guilty . . ."; "I came here today to apologize"; "Please forgive your foolish

father . . ." (Kobayashi 1979, p. 19).

Buddhist elements. It has already been observed that ***mizuko kuyō*** is offered at traditional Buddhist temples and at other temples which show Buddhist influence. Moreover, ***mizuko kuyō*** is affiliated with Buddhism through its use of Buddhist priests, holidays, and scriptures. Some temples offering ***mizuko kuyō*** use traditional Mahayana Buddhist scripture, but the most popular "scripture" is a Japanese Buddhist hymn called *Sai no kawara Jizō wasan* ("Hymn to Jizō of the River Beach of Sai").[4] According to the text of this hymn, young children or babies who died before they had any opportunity to offer service to their parents or community must place stones on top of one another to build towers symbolic of Buddhist pagodas. Although building pagodas would be good deeds which should help the children go to Buddha's world, a demon destroys them; so, through the hymn devotees call upon Jizō to protect the children and guide them to Buddha[5] (Kanaoka 1979).

4. "According to the curious old Buddhist book, *Sai no kawara kuchi zu sami no den* ['The Legend of the *Humming* of the Sai-no-Kawara'] (Hearn 1894, p. 59), the whole Sai-no-Kawara legend originated in Japan, and was first written by the priest Kūya Shōin [903–72]" (Hearn 1894,p. 44, italics in original). According to de Visser 1914, p. 117: "We did not find this idea [of the *little children* being especially forced by the old hag to heap up the pebbles of the *Sai no kawara*] or the term '*Sai no kawara*' mentioned before the beginning of the 18th century. The Genroku era (1688–1703) may be the time of their spreading among the people."

5. Here is a portion of the text of the hymn which has been translated as follows:

> Not of this world is the story of sorrow.
> The story of the Sai-no-Kawara,
> At the roots of the Mountain of Shide;—
> Not of this world is the tale; yet 't is most pitiful to hear.
> For together in the Sai-no-Kawara are assembled
> Children of tender age in multitude,—
> Infants but two or three years old,
> Infants of four or five, infants of less than ten:
> In the Sai-no-Kawara are they gathered together.
> And the voice of their longing for their parents,
> The voice of their crying for their mothers and their fathers—
> '*Chichi koishi*! *haha koishi*!'—(Hearn 1894, pp. 59–60).

Another popular scripture is a traditional Buddhist sutra called *Hannya shingyō* ("the Heart sutra").[6] Both of these are used at Shiunzan Jizō Temple. Bentenshū uses an esoteric Buddhist sutra called *Rishukyō* (*Adhyarthaśatikā-prajnāpāramitā*).[7] According to this sutra, all human beings are good by nature and ought to be saved without any explanation or special requirements (Kanaoka, 1979). At Zōjōji, the priest uses a Jōdo sutra when praying for *mizuko*. At Shinagawa-dera in Tokyo, the priest permits the copying of *Hannya shingyō* on the eighteenth day of each month, when a Buddhist service for ancestors is held. The hymn *Sai no kawara no Jizō wasan* is also posted at the temple to console those who come for *mizuko kuyō*.

In addition to making use of Buddhist scripture, *mizuko kuyō* also utilizes traditional Buddhist ritual objects including incense, the gong, *ihai*, *kaimyō*, *tōba*, and the bodhisattva Jizō image. It is well known that each of these ritual objects is used in traditional ancestral rites. What is not so well known, however, is the use made of four of these in *mizuko kuyō*.

These four are the *ihai* ("Buddhist memorial tablet," on which is inscribed the deceased ancestor's posthumous name), *kaimyō* ("posthumous name"), *tōba* ("thin wooden slat" placed on the grave), and the image of Jizō. Since aborted babies do not have real life names, one would not expect that they would be given a a *kaimyō* or an *ihai*. According to my research, most temples offering *mizuko kuyō* do not suggest using *ihai* for aborted babies. Instead, they recommend placing small (c. two and one half inch) individual Jizō figures on the family *butsudan* ("Buddhist altar")

6. "This is a compendium or summary of the *prajnāpāramitā* literature, and consists of only one page" (*Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary* 1965, p. 99)
7. "This is the *Prajnāpāramitā-sutra* (*Pan-jo-ching*, *Hannya-gyō*) in one hundred and fifty *ślokas*, depicting the truth of *prajnāpāramitā* or perfect wisdom spoken by the *Vairocana* Buddha for the benefit of *Vajrasattva* .... In the Shingon Sect, this *sūtra* is chanted every morning and evening, and is respected as a *sūtra* setting forth the deep insights of *Vajrasattva*" (*Japanese-English Buddhist Dictionary* 1965, p. 235)

in memory of aborted babies. An unorthodox book on *mizuko*, however, recommends both *kaimyō* and *ihai* for *mizuko kuyō* (Sugiura 1978, pp. 164–202). For *kaimyō*, Sugiura recommends four characters that have good connotations. If one is suffering from headaches, for example, he says that one should use a character related to the head to be cured. He recommends that the *ihai* be a black painted wooden tablet with gold lettering, which should be placed in the *butsudan* in a pleasant environment "because the *butsudan* is where souls come to play" (1978, pp. 164–175).

The use of *kaimyō* and *tōba* seems to be dependent on whether or not a temple uses one large Jizō statue in memory of the collective aborted babies or whether it sets up individual Jizō figures in the temple yard for aborted babies of individual families. Shiunzan Jizō Temple has a tall standing *mizuko* Jizō at the foot of the path which leads up to the temple. This Jizō figure has a staff in his right hand and a baby in his left, and there are several babies sitting around his feet reaching up to him. In addition, six thousand Jizō figures, which represent the aborted babies or specific families, are arranged in a semi-circle around the mountains surrounding the temple. Here, there is an individual Jizō figure for every *mizuko* of a different father, and the name of the family's prefecture is carved on the front base of each statue, along with the name of the family, which is carved on the right side of the base. These Jizō images, in three different sizes, have calm, innocent faces, red bibs and caps, and their hands are held gently together in a gesture of prayer. Some have been dressed by devotees in raincoats, baseball jackets, knitted shawls, or baseball shirts.[8]

8. Shiunzan Jizō Temple was founded by Hashimoto Tetsuma, the Chairman of Shiunsō Society. Mr. Hashimoto founded Shiunsō about sixty years ago, for the purpose of creating a prosperous society where there is co-operation, harmony between the living and the dead, no sickness, and no anxiety. The main tenet of Shiunsō is the belief that all diseases are caused by mental and spiritual problems. Shiunsō Society consists of eight persons, but persons who accept the principles of Shiunsō are invited to join the membership body called Shiunkai which has a membership of about 7,000 members (Hashimoto Yasuo, 1979).

At Bentenshū headquarters in Osaka, individual Jizō statues are not used. Instead, a large *mizuko* tower is being built; this will house one large statue of Jizō and the *tōba* of the individual aborted babies. Bentenshū followers have contributed 4.8 million dollars toward the construction of this tower, which has a completion date of August 1981. It is intended to be a place where one can pray for the happiness of people of past and present generations who have had abortions.[9] Bentenshū requires the purchase of a *tōba* to be inscribed with one of the following inscriptions:

1. *mizuko no rei* ("soul of the *mizuko*"), which may be purchased for one aborted baby by its parents;
2. *mizuko sō hō kai* ("collective *mizuko*") which includes the purchaser's name and may be purchased by parents with more than one *mizuko*;
3. *mizuko sō hō kai . . . ke* ("collective *mizuko* . . . family") which includes the family name and is purchased to represent *mizuko* collectively for all past generations of the family.

Since graveyards for aborted babies do not exist at Bentenshū temples or at most other temples offering *mizuko kuyō*, the *tōba*, which are traditionally placed by the grave monument of the deceased, are placed inside the temples. At the end of a certain period of time (about a year), these *tōba* are usually burned (Kotake, 1979).

At Adashino Nenbutsuji in Kyoto, permanent stone figures have been used for about seventy years in memory of unknown soldiers; so *tōba* inscribed with the family name, the phrase *mizuko no rei*, the date and the given name of the purchaser are placed inside the temple. From 10,000 to 20,000 of these are burned each year.

9. "The Foundress Lady Chiben had the revelation of Benzaiten on 17 April, 1934. She as the incarnated body of God started her ministry for salvation. Her actions have been seen as a carrying out of God's will so that she could help the less fortunate people, promising them freedom from disease and calamity, and providing them an effective means for prosperity in body and mind" (*Bentenshū: Yutaka na shiawase o sōzō suru* 1976, p. 24).

There is one large seated Jizō figure in a small building adjacent to the temple where offerings and prayers may be made (*Shūkyō Kōgei* 15 July 1979, p. 68). Ninnaji in Kyoto has a place set aside for a central Jizō figure which is surrounded by Jizō statues representing individual families. Since Ninnaji is a Shingon Buddhist temple, these images of Jizō have haloes which make them look more divine than human. Family names are carved on the bases of these individual statues.

At Zōjōji in Tokyo there are about 1,200 stone Jizō statues on the temple grounds. This number includes *kosodate* ("child rearing") Jizō figures as well as *mizuko* Jizō. These Jizō figures all look alike; banners and inscriptions reveal their purposes. Each figure wears a red knitted cap and has a pink and red pinwheel in a container by its side. The facial expression of each is tender and innocent like that of a child, and the hands are clasped in prayer. The priest who conducts *mizuko kuyō* recommends placing an *ihai* inscribed with the family name and the phrase *mizuko no rei* on the family *butsudan* (Tagaya, 1979).[10]

MIZUKO KUYŌ IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Jizō in Japan. The bodhisattva Jizō (*Kshitigarbha*) is one of the most popular bodhisattvas in Japan although he did not seem to attain much importance on Indian soil at any period (Eliot 1935, p. 127). His popularity in Japan seems to have stemmed from his adaptability. "Not belonging to any particular sect," says Alicia Matsunaga, "it was possible for him to gain popularity in all, but

10. Although *mizuko kuyō* is conducted in a temple building in the Zōjōji precinct, this building has no official relationship with Zōjōji, which is the headquarters of the Jōdo Sect in the Kantō area in eastern Japan. The building is supported and managed by a layman's organization, and the archbishop of Zōjōji has no control over *mizuko kuyō* activities or over the income of the layman's group. Since religious rites require priests, a group of laymen requested Zōjōji to supply them with a priest to conduct *mizuko kuyō*; this is the only connection *mizuko kuyō* activities seem to have with Zōjōji (Saeki 1979).

especially he was readily adopted into the folk beliefs" (Matsunaga 1969, p. 236). Jizō's original and main function was to deliver all creatures from hell (de Visser 1914, p. 179), and in China, especially, he plays an important role in ceremonies for the welfare of the dead (Eliot 1935, pp. 127–128). Since his introduction to Japan in the eighth century, the Japanese have adapted him to both their particular religious heritage and their own concrete experiences. As Hearn observed, "in Japan Jizō has become totally transformed: he may justly be called the most Japanese of all Japanese divinities" (Hearn 1894, p. 44, n. 2)

As is true of the spread of Japanese Buddhism in general, worship of Jizō spread from the higher classes and the priests to the lower classes. It is believed that famous priests such as Gyōgi Bosatsu (8th century), Kōbō, Dengyō and Jikaku Daishi (9th century) introduced and propagated the belief in Jizō (de Visser 1914, p. 178). As belief in Jizō spread among the people, "the idea arose that Jizō had the ability to manifest himself in the form of other Buddhist deities" so that he could save sentient beings in all six states of existence (Matsunaga 1969, pp. 236–237). It is not surprising, then, "that Jizō became one of the most popular *honji* ["original"] of many of the Japanese native gods" (Matsunaga 1969, pp. 236–237).

Jizō became very popular with the oppressed masses in the Heian period. According to Kitagawa, "the masses, who had never experienced comfort and happiness in this world . . . began to fear suffering in hell rather than to anticipate the joy of rebirth in the Pure Land" (1966, p. 82). Thus, they turned to Jizō "who was believed to stand between this world and the next and to save those who were on their way to hell" (Kitagawa 1966, p. 82). In this early period of Japanese history, then, a divinity of obscure origin was lifted out of the Buddhist pantheon to comfort the masses in the concrete world of their immediate experiences.

In the twelfth century, Taira Kiyomori placed images of Jizō at the six roads leading to the capital to protect passers-by. For the first time, Jizō was worshiped as a deity of the roads (de Visser 1914,

p. 179). For centuries thereafter, he was worshiped alongside the pre-Buddhist "kami of the roads" (*sae* or *sai no kami*) "who was believed to guard the turning points of highways" (Kitagawa 1966, p. 84). Thereby, Jizō's function was expanded to include travelers in both this world and the next. By the end of the seventeenth century, Jizō had taken over the role of the "kami of the roads"; moreover, he had also become a special guardian of the souls of children (de Visser 1914, p. 120). This special function is significant since Jizō was never held responsible for the souls of infants or children in either China or India (Kitagawa 1966, p. 84; originally in Yanagita 1951, pp. 257–58).

Jizō's expanded function as special guardian of the souls of children shows how Jizō was adopted into an ancient Japanese folk belief. According to this belief, "dead children are required to heap up small stones to build a stupa, goaded by the ogres of hell, if they died without having offered any service to their parents or community" (Hori 1968, p. 208). Although the legend seems to pre-date the Edo period, the concept of *Sai no kawara no Jizō* spread in the eighteenth century (de Visser 1914, p. 120). From that time until the present day, Jizō has been worshiped in a special way in Japan "by parents who have to deplore the loss of children; their toys are offered in the Bodhisattva's temples, and their red bids are hung around the necks of his stone images along the road, that he may protect their souls" (de Visser 1914, p. 117).

In the Tokugawa era, impoverished peasants turned to Jizō to secure the safety and comfort of children who had died as a result of starvation, infanticide (*mabiki*)[11] and abortion. According to Sansom, the peasants were so poor under the Tokugawa regime that they found it impossible to support all their children and thus resorted freely to abortion and infanticide. "There are traces of these practices before Tokugawa times," says Sansom. "Then they seem to have been sporadic and to have followed natural ca-

11. The word *mabiki* is written with the Chinese characters meaning "to pull out." These characters carry the image of pulling up rice plants to thin out a row of plants.

lamities like famine and plague; but by the middle of the 18th century they were prevalent throughout Japan, and had reached such alarming dimensions that they were prohibited by official edict in 1767. Naturally such decrees had no success. Infanticide was regarded as a quite proper process" (Sansom 1962, p. 516).

Some of these peasants apparently thought their babies would be better off to have the opportunity to be born again rather than to die of starvation or a poverty-related illness.[12] There is evidence, however, that some peasants thought the dead children would not safely reach the world of Buddha without special assistance. It is believed that the *kokeshi* doll, which is a famous product of the famine-stricken Tōhoku area, was originally offered to Jizō to secure a dead child's safety and comfort in the afterlife.[13]

Jizō appears in stone images intended to console the victims of infanticide, starvation, and abortion from at least as early as 1710. At Jōsenji temple in Yokohama, there are many stone Jizō figures which were made and erected in 1710 for safe child delivery, for successful child rearing and for the victims of infanticide, starvation, and abortion. Recently a new Jizō was erected at this temple for the comfort of the souls of aborted babies (*Shūkyō Kōgei* 15 August 1979, p. 75).

While studying *mizuko kuyō* customs in the Tōhoku area, Azuma Junko found six Jizō statues on a country roadside; they had been made in 1729 and were wearing kimono, bibs and caps, with stones at their feet which had been placed there by passers-by. Azuma learned that these statues had been put there to console the souls of the victims of infanticide (Azuma 1977, p. 206).

Other temples also provide evidence of the appeals made to Jizō

12. At Shōhōji in Mizusawa there is a pond called *Ko-naki-ike* ("the pond of the crying babies"). It is believed that mothers who had babies they thought would not be able to survive the famine threw them into this pond in the belief that they could reach Nirvana. See Azuma 1977, p. 209.

13. Saeki 1979. See also Matsunaga 1979, p. 237, note 21, The *kokeshi* is a wooden doll with a round head and a cylindrical body. The word consists of two characters meaning "child" and "to extinguish."

in the eighteenth century. A few years ago some people cleaning up a graveyard at Jōkōji in Okazaki City found fifteen Jizō statues, one of which was dated 1783, the year of one of the great famines (Ishikawa 1976, p. 13). There is a large temple called Ekōin in Tokyo where there is a *mizuko* monument with the traditional image in relief of Jizō holding a staff in his right hand and a pearl in his left. This monument was built in 1793 by Matsudaira Sadanobu so that offerings and prayers might be made for victims of infanticide and abortion (Kobayashi 1979, p. 17).

Contemporary popularity. On the contemporary scene, the popularity of Jizō has become so widespread that journalists say there is a "Jizō boom" (see for example, *Osaka Asahi Shinbun* 26 July 1974, p. 12). The popularity of Jizō in recent years as the central figure in *mizuko kuyō* seems to have arisen in response to a need created by the widespread practice of abortion in modern Japan.[14] With acute poverty following World War II, with no system of adoption in Japan, and with the need to control a growing population in a country with very limited living space, one might say that the Japanese have resorted to abortion the way their Tokugawa counterparts resorted to infanticide and abortion as a practical means to solve an immediate problem. Ironically, however, this may have turned out to be a self-perpetuating solution since some people think that economic success in contemporary Japan has brought about a shift of values which has resulted in the practice of abortion for selfish reasons. One journalist has

14. Abortion was legalized in Japan in 1948 with the passing of the Eugenic Protection Law. The following year, the law was liberalized with the addition of "economic necessity" as a "condition" permitting abortion. Statistics compiled by the Japanese Ministry of Health report one million abortions a year during the 1950's. This figure is believed, however, to represent only about one half of the abortions actually performed. In recent years with the wider practice of birth control by contraception, the number of abortions reported yearly has decreased. The number reported for 1979 is 613,676. This figure, however, is also believed to represent only about half of the abortions actually performed.

frankly said that economic prosperity and sexual freedom have led to the *mizuko* Jizō boom. He claims that there is almost no family in which women have not had abortions; he even cites a town guide from one city who tells tourists that it is "fashionable" nowadays for women who have had abortions to come and do *kuyō* at one of the temples (*Josei Jishin* 4 August 1977, p. 62).

Recognizing the need to discuss openly some contemporary social concerns that had been ignored in the past, the *Osaka Kyōku Kyōka Suishin Kyōgikai Shuppanbu* (The Department of Publications of the Osaka District for the Promotion of Evangelism) sponsored a dialogue on current social problems and the responsibilities of Buddhists of the Shinshū sect.[15] In the introduction to the published account of the dialogue, the narrator of the discussion, Naomi Genyō, expresses concern about the contradiction that exists between spoken regard for the value of life and the actual disregard for life shown in the practice of abortion, free sex, and mercy killing. He also expresses concern about the tendency of people with comfortable means to throw away things they do not need without considering their value. He contends, therefore, that people have become less humane (Ōsaka Kyōku . . . 1973, p. 2) According to Morita Yasuko, "Living well in society is people's main concern; so, abortion is a secondary concern." "With this type of thinking," she says, "the self is most important." "Almost nobody," she continues, "thinks that abortion is anything to feel guilty about." According to Hanafusa Akira, "Sex education is being emphasized in the schools but not the importance of maintaining purity" (p. 3). Stating the Buddhist position, Nakagaki

15. On 12 July and 27 August, 1973, they held their first discussion on the problems of abortion, free sex, and mercy killing. Discussants included Hanafusa Akira, Assistant Professor of Ōtani Women's Junior College, Morita Yasuko and Kodama Kimiko, office workers, Mori Masataka, priest of Renkōji, and Nakagaki Masami, professor of religious studies at Ryūkoku University. The discussion was taped and later published as the first of a series of discussions to be held on social problems and possibilities for solving them.

Masami explains that life begins with conception according to Buddhist teachings; so, abortion is clearly murder (p. 7).

Although one might compare the devotion paid to Jizō in the Tokugawa era as a special guardian of children in the afterlife to his popularity today in *mizuko kuyō*, there is a pathetic twist to present-day devotion. This pathetic twist is created by those persons who seem to abort their children because of self-centered materialistic aspirations. In an interview, a scholar-priest lamented this contemporary attitude:

> In the past, miserable mothers had to do merciless deeds because of their poverty, but nowadays we are not so poor, but the majority of the city people always feel that they want a better life. They can eat, dress, and sleep comfortably, but they always want to increase their standard of living. Therefore, they have no time to bring up children, and they don't want to have more than two children; so, if they conceive they may immediately go to a hospital or clinic and ask for an abortion (Kanaoka, 1979).

Conflicting feelings. Regardless of the motivations underlying the practice of abortion in contemporary Japan, Japanese in general cannot escape having some bad feelings about aborting a child. First, abortion goes against the principle of respect for life which is not only the foundation of Buddhist ethics but also an important aspect of the Japanese way of thinking.

The central position of respect for life in Buddhist ethics is well known. It can be observed in the life of Gautama Buddha who spent the last forty-five years of his life in compassionate ministry to those who suffered, in the lives of the bodhisattvas who willingly postpone entering Nirvana so that they can help those who suffer find release, and in the humane rules for living given in Buddhist literature. Moreover, Buddhism's respect for life is clearly acknowledged in the following statement: "According to Buddhist literature, especially the *Kusha-ron* (*Abhidharmakośa*) which contains the basic position, life is there from the moment of conception and it should not be disturbed for it has the right to live" (Japan Bud-

dhist Federation 1978, p. 162).

Buddhism has also enhanced a basic tendency in Japanese thinking which is to esteem highly the nature of man and his natural disposition. According to Nakamura, this tendency is the basis for the love of human beings which is "one of the most prominent features of traditional Japanese ways of thinking" (1967, p. 144). "The love of human beings," he says, "seems to be closely connected with the love of the beauties of Nature, which is as old as the Japanese people themselves" (1967, p. 145)

Due to their respect for the nature of man and his natural disposition, the Japanese also acknowledge and respect the realm of human emotions. This respect for human emotions can be illustrated by an example taken from a recent publication on Japanese Buddhism:

> During a recent radio program, one listener—a child—called the station to ask if a flower is hurt when broken off from its stem. The doctor in this particular program replied that the flower does not have nerves and so is not hurt, but the heart of the one who does the actual breaking hurts (Japan Buddhist Federation, 1978, p. 159).

While the problem among modern rationalists is the question, "When does life begin?" there would seem to be among Japanese an intuitive perception of abortion as the interruption of life. Thus, the "problem" among Japanese would be to find ways to help those who have interrupted the life process rid themselves of the bad feelings they have as a result of their actions.

A second reason for conflicting feelings is the tendency even today among many Japanese to non-rational or non-scientific habits of investigating cause and effect (Nakamura 1967, p. 143). This way of thinking may produce in some Japanese anxiety about the potential danger of the unmemorialized souls of aborted babies. Before the introduction of Buddhism, ancient Japanese believed that a dead spirit content with his status would become a *kami* or ancestral spirit after a certain time had passed. As an "ancestor," he would exert "himself for the happiness and safety of the descen-

dants as the protecting deity of the home or birthplace" (Watanabe 1964, p. 63). After the introduction of Buddhism, Buddhists identified *kami* with *hotoke* ("buddha"); so to become a "buddha" meant "that the unstable, dangerous dead spirit is pacified on becoming an ancestral spirit" (Watanabe 1964, p. 73).

On the other hand, the thought has existed in Japan from ancient times that some spirits are condemned to wander the earth posing a threat to the living. There are at least two kinds of such spirits: (1) those who died in an angry state and (2) those who are neglected by their descendants. These wandering spirits are most commonly called *muen-botoke* ("buddhas without attachment or affiliation") or *gaki* ("hungry ghosts"). Since these spirits have been neglected or remain gripped in their worldly passion, they wander "endlessly in a pathetic and potentially dangerous search for comfort from the living" (Smith 1974, pp. 41–44). According to Smith's interpretation of a study done by Maeda Takashi, "Very often these spirits are said to be suffering from the emotional state of *urami*—bitterness, ill will, enmity, spite, or malice" (Smith 1974, p. 44). In the case of these spirits, "it is necessary to hold special religious rites in order to have them 'become Buddhas' " (Watanabe 1964, p. 73).

Even today some Japanese attribute sickness, misfortune, or social evils to the work of spirits. This way of thinking is typical of societies in the earliest stages of development, but as Watanabe observes, "even to the present time, the spirits have controlled in a part of Japanese society" (1964, p. 57). The founder of Shiunzan Jizō Temple in Chichibu, Hashimoto Tetsuma, wrote and published a pamphlet in which he perpetuates this way of thinking. In the pamphlet, he expresses his views on abortion and gives case studies on the suffering caused by the souls of aborted babies. This suffering includes heart trouble, epilepsy, nightmares, suicidal tendencies, neurosis, parent-child conflict, back trouble, and cancer. Relief from these sufferings, he concludes, can be found through the sincere practice of *mizuko kuyō* (n.d., pp. 1–53).

To what extent do these beliefs in wandering spirits influence

contemporary Japanese ways of thinking? Dr. Suzuki estimated that only about 10% of the persons practicing *mizuko kuyō* are motivated by fear of the potential harm posed by the wandering spirits of aborted babies. From the conversations I had in Japan, I would have made a higher estimate.

There are many variations in belief and religious practices in Japan, but the treatment of aborted babies as wandering spirits capable of experiencing *urami* and thereby posing a threat to living persons does influence the thinking of some persons practicing *mizuko kuyō*. According to Hashimoto Yōtarō, "associate priest" of Shiunzan Jizō Temple, the people who come to do *mizuko kuyō* at his temple are motivated by the desire to bring peace to their society and comfort to their personal lives by comforting the souls of aborted babies through offerings and prayers of apology (1979). An interviewee at Shiunzan Jizō Temple told me that in the past she had felt cruel (*mugoi*) about having aborted her child, but now, "I am glad that I can do something about what I did. My son passed his high school and national university exams, and I feel that this is because we both prayed at the Jizō Temple and thereby prevented anything bad from happening to him" (Ōta 1979).

On 23 November 1979 at a special *mizuko kuyō* service at Nenbutsuji in Kyoto, I met a young lady and her husband (whose names I will not use) who had come from Saga prefecture. The lady was very open and sensitive regarding her feelings and her reasons for doing *mizuko kuyō*. She was also influenced by belief in *urami*. She said, "I aborted my first baby, and I don't want the *urami* of the first baby to affect the baby I am now expecting. I feel that I did a bad thing by aborting the first one and that is why I came for this service."

Professor Kanaoka explained to me that it is not Buddhistic to think that an aborted baby or any dead child suffers from *urami*. "*Mizuko kuyō*", he said, "is not to resolve *urami*; it is for making a confession and for receiving mercy" (1979). Yet, as Watanabe has observed, "rites for the dead clothed with Buddhism have

developed in Japan on the foundation of folk belief" (1964, p. 73). Thus, a part of Japanese society would be quite vulnerable to the power of suggestion, through any of the communications media, that the wandering spirits of aborted babies pose a threat to their lives.

Buddhism and abortion. As stated above, Buddhist literature, especially the *Kusha-ron*, opposes abortion. Notwithstanding this position, representatives from established Buddist denominations did not arrive at a definite conclusion on the question of abortion when they held a conference on the problem a few years ago. Moreover, Buddhists in general have not voiced any criticisms regarding the issue (Japan Buddhist Federation 1978, p. 162). In 1978, however, in response to recent descriptions of Japan as a "haven for abortions," the World Buddhist Conference drew up a constitution for life and made an announcement opposing abortion (Saeki 1979).

To understand this prolonged silence on the subject, one needs to consider the two dimensions of Japanese thinking; *tatemae* ("theoretical") and *honne* ("practical"). On a theoretical level, Japanese oppose abortion, but on a practical level they realize they must face the realities of life: an unexpected pregnancy, limited living space, or financial problems, for example. Due to its *furoshiki* ("wrapper cloth") characteristics, Mahayana Buddhism lends itself to this way of thinking. A *furoshiki* can wrap up or engulf anything—square or round things. Thus, Mahayana Buddhism advocates respect for life but also "teaches that it is inevitable for man to sacrifice some forms of life in order to protect and nourish himself" (Japan Buddhist Federation 1978, pp. 158–159). Therefore, there are farmers among its lay believers who must kill insects to protect their plants. Moreover, the traditional samurai spirit in Japan upholds suicide based on the concept that a single life may be sacrificed for many lives (Japan Buddhist Federation 1978, pp. 159–162).

As one might infer from the details already mentioned, Japanese

Buddhism has attempted to deal with the often contradictory demands of existence as exemplified by abortion while at the same time professing reverence for life. From the perspective of Japanese Buddhism, one should accept reality with all of its contradictory demands as one's *karma*. At the same time, however, one should continue to reflect on the universal principle and strive for the ideal (Japan Buddhist Federation 1978, p. 166). To compensate for the karmic dilemma of one's life, there is the mercy the historical Buddha and the bodhisattvas have offered those who suffer. Perhaps it is sensitivity to the need for this mercy that has endeared the Japanese to Jizō, whose tender expression and gentle features are most merciful.

Thus, Japanese Buddhism can incorporate *mizuko kuyō* into its practices whereas a religion that puts greater stress on theory or dogma could not. In this sense, as Kishimoto has noted, Japanese Buddhism has developed as a practical religion and shows interest mostly in immediate experience (1962, p. 246). This perspective on *mizuko kuyō* accords with Kitagawa's thesis on the preoccupation of Japanese Buddhism with the "immediate and concrete world of the Japanese" (1965, p. 320). As Kishimoto has explained, "the main concern of Japanese religions, especially Buddhism, has not been so much with the good and evil of man's conduct, but with the attitude of man, that is, how to accept the given environment. In other words, they put stronger emphasis on the mental aspect of man than on the behavioral aspect. They instruct man how to reach a tranquil and balanced state of mind" (1962, p. 251). In other words, when the right frame of mind has been reached, though any of a number of disciplines, one can accept the realities of life and still pursue the ideal without experiencing the conflicting desires that give rise to worry and anxiety.

Among those who practice *mizuko kuyō*, there seem to be those who desire meaningful religious experiences as well as those who seek easy solutions to everyday problems. Among those who instruct devotees, there seem to be those who sincerely teach Buddhist doctrine and its ethical implications as well as those who

offer simple ritual practices as a way of achieving easy answers to social problems or illness. One of the most popular terms used in brochures and advertisements encouraging participation in *mizuko kuyō* is *yasuragi*, or "peace of mind." At Bentenshū headquarters in Osaka, I received a "guide for living" pamphlet (*Omichibiki shiriizu* 10) titled *Yasuragi*. The pamphlet lists cases of what happened to family members when *mizuko kuyō* was neglected and tells how the situation improved when the family started practicing *mizuko kuyō*.

CONCLUSION

As Byron Earhart has said, "All modern people are facing a common problem: the problem of relating one's own religious traditions to contemporary questions" (1969, p. 98). Thus, regarding the practice of *mizko kuyō*, some credit should be given to Japanese Buddhists for accommodating Buddhism to the particular needs of the Japanese people. On the other hand, perhaps some criticism could and should be expressed against the practice of *mizuko kuyō* for what Hasegawa Nyozekan has called a characteristic of Japanese ways of thinking: "the habit of patching up things for the moment with improvised, unscientific attitudes and methods" (de Bary 1958, p. 391).

On the positive side of the issue, the support of *mizuko kuyō* shows the Japanese concern for "the human nexus" (Nakamura 1967, p. 161). As Professor Saeki said, "Japanese Buddhists should weep with those who suffer, because this is expressive of the compassion Gautama Buddha and all the bodhisattvas have for those who suffer" (1979).

Moreover, this concern for the human nexus has motivated some priests to endeavor to elevate human life through an emphasis on ethical conduct in their *mizuko kuyō* services. As early as the eighteenth century, for example, Jikan Oshō, the twenty-fourth priest of Shōanji in Hanamaki City, preached a sermon on reverence for life and the importance of child rearing. Morever, he organized a women's group in 1760 that was dedicated to the principle

of reverence for life, and members of this group constructed a Jizō figure at the temple in 1761 (Ogawa 1976, pp. 32–33). Even today, the priest at Shōrenji in Fujimi City recites sutras for those requesting *mizuko kuyō*, gives them a *kaimyō*, counsels the family on personal problems, and warns them about future abortions (*Shūkyō Kōgei* 15 September 1979, p. 64). Also at Yakushiji in Nara, the priest feels that repentance is more important than the form of *mizuko kuyō* and his *mizuko kuyō* services include hour-long lectures (*Shūkyō Kōgei* 15 October 1979, p. 60).

On the other hand, does the practice of *mizuko kuyō* reveal the tendency to "patch up things for the moment?" Advertisements as well as announcements in temple newsletters and popular magazines encourage a way of thinking that makes the main object of *mizuko kuyō* worldly benefits, placing little or no emphasis on enriching the quality of human life or on strengthening universal religious perceptions.

One journalist wrote an article in which he criticized advertisements like the following one which has special appeal to those frustrated by the problems of contemporary society and the popular belief in wandering spirits of the dead: "The wandering soul of the aborted child is lingering around with the family and creating diseases even medical doctors cannot diagnose. These wandering souls are also creating disintegration of the family and the delinquency of children" (*Tokyo Times* 20 February 1977, p. 3). It should be noted that at the end of such advertisements there is a form with which to order an individual Jizō statue. The cost of these statues, designed for outdoor use, ranges from about eight dollars to seven hundred dollars, price being determined by the size and the material. "I'm suspicious of the ethical sense of those who advertise in such a way" wrote the journalist (*Tokyo Times* 20 February 1977, p. 3).

Questions probably should be raised about the commercialization of *mizuko kuyō*. Since many temples in Japan are faced with declining revenues, fostering interest in *mizuko kuyō* may be a way of attracting a new generation to the temples (cf. Smith 1974,

pp. 211–266). Persons going to temples to do *mizuko kuyō* make voluntary contributions, pay set amounts for the purchase of *ihai* or *tōba*, pay for the *kuyō* service, and/or purchase a Jizō figure to be placed in the temple yard. At Shiunzan Jizō Temple, individual Jizō figures to be placed in the temple yard are 130,000 yen ($531), 100,000 yen ($408), and 70,000 yen ($286); at Sōkeiji in Osaka, they are 180,000 yen ($735), 140,000 yen ($571), and 100,000 yen ($408); at Zōjōji they are 40,000 yen ($163); at Hasedera in Kamakura, they are 3,500 yen ($14) and 2,000 yen ($ 8). At Bentenshū headquarters in Osaka, an *ihai* for each *mizuko* costs 30,000 yen ($122). At Adashino Nenbutsuji, *tōba* for *mizuko* cost 400 yen ($1.60) each. At temples where Jizō figures, *ihai*, or *tōba* are not used, there may be no special charge for *mizuko kuyō*. Persons attending services, however, generally do make contributions. Those who live in the neighborhood of Shiunzan Jizō Temple say contributions are made there in units of 10,000 yen ($40) (Shirakigawa 1979, p. 8). This amount seems to be larger than that given by the general public for other kinds of memorial rites. One should not ignore the abuse that could come from the commercialization of *mizuko kuyō*.

Related to this factor is the practice of placing individual Jizō statues in temple yards. Individual Jizō statues placed on the family *butsudan* are useful to remind one to confess and to be sensitive to "invisible matters" such as the suffering of *mizuko*, but this can be done without placing individual statues in temple yards (Kanaoka 1979). In the Edo period, a *mizuko* Jizō statue was placed in a temple for all aborted children. The practice of having families erect individual Jizō figures has a tendency to foster commercialization (Saeki 1979).

There is another problem. In any worship experience, images have to be used very carefully or they will become ends in themselves rather than means to an enlightening religious experience. The Japanese have to be especially careful, for as Watanabe has said, "More than learning Buddhist doctrine and its ethical implications and attitude of life, they [the Japanese] learned first to build temples,

construct Buddha images and hold rituals" (1964, p. 83).

Ironically, however, hope for deepening the religious significance of the rituals may lie within these objects of Buddhist art and architecture. Symbolically, these works of art and architecture contain within themselves "the concentrated essence of the teachings of the scriptures," and their purpose is "to awaken the mind through spiritual experience to deeper levels of the Buddhist healing process and, ultimately, to enlightenment" (Birnbaum 1979, p. xv). In this context, "one of the most important aspects of the healing process is the conversion of suffering into the aspiration to attain enlightenment" (Birnbaum 1979, p. xiv). Art assists in this healing process by focusing the mind and "intensifying the spiritual experience" (Birnbaum 1979, p. 107).

At the beginning of this paper, I suggested that *mizuko kuyō* may not be authentically Buddhist. In conclusion, I realize that I cannot resolve that question. It must be resolved in the minds of the priests and devotees who practice *mizuko kuyō*. I believe, however, the words of Watanabe can provide guidelines for an evaluation:

> . . . if there is no seeking of *Bodhi*-mind (*jōgu-bodai*) above and the saving of beings below (*geke-shujō*), it is not Buddhism. What we call *jōgu-bodai* is to pursue the high ideal to the utmost for one's own sake and strive to realize a genuine Buddhist way of life. However, that must have the backing of the practice of *geke-shujō*, which means to strive to increase the happiness of all men. Apart from these, Buddhism is impossible (1964, p. 125).

As Kitagawa, confirming the ideas of William Ernest Hocking, has said, "the universal must be particularized and the particular must be universalized, if religion is to be meaningful at all" (1965, p. 320). Whatever the outcome of the evaluation, the contemporary problems of overcrowding, overpopulation, sexual freedom, and unlimited material expectations are not only Japanese problems but global problems; so, the challenge to Japanese Buddhists is to be sure to discover and disclose to their nation and to the world an authentic Buddhist approach to these problems.

GLOSSARY

Adashino Nenbutsuji 化野念佛寺
akachan 赤ちゃん
Bentenshū 辯天宗
bon 盆
butsudan 仏壇
Chichibu 秩父
Dengyō 傳教
Ekōin 回向院
Fujimi 富士見
furoshiki 風呂敷
gaki 餓鬼
geke-shujō 下化衆生
Gyōgi Bosatsu 行基菩薩
Gyokuhōji 玉宝寺
Hanafusa Akira 華慧
Hannya shingyō 般若心経
Hasedera 長谷寺
Hasegawa Nyozekan 長谷川如是閑
higan 彼岸
honji 本地
honne 本音
hotoke 仏
ihai 位牌
Jikaku Daishi 慈覺大師
Jikan Oshō 慈観和尚
Jizō 地蔵
jōgu-bodai 上求菩提
Jōkōji 浄光寺
Jōsenji 定泉寺
kaimyō 戒名
kami 神
Kōbō 弘法
Kodama Kimiko 小玉紀美子
kokeshi 子消し
ko-naki-ike 子泣き池
kosodate 子育て
Kusha-ron 倶舎論
Kūya Shōnin 空也上人
mabiki 間引き
Maeda Takashi 前田たかし
Matsudaira Sadanobu 松平定信
mizuko kuyō 水子供養
mizuko no rei 水子の霊
mizuko sō hō kai 水子総法界
mizuko sō hō kai...ke 水子総法界...家
Mizusawa 水沢
Monjuin 文珠院
Mori Masataka 森正隆
Morita Yasuko 森田靖子
muen-botoke 無縁仏
mugoi 惨い
Nakagaki Masami 中垣昌美
Naomi Genyō 直海玄洋
Ninnaji 仁和寺
Okazaki 岡崎
omichibiki shirīzu おみちびきシリーズ
Renkōji 蓮光寺
Rishukyō 理趣経
sae or *sai no kami* 幸神
Sai no kawara Jizō wasan 賽の河原地蔵和讃
Sai no kawara kuchi zu sami no den 賽の河原口ずさみの伝
Shinshū 真宗
Shiunkai 紫雲会
Shiunsō 紫雲荘
Shiunzan 紫雲山
Shōanji 松庵寺
Shōhōji 正宝寺
Shōjuin 正受院
Shōrenji 性蓮寺
Sōjiji 総持寺
Sōkeiji 宗慶寺
tatemae 建前

tōba 培婆
Tōhoku 東北
urami 怨み
Yakushiji 薬師寺
yasuragi やすらぎ
Zōjōji 増上寺

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