

RELIGION, COMMERCE, AND COMMODITY
IN JAPAN'S MATERNITY INDUSTRY

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Contemporary services for safe childbirth offered by Buddhist temples and Shintô shrines attract large numbers of pregnant women and their families. These institutions generate much income from their services and also work closely with various maternity-related enterprises, such as obstetricians, retail outlets, printing houses, and manufacturers of infant formula. They have also created narratives where issues related to women and reproduction take center stage in their material culture and menu of ritual services, even though Japanese society, in general, held the attitude throughout history that menstrual blood and lochia defiled the Buddhas and the *kami* and considered women by extension impure. This dissertation offers a challenging, interdisciplinary approach to understanding the various facets of Japan's maternity industry. Through participant-observation, field research, and investigation of documents and archives, I illustrate how rituals for safe childbirth have become integral services for select Buddhist temples and Shintô shrines and demonstrate how the concerns of commodification, secularization, and the reconstitution of customs and folkways are activated.

Religious rituals of safe childbirth cannot be researched without consideration of the current social crisis of Japan's low birthrate. This study examines authoritative measures and government policy to manage the reproductive lives of the Japanese that have been in place since the Tokugawa period. Also, the history of gendered

devotional practices in Japanese religions concerning life cycle issues must also be included in such a study. In particular, the issues that draw women to appeal to the religious world of miracle and succor and the culturally specific practices that have developed in Japan's folkways and religious organizations are examined.

Interestingly, Both topics, although divergent in theme, methodology, and scope, reveal similar issues concerning ideologies of reproduction, gender, and sexuality.

This study considers how these ideologies are implicated in contemporary rituals for safe childbirth.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lisa Kuly was born in Detroit, Michigan on June 16, 1964. In 1989, soon after she graduated from University of Toronto with a Specialist in English and Drama, she traveled to Japan. Based in Tokyo, she studied the Japanese language, performed in a theater group that specialized in Kyôgen and a Japanese drumming (*wadaiko*) group, and practiced the martial art Aikidô. She returned to North America and completed her Master's thesis entitled *Port Towns, Station Stops, Rice Fields, and Temples: The Journey of Nô* at the University of Toronto's Department of East Asian Studies in 1999. A Monbusho (Monbukagusho) Fellowship brought her back to Japan as a Visiting Scholar. In that capacity, she researched ritual performance under the guidance of Hashimoto Hiroyuki at Chiba University's Department of Culture from 1999-2001. Concurrently, she trained intensively at Hombu Dôjô, the Aikidô world headquarters in Tokyo.

She returned to North America to study Japanese Religions and Ritual Studies with Jane Marie Law at Cornell University's Department of Asian Studies. A Fulbright Graduate Fellowship brought her back to Japan, where she researched customs and religious rituals related to pregnancy and childbirth under the guidance of Yagi Tôru in Bukkyo University's Department of Letters from 2006 to 2007.

For my parents, Elsie and Paul Kuly

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This dissertation topic was germinated on a research trip to Japan in the summer of 2004 while pregnant with our first daughter. A cleaner at Nara's JR station noticed my five-month pregnant belly and recommended a *hara-obi*, a band women in Japan wrap around their midsections during pregnancy. The helpful information assistants at the station's Japan Travel Bureau kiosk directed me to Obitoke-dera, a Nara temple famous for its *obi*, where I did just that. Serendipitously, the world of religious rituals of safe childbirth in Japan opened its gate to me on that day. I never did catch the names of the staff at the train station, but I am grateful for their assistance! The project continued in Kyoto from June 2006 to June 2007 with the pregnancy and birth of our second daughter. I completed this dissertation during the first few months of our third daughter's life, born in December 2008. Sleep deprivation, computer crashes, revisions, and intense joy mark this stage of my professional and personal life.

I am deeply indebted to my advisor Jane Marie Law, who has tirelessly endeavored to help me realize my academic potential. A mentor of the highest degree, she has guided me through the intricacies of academia, helped me strike a balance between intellectual pursuit and work-life concerns, and persistently reminded me to keep an eye out for the issues at stake.

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I was able to conduct pre-dissertation research during the auspicious summer of 2004 with a Japan Research Travel Grant from Cornell's East Asia Program, Gender and Global Change. Thank you to my colleague Matsubara Masaki who invited me to stay at his family's temple in Tokyo. The kitchen table conversation with Matsubara Masako, Masaki's mother, and Tomari-san put my research goals into focus.

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Institutional affiliation with Bukkyô University's Department of Literature under the guidance of Yagi Tôru anchored my dissertation research. I cannot thank Yagi Sensei enough for his support that continues to this day. His generosity with his extensive library, his field research, and his profound knowledge of life cycle rituals in Japan knows no bounds. Takezoe Yuko, Yagi Sensei's energetic wife, kindly gathered together a spirited bunch of mothers to discuss their experiences for another kitchen table encounter. I am grateful to Daniel Boucher and Mark Blum for

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Yoshihiro Kiyohara, Secretary of Kyoto West Lions Club, invited me to present my research at a club's monthly meeting at the end of my year of research. The comments and reactions of those in attendance helped me synthesize the events that occurred throughout the year. Thank you to Kawakami Takafumi for arranging this.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| BIOGRAPHICAL SCHETCH..... | iii |
| DEDICATION | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | v |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | x |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | xii |
| | |
| INTRODUCTION: NOTES FROM THE FIELD, | 1 |
| THE QUESTION OF EXPERIENCE, AND PRECONCEPTIONS DISMISSED | |
| Imprisoned by my Body..... | 3 |
| Experience, ‘An Experience,’ and the Special Mode of Knowing | 6 |
| | |
| Chapter | |
| | |
| 1. GIVING BIRTH: MONSTERS, BLOOD, ‘N BABIES ‘R US..... | 14 |
| Shades of Grey Surrounding Pools of Red | 21 |
| The Crocodile, the Corpse, and the Hut on the Beach..... | 29 |
| Harnessing the Creative Force of Dirt in Contemporary Japan..... | 46 |
| The “Privatization of Asian Wisdom Traditions”..... | 52 |
| and The Zen of Having Babies | |
| Of Department Stores, Train Lines, Religious Recreation, and Healing: | 62 |
| Commerce and the Temple | |
| | |
| 2. STATE STRATEGIES TO INCREASE JAPAN’S BIRTHRATE:..... | 72 |
| UNCOMFORTABLE BEDFELLOWS AND WALKING (PILLOW) THE TALK | |
| Discourses of Sexuality and Self-regulating Fertility | 79 |
| in the Tokugawa Period | |
| Demographic Shifts, Declining Death Rates, | 88 |
| and the Medicalization of Childbirth in the Meiji Period | |
| Constructing Motherhood and Childhood in the Taishô Period | 92 |
| Post-War Japan: Family Planning to Make a “Happy Home” | 95 |
| The Maternity Handbook | |
| and <i>Premama/Papa</i> Cooking at the Public Health Office | 108 |
| Conclusion: Hell for Barren Women and Birthing Machines | 119 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 3. BODY, COMMODITY, AND CUSTOM | 123 |
| IN THE MULTIPLEX UNIVERSE OF THE <i>HARA-Obi</i> | |
| Belly and <i>Obi</i> as Commodity in Japan’s Maternity Industry | 127 |
| The Ethnographic World of the <i>Hara-obi</i> :..... | 136 |
| The <i>Hara-obi</i> in Shrines and Temples..... | 140 |
| The Ritual World of the <i>Hara-obi</i> | 149 |
| The Mythic and Historical Worlds of the <i>Hara-obi</i> | 158 |
| The <i>Hara-obi</i> in the Hospital and Department Store: | 164 |
| Conclusion: Custom Becomes Cultural Trend?..... | 170 |
| 4. THE CASE OF ÔBARA JINJA’S PARTURITION HUT: | 173 |
| INTERSECTION AT THE CROSSROADS OF THIS WORLD | |
| AND THE OTHER WORLD | |
| Making Place: Ritual and the Space of the <i>Ubuya</i> | 177 |
| People, Places, and Things: | 184 |
| Expressing the Relationship Between Life and Death | |
| Enforcing Birth Territories | 194 |
| Of Closets, Sleeping Rooms, Auspicious Directions, | 202 |
| and Concerns for the Health of Mother and Baby | |
| How do We Spin the Merits of a Parturition Hut? | 217 |
| Conclusion: Of Blood and Passages | 227 |
| 5. SEEKING HELP AND FINDING IT WITHIN: | 229 |
| RELIGIOUS DEVOTION AND WOMEN’S ISSUES IN JAPANESE | |
| RELIGIONS | |
| Jizô: The Friend of the Japanese | 233 |
| Kishimojin: Cannibal <i>Kami</i> as Protector of Children? | 258 |
| Kannon: The Question of Gender and Pilgrimage for Women..... | 271 |
| Sophrology: A Contemporary Life Cycle Ritual | 284 |
| Conclusion: Seeking Help and Finding it Within | 286 |
| CONCLUSION | 288 |
| Areas for Further Research | 294 |
| APPENDIX | 296 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 302 |
| GLOSSARY..... | 320 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 1-1 | Baby's first visit to Suiten-gu, Tokyo. | 15 |
| 1-2 | Advertisement for Babies R' Us at Nakayama-dera | 17 |
| 1-3 | Nakayama-dera's Shichi-go-san festival, November 4, 2006. | 19 |
| 1-4 | An advertisement for a maternity related service at Suiten-gu | 20 |
| 1-5 | An image of ubume by Toriyama Sekien (1712-1788) | 39 |
| 1-6 | An image of an ubume from the Hyakkai-Zukan | 40 |
| 1-7 | A scene of Blood Pool Hell | 42 |
| 1-8 | A maternity yoga class | 56 |
| 1-9 | A page from <i>21 Seiki no pojiteibu shussanhô</i> | 58 |
| 1-10 | Woman in labor using the method of Sophrology | 62 |
| 1-11 | Hankyu railway display at Nakayama-dera | 67 |
| 2-1 | Pregnancy badge issued by Kyoto City. | 76 |
| 2-2 | <i>Kokeshi</i> figurines | 85 |
| 2-3 | A young Japanese housewife | 98 |
| 2-4 | The author's pregnancy handbook | 111 |
| 2-5 | A page from the author's pregnancy handbook | 112 |
| 2-6 | "Pregnant Mama and Papa Cooking." | 113 |
| 2-7 | The Maternity Badge. | 116 |
| 2-8 | Benesse Corporation's instructional pamphlet for pregnant women | 117 |
| 2-9 | Young people sitting in Priority Seating Section (<i>Yûsenseki</i>) | 118 |
| 3-1 | A priest performing duties at Obitoke-dera | 124 |
| 3-2 | Display models of Obitoke-dera's <i>hara-obi</i> | 125 |
| 3-3 | Image of pregnant Britney Spears | 132 |
| 3-4 | A pregnant woman wrapped in a traditional <i>hara-obi</i> | 134 |
| 3-5 | Lateral view of Obitoke-dera's contemporary <i>hara-obi</i> | 144 |
| 3-6 | <i>Hariko inu</i> | 149 |
| 3-7 | The shrine to Ono no Komachi | 160 |
| 3-8 | Lesson on how to wrap the Iwata-obi | 166 |
| 3-9 | "The Hara-obi," leaflet from Public Health Office | 168 |
| 3-10 | Inujirushi's typology of the "pregnancy band" | 169 |
| 3-11 | Mail order advertisement for Obitoke-dera | 171 |
| 4-1 | Ôbara shrine's <i>ubuya</i> | 174 |
| 4-2 | An interior view of Ôbara Shrine's <i>ubuya</i> | 176 |
| 4-3 | A votive placard (<i>emma</i>) of Ôbara shrine | 179 |
| 4-4 | Author with Hayashi Shûjûn, head priest of Ôbara Shrine | 190 |
| 4-5 | Interior view of the <i>ubuya</i> | 198 |

INTRODUCTION

Notes from the Field, The Question of Experience, and Preconceptions Dismissed

I arrived in Kyoto in June 2006 for a year of dissertation research supported by a Fulbright Graduate Dissertation Fellowship. My husband and toddler daughter followed two weeks later. I was five months pregnant and would eventually give birth to our second daughter in December.

A branch of my research design involved interviewing pregnant women and women who had experienced pregnancy to ascertain the ritual activities and material culture associated with pregnancy and childbirth in Japan. Interviews took place over coffee and lunch, at somebody's home, in an available room at Bukkyo University, where I held a visiting researcher position, or at Starbuck's located in central Kyoto. As I formulated my interview script I was concerned my questions were culturally insensitive because they touched on topics Japanese might consider offensive, such as menstruation and childbirth. Those concerns, however, were completely dispelled as I met with women. My interviewees discussed with abandon their menstrual cycles, the breaking of their waters, disposal of their placenta, and their experiences with umbilical cords.

Families in Japan customarily keep their infants' umbilical cord. It became clear to me that mothers considered the cord an important keepsake, much more so than they did the religious items sold by the temples and shrines that conduct services for safe childbirth (*anzan kigan*). At one meeting with a group of five women over lunch, one woman brought out a small wooden box containing her daughter's

umbilical cord, unwrapped the desiccated organ, and placed it on the dining table in front of me just as the hostess served our lunch. It happened again at another meeting with a group of women several months later: a mother proudly placed her one-year-old daughter's umbilical cord on the dining table as the women passed around bowls of curry.

These actions caught me off guard as my experiences during a three-week research trip in June 2004 convinced me that notions of impurity surrounding pregnancy and childbirth were as intact in twenty-first century Japan as they were in the premodern period. Incidentally, the trip occurred during the fifth month of pregnancy of our first daughter. During a visit to the Osaka Human Rights Museum, known also as Liberty Osaka, a docent showed me images of primitive stone sculptures with inscriptions forbidding women entrance to temple grounds (*nyonnin kekkai*). Japanese society, in general, held the attitude that menstrual blood and lochia defiled the Buddhas and the *kami*; it considered women by extension impure. But this was a remnant of Japan's past, and these attitudes no longer active, I thought. However, as I began discussing my research about religious rituals of safe childbirth performed at temples and shrines during dinner at a *soba* restaurant with a colleague, an anthropologist by training and a Senior Researcher at the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, he abruptly stopped our conversation. He explained to me that notions of *kegare* were very much alive in Japan and people avoided discussing topics like childbirth in public.

When I step back and attempt to put these discordant viewpoints in focus – a view that umbilical cords have a place on kitchen tables and another view that holds topics like childbirth have no place in a dining room – it becomes apparent that the issue at stake concerns the fissure between theory and practice. A global theory, in this case, a theory concerning ritual purity systems in Japan, while attempting to

express a fundamental truth about an aspect of Japanese religions does not reflect what occurs at the level of local practice. For the researcher who happens upon this disturbance, how can the two viewpoints be reconciled?

Being a pregnant mother while conducting research allowed me entrance into a world of knowledge and experience, a world that I was able to embody. Between my body and my mind, I had at my disposal the tools to solve this problem. While I was fortunate to find myself in this unique hermeneutical position, I had to keep in mind an important issue: I was pregnant in Japan, but I could not experience a Japanese pregnancy.

Imprisoned by my Body

Barbara Duden, in her dual project to uncover perceptions of the body and the making of the modern body, examines medical complaints documented in the diary of an eighteenth-century physician working in the German town of Eisenach. Her aim in her work *The Woman Beneath the Skin* involves “reconstructing an extinct body perception.”¹ In doing so, however, an epistemological conundrum emerges that the historian of the body must address: “I cannot be too careful *not* to use my own body as a bridge to the past.”² That is to say, her body, the body from which she makes her inquiries, assumptions, and, investigations, is different from the bodies she studies. Her twentieth century body inhibits her from understanding the bodily experiences of Dr. Johann Storch’s patients. She must craft a method of describing bodily experiences of the past, because the historian and the subject do not “have” the same bodies. From this framework, Duden uncovers how a rhetoric of reproduction

¹ Barbara Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlop (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 2.

² *Ibid.*

influenced women's experience in the birthing room, which I shall discuss in the second chapter of this dissertation.

In this regard, my study is much easier as the reproductive bodies I investigate are living in the twenty-first century; I can talk to them. I can also observe them. The challenge, however, is that our bodies come from different cultural backgrounds and have different gender expectations imposed on them. Although the fundamentals of giving birth are simple – the baby eventually has to leave our body one way or another – the choices we have and the ways in which we approach pregnancy and birth are different.

A seemingly superficial anecdote explains this: I arrived in Japan in rainy season which soon gave way to an unbearably hot summer – even for Kyotoites I encountered. Pregnant Japanese women suffered the heat in attire that seemed to me uncomfortable: covered legs and arms, socks, sensible shoes, and hats and parasols. My summer uniform consisted of shorts or yoga pants, a Gap maternity tank top, and Birkenstocks, an outfit suitable for cooling bike rides along the Kamo River. In North America this type of deportment is acceptable; women dress for comfort and the medical establishment encourages pregnant women to maintain active lifestyles. In Japan, I received stares of disbelief. Pregnancy, while considered a natural, non-pathological physiologically occurring event by the administrators of the national health insurance program (*Kokumenkenkôhoken*), requires women to adjust their lifestyles. Loose-fitting tunics, maternity belts, and leggings – typical maternity clothes I noticed during my research trip – enclosed the body in a protective cocoon and rendered it non-sexual. Private health clubs did not allow women membership because management considered exercise contraindicative to pregnancy. Although pregnant in Japan, I could never experience a Japanese pregnancy and I was content not to even try. My concern, however, is this: did the body I use as a scholar and

researcher prevent me from seeing the material reality of the bodies of my study? Would I overlook valuable details in the religious services, maternity yoga classes, and appointments with my midwife and obstetrician because my body existed in a particular discursive space bound by geography, gender, class, and culture?

Duden explains this issue in the following way: there is a tendency to treat the body synchronically, as an organism that is immune to shifts in *zeitgeist* and temporal and spatial change. Her task, the formulation of which draws upon the work of Gaston Bachelard, an epistemologist who theorized imagination as a source of reality, is to resist this tendency: "...if we start from the assumption that the imagination and perceptions of a given period have the power to generate reality, we can approach phenomena that are usually rendered invisible because of some a priori axiom of what is natural."³ Contemporary fieldworkers conducting research in foreign countries must also work within the same parameters. My swims in the Japan Sea on a trip to Amanohashidate when I was six months pregnant were as "real" as the maternity yoga classes in the dog days of August for the heavily pregnant Japanese woman who wore long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and a tightly wound *hara-obi*. Health-care professionals, the media, and folk custom in Japan advises women to avoid getting their bellies cold when pregnant; in Canada and the United States, obstetricians and the media are not concerned with chills to the belly. Just as the body is not "a natural given,"⁴ a natural childbirth is as impossible to experience in Ithaca, New York, as it is in Kyoto – culturally based notions inform the experience and the researcher's job involves first identifying and then untangling the various strands of cultural imposition.

³ Ibid.,6.

⁴ Ibid.,5.

Knowledge and experience are the other components of bodily experience that influence the ways in which we collect, synthesize, and analyze data. While I could not experience a Japanese pregnancy and childbirth, the fact that I was pregnant in Japan while conducting research on rituals of safe childbirth gave me unique interpretive perspective. Did this experience forge a bridge between me, the researcher and student of religion, and the subjects I interviewed, the texts I consulted, the rituals in which I participated, and, the events I experienced? Basically, could I conduct an out-of-body investigation?

Experience, 'An Experience' and the Special Mode of Knowing

The hermeneutical position I found myself in concerns the difference between “experience” and “an experience,” a distinction made by Victor W. Turner drawing on Willhelm Dilthey he uses to identify how individuals deal with their experiences of the past and how they parlay them into an understanding of experiences of the present.⁵ Life is a series of encounters and events that can be transformative; Dilthey conceived of these experiences as processual structures that are broken down into discreet stages having the capacity to rewire an individual’s network of thoughts, desires, and feelings.

Individuals convert experience to “an experience” when they consciously address the ramifications of events that occur out of the ordinary:

These experiences that erupt from or disrupt routinized, repetitive behavior begin with shocks of pain or pleasure. Such shocks are evocative: they summon up precedents and likenesses from the conscious or unconscious past – for the unusual has its traditions as well as the usual. Then the emotions of past experience color the images and outlines revived by present shock. What happens next is an anxious need to find meaning in what has

⁵Victor W. Turner, "Dewey, Dilthey, and Drama: An Essay in the Anthropology of Experience," in *The Anthropology of Experience*, ed. Victor W. Turner and Edward M. Bruner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 35-36.

disconcerted us, whether by pain or pleasure, and converted mere experience into *an* experience. All this when we try to put past and present together.⁶

Ultimately, Turner asks, do we learn something from this collision of past and present? What “meaning” do we derive when we find ourselves at this intersection? Are we elevated to a new level of consciousness?

For the academic, can “an experience” be transformed into a way of knowing? Hans-Georg Gadamer, also drawing on Dilthey, views scholars – specifically historians – as only able to understand historical processes provided they have cultivated experience. Then and only then can they construct bridges that span the gulf between their reality and the historical reality of their subjects. Gadamer states:

For the structure of the historical world is not based on facts taken from experience which then acquire a value relation, but rather on the inner historicity that belongs to experience itself. What we call experience (*Erfahrung*) and acquire through experience is a living historical process; and its paradigm is not the discovery of facts but the peculiar fusion of memory and expectation into a whole.⁷

The interpretive task of the historian or the researcher involves drawing on the past and projecting into the future, and making meaning from encounters and experiences. Gadamer expresses how this is accomplished: “Thus what preshapes the special mode of knowing in the historical sciences is the suffering and instruction that the person who is growing in insight receives from the painful experiences of reality. The historical sciences only advance and broaden the thought already implicit in the experience of life.”⁸ Experience, then, is the means by which we acquire knowledge – the ‘special mode of knowing.’ This special mode of knowing allows the researcher to penetrate the material reality of others, to resolve the discrepancies between theory and practice, while working with text to peer into the past, and while working in the

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, Second Revised ed. (New York: Continuum, 2002), 221.

⁸ Ibid., 222.

present in different milieu. Because we possess bodies different from our subjects – living and dead – this does not preclude us from figuring out their experiences and their impressions of their experiences. There is one more important feature to human experience that opens up a world of knowledge.

“Lifeways” – the term Victor Turner uses to refer to rites of passages (*tsûka girei*) – have the potential to indoctrinate an individual into the special mode of knowing. Going through a lifeway myself, while exploring the processes of others going through their lifeways, and focusing on customs, devotional practices, material items, and religious sites, the primary function of which facilitates families and communities to manage the lifeways travelled through by their constituent members, is the central feature of this dissertation.

Through an examination of these lifeways, I unravel the interlocking narratives generated by the various actors and agents of Japan’s maternity industry (*matanitei sangyô*),⁹ ranging from the origin myths and miraculous tales told by religious sites specializing in amulets and prayers for safe childbirth, to the policy statements and demographic divinations government officials announce when addressing Japan’s low birthrate. Items such as the *hara-obi* and structures like the *ubuya*, a parturition hut where women give birth, populate the narratives fashioned by the maternity industry. The medical profession and retail organizations constitute the secular facet of the maternity industry. Ultimately, I present a detailed picture of pregnancy and childbirth in Japan and the complex network of religious practices, customs, and commercial enterprises that support it.

Returning to the anecdote that begins this chapter: one of the main issues that crops up repeatedly throughout this dissertation is the fact that attitudes and

⁹ I encountered the term “maternity industry” in the work of Ôbayashi Michiko. Please see "Osan Konjaku," in *Hahatachi no minzoku shi*, edited by Ôtô Yuki, 25-42 (Tokyo: Iwata shoin, 1999), 29.

behaviors occurring on the ground often conflict with religious doctrines and academic theories. A major question preoccupying me involves the disjuncture between theory and practice. Did the actions of placing products of childbirth on kitchen tables not violate rules of ritual purity? Or, perhaps the umbilical cord fell outside the category of *kegare*? At any rate, a breakdown in systems of ritual purity that form the foundation of Japanese religious practice rests upon occurred with the mixture of umbilical cords and curry and the discussions of menstrual cycles over coffee and cake. How could I reconcile the information I gleaned from investigations on pollution and taboo and systems of ritual purity with what I experienced in the field? Why did the lived realities of the women I interviewed seem strikingly different from the narratives laid out by safe childbirth temples and shrines and the customary practices outlined in ethnographies? How would this initial shock at the disjuncture between the knowledge I had received and the events I experienced influence my strategies for collecting data? In this dissertation, I untangle this web of questions.

In chapter one, I revisit systems of ritual purity in Japanese religion and processes of secularization and commodification. These are the frameworks in which religious rituals of safe childbirth are situated. I am especially curious how women's blood is a barometer of Japanese society's morality and the double standards to which women are held. Also, continuing the discussion that opens this introduction, I turn to my experiences in a private maternity clinic to illustrate how issues of ritual purity, rather than reflecting concerns of hygiene, reveal the need to categorize and systematize social relations and relations with the divine.

For understanding processes of secularization and commodification, I look at the example of a natural birthing technique called Sophrology developed by an obstetrician that draws upon techniques of *zazen* and yoga. This case illustrates a cultural trend occurring in Japan, where traditional Japanese practices are

reconstituted as exotic and other. I show how the corporate take-over of spirituality has seeped into Japanese society and question whether this influences Japan's maternity industry.

Chapter two opens with a discussion of the current social crisis of low fertility rate faced by Japan and the policies adopted by the government to address them. Japan's current birthrate of 1.25% speaks volumes to the uncomfortable relationship between the state and family. Kuniko Inoguchi, Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs, outlined her ministry's efforts to increase the nation's birthrate in June 2006. In particular, the ministry's key priority involved changing attitudes through campaigns promoting gender equality and raising awareness of the issues faced by women of childbearing age. Highly publicized statements expressed by high-ranking government officials, such as a reference to Japanese women as "birth-giving machines," contribute to these attitudes. The national health care system which the majority of Japanese women and their families rely on to "finance" their pregnancies and births has made pregnancy a costly endeavour. In fact, some criticize it as being prohibitively expensive. Furthermore, while the World Health Organization ranks Japan as one of the safest places in the world to give birth, access to prenatal care options of one's choice are often limited.

This chapter focuses on how state strategy and rhetoric aimed at creating social conditions more conducive to being pregnant, giving birth, and raising children is translated into practice. I examine state involvement in reproduction and pregnancy at three levels. First, I conduct an historical survey from the Tokugawa period to highlight themes surrounding gender, sexuality, and reproduction. Then I explore existing state programs at the local and national levels, including the maternity passbook system that requires pregnant women to register at their ward office. Finally, I examine the strategies to change that mindset, such as the maternity badge campaign

launched in 2006 in cooperation with Japan's private and national railways. Japan's falling birthrate has been under the radar of Japanese politicians and policy makers since the mid 1960's; Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryûtarô warned a demographic crisis was imminent in 1996. In spite of the action committees formed and the political platitudes uttered, little has been done to change the course of the demographic decline. I explore why and look at the implications of this from a gendered perspective.

In Chapter Three I explore the various worlds of meaning associated with the *hara-obi*, a sash women in Japan don in the fifth month of pregnancy. Ethnographic research of the *hara-obi* unearths a plurality of traditions practiced throughout Japan. Today, Buddhist temples and Shintô shrines primarily sell the girdle. I argue that various components of Japan's maternity industry extract the item from the depths of the nation's history, myth, and customs, and reconstitute it to not only appeal to the modern consumer of spirituality, pregnancy related goods, and religion, but to also produce a uniquely Japanese experience of childbirth and pregnancy. Indeed, the *hara-ob* is a nationally recognized shorthand for pregnancy.

In this chapter, I address the processes of secularization and commodification occurring as temples and shrines have incorporated popular practices and local traditions into their calendars of events. A reverse process also occurs with the medical industry and retail organizations mobilizing myth and custom to promote the *obi* in a modern context. Igoy Kopytoff's processual model of the commodity helps us understand how the *obi* and the pregnant body become "commoditized" in the maternity industry and the way in which society attempts to wrap culture around the physiological process of pregnancy. The *Nihon Saniku Shûzoku Shiryô Shûsei (Nihon Saniku)*, a collection of data concerning customs associated with pregnancy, birth, and children's early years collected by local field researchers located throughout every

prefecture of Japan, informs the discussion of regionally specific practices of the *hara-obi*. Ultimately I explore how competing interests in Japan's maternity industry deploy the *hara-obi* to reflect their agendas.

In Chapter four, I introduce the case of Ôbara's parturition hut, built on the grounds of Ôbara shrine located in the village of Miwachô, about an hour's drive from Kyoto. The Kyoto prefectural government designated the *ubuya* as a Tangible Folk Treasure (*Yûkei minzoku bunkazai*); resultantly, the *ubuya* of Ôbara shrine attracts the attention of Japanese scholars of religion, anthropology, ethnography, and gender studies. To a lesser extent, tourists – specifically expectant families – visit the site. Through strategic marketing techniques and a reframing of the customs of parturition associated with the confinement hut, the community of Ôbara has placed its *ubuya* on the map of religious tourism. Simply, it advertises its claim that the customs of parturition practiced by this community up until the early Shôwa period (1926-1989) challenge conventional notions of pollution and impurity associated with childbirth.

In this chapter, I ask how the practices of parturition locate the community in the larger scheme of things and how the community presents its customs to the outer world. Jonathon Z. Smith's discussion of the locative versus utopian perspectives expressed in ritual and Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of a Berber house to show how space and cosmology are intertwined are useful conceptual tools to explain how Ôbara's customs of parturition ground the community in space and time. I also include a discussion of the *toriagebaasan*, a ritual figure who assists women in childbirth. I broaden the discussion to include customs of parturition practiced throughout Japan documented in the *Nihon Saniku*. The chapter concludes with an examination of the ideology of reproduction voiced by the community in order to present themselves favorably to modern audiences and the implications of this ideology.

In Chapter five, I explore devotional practices to three main deities associated with granting petitions for safe childbirth: the bodhisattvas Kannon and Jizô, and the hybridized deity Kishimôjin. This exploration allows me to illustrate how Japan's maternity industry has absorbed regional and fringe practices and in so doing, has taken over women's narratives of their own pregnancies. I return to the natural childbirth technique of Sophrology to demonstrate how women in Japan have at their disposal a spiritually based method that helps them draw on inner resources to effectively manage pain. These types of devotional activities activate the tension between "other power" (*tariki*) and "self-effort" (*jiriki*) present in Japanese religious traditions.

In this work, I give Japanese names in their usual order of surname first unless where authors identify themselves using the Western order. Unless otherwise noted, I have taken the photographs that appear in this dissertation.

CHAPTER 1

GIVING BIRTH: MONSTERS, BLOOD, 'N BABIES 'R US

Two Stories:

Töyö-tama-hime, the daughter of the deity of the sea, is about to give birth.¹ Her home is in the ocean, but when she feels the onset of labor, she emerges from the sea and has a parturition hut constructed by the edge of the beach. The hut is thatched with cormorant feathers.² A child of the gods, she reasons, should not be born in the sea. Before the *ubuya* is completed, however, her labor pains begin. She warns her husband, Po-wori, to avoid looking at her, because: “All persons of other lands, when they bear young, revert to the form of their original land and give birth.” Po-wori cannot resist and secretly watches as his wife gives birth. To his horror, she transforms into a monster, a giant crocodile in fact. He flees at the sight of the horrific spectacle. Töyö-tama-hime slithers back into the sea, ashamed at having been watched giving birth, never to return to land.

My field research commenced with visits to temples and shrine famous for the efficacy of their services and amulets for safe childbirth. Although many temples and shrines throughout Japan offer prayers for safe childbirth and dispense *hara-obi* and amulets, I focused on the most popular sites: Nakayama-dera, located on the outskirts of Osaka, Obitoke-dera, a temple of Nara city, and Suiten-gu, a shrine located in the heart of Tokyo. All these facilities do brisk business on the day of the dog (*inu no hi*) specific days in the lunar calendar associated with dogs, known for their ability to bear

¹ Donald L. Philippi, *Kojiki* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1968), 156-58.

² Tanigawa Kenichi explains the custom of the south Islands where the roof of the parturition hut remains unfinished until the child has been safely delivered. In this region, cormorant feathers are also considered talismans for safe childbirth. Please see Tanigawa Kenichi and Yayoi Nishiyama, *Ubuya no minzoku: Wakasa-wan ni okeru ubuya no kiki-gaki* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankôkai, 1981), 18-19.

large litters of puppies with ease. This is an auspicious day when women traditionally don the *hara-obi*, a pregnancy belt and the subject of the third chapter of this dissertation.



Figure 1-1 A proud grandmother holds her grandson on his first visit (*miyamairi*) to Suiten-gu, Tokyo.

These sites boast fantastic miracle tales and historical narratives, host exciting festivals, and display gorgeous religious artifacts, images, and art; however, the bustling secular activity energizing the sites left the greatest impression on me. For example, when I visited Nakayama-dera, I encountered large advertisements from the retail outlet Babies 'R Us decorating the sprawling temple complex. Representatives distributing flyers announcing a newly opened store stood in strategic locations – escalators depositing pregnant women on the shrine's upper level – within the temple grounds. I thought it highly suspicious that the branch is located only one train stop away from Nakayama-dera station, a geographical proximity and mercantile partnership bordering on collusion between the international conglomerate and

administrators of the temple. The store also hosts sign language classes for babies at the temple. Obitoke-dera produces an annual 'Opera recital for the fetus sponsored by Benesse Corporation, a company that publishes pregnancy manuals, magazines and children's books. When I attended the prenatal spectacle, representatives from Benesse handed out small gifts and hawked books and magazines. Actually, Nakayama-dera's concert was much grander, attracting a large audience of pregnant women and offering a greater selection of maternity-related services. A dashing, young obstetrician also appeared in the program, proffering advice about such concerns as travelling while pregnant and hot springs. Suiten-gu was slightly more discreet, but one could not help noticing the benches plastered with advertisements from Meiji Dairy Industry, producer of infant formula, and maternity clinics scattered around the site.

Nakayama-dera's *Shichi-go-san* festival represents the culmination of syncretism and secularism in the world of rituals for safe childbirth. *Shichi-go-san* is a festival for children celebrating their third, fifth, and seventh birthdays and occurs on the fifteenth of November. It is associated with Shintô. Nakayama-dera, however, celebrates the event throughout the month of November and draws in crowds of families, many of whom visited the temple for safe childbirth services.

I was fortunate to visit the temple on an auspicious day in November. *Inu-no-hi* fell on a weekend in November, which meant I could experience the perfect storm of temple activity related to childbirth and children. Arriving at the temple early in the morning on Saturday November 4, 2006, I was overwhelmed by the bustling crowd of people: pregnant women and their husbands; families; little girls costumed in *kimono*; and, boys in *hakama*. Less traditional families outfitted their children in dresses and suits and some boys sported their school uniforms. Parents and grandparents and uncles and aunts feverishly snapped pictures of children: the little

ones celebrating *Shichi-go-san* and the older ones receiving services for safe childbirth.



Figure 1-2 Advertisement for Babies R' Us at Nakayama-dera

Representatives of maternity-related services stood outside the gate of the temple handing out pink goody bags to pregnant women. On this day, the presence of Babies R' Us was limited to one person distributing flyers; however, the merchant's close relationship with the temple was reflected in the fact that the representative stood inside the temple gates.

On less busy days, attendants behind windows in a small reception area in the *honden* (main hall) administer applications and handle fees for the services. Today, however, pregnant women studiously filling out application forms crowded around two tables under white canopies set up at the foot of the *honden*. Mothers, mother in laws, and husbands anxiously waited on the fringes of the canopies, a scene presaging the event that would occur months later in maternity clinics and obstetric wards. The majority of the moms-to-be applied for the 7,000 Yen service, indicated by the pink forms they filled out. Those few women filling out white forms were lucky enough to be treated to deluxe services for 20,000 Yen. The less expensive fee covered the cost of a pre-sacralized *hara-obi*; for 20,000 Yen the woman and her family received two *hara-obi* and attended a deluxe service conducted by a priest that the temple held every forty minutes throughout the day.³ At the service I joined, two other pregnant women were present; one accompanied by her husband, the other, by her mother.

Several months later I interviewed a priest working at Nakayama-dera.⁴ Revealing my deeply programmed distrust of the notion of merchants in the temple, I probed how the relationship came about between Nakayama-dera and organizations like Benesse and Babies R' Us. The priest – with a hint of exasperation – explained how the temple and commercial organizations cooperate with each other and pointed out the maternity yoga classes held at the temple offered by Babies 'R Us. Simply, the temple provides a “space” for activities related to pregnancy and parenting. I also discovered why Nakayama-dera incorporated *Shichi-go-san* into its calendar of events: the temple, like the school system in Japan, felt the effect of the nation's falling birth rate; the festival provided another source of income for the temple. I

³ Suiten-gu's fees were less expensive: a *hara-obi* alone cost 3,000 Yen and a *hara-obi* with a private service performed by a priest cost an additional 3,000 Yen

⁴ Personal interview with Imai Sôen, priest of Nakayama-dera on May 12, 2007.

obviously had more of a problem with these shrewdly concocted relationships and non-religious activities occurring on temple grounds than did the priest.



Figure 1-3 Nakayama-dera's *Shichi-go-san* festival, November 4, 2006.

With these two stories, I illustrate the concerns of this chapter. What does the birthing practices laid out in the story of Tōyō-tama-hime, a paradigmatic explanation of the way childbirth should be conducted relayed in Japan's earliest textual sources, tell us about pre-modern attitudes towards pregnancy, childbirth, and the woman's body? How are these attitudes manifested in praxis throughout history? Where do we place them in the discourse of ritual purity generated by scholars? Do the examples of commerce, commodification, syncretism, and secularization I observed at temples and shrines simply reflect aspects of popular religious practice, or is there a more sinister

process at work? Are these institutions providing religious services for women and their families to enhance their experience of pregnancy and childbirth or are they capitalizing on their fears regarding the uncertainties of pregnancy and childbirth? How does this blend of the sacred and the secular shape women and their families' experience of pregnancy and childbirth?



Figure 1-4 An advertisement for a maternity related service at Suiten-gu. “Nice Baby” rents baby products and provides a cleaning service for expanding families.

Basically, I revisit two major topics in the history of religions, and more specifically, Japanese religions: systems of ritual purity and processes of commodification and secularization. To begin the discussion on systems of ritual purity, I review attitudes and theories towards women's reproductive bodies, focussing on blood associated with menstruation and childbirth. I examine the connection between body and community to understand how blood shed by women is

not only a physiological event requiring ritual attention, but also an excuse for crafting ideologies of gender, reproduction, and sexuality. I then turn to a chronological development of attitudes towards the reproductive body in Japan, beginning with the earliest sources compiled in the eighth century, the *Kojiki* and the *Nihongi* (*Nihon Kiki*). A review of the *Ketsubonkyô* (The Blood Pool Sūtra) reveals how attitudes towards the women's body are not simply rooted in national ideologies, but are imported. I then shift to post-War and contemporary ethnographical research to highlight contemporary attitudes and taboo practices concerning blood pollution. Finally, I discuss my experience in a maternity clinic to illustrate how we are dealing with categories of ritual purity rather than with issues of hygiene and germs. This sheds light on shifting moralities and double standards regarding issues of blood faced by women.

In the section on secularization and commodification, I first explore one aspect of this process. A natural birthing technique called Sophrology made popular in the 1980s by an obstetrician is a valuable lens through which to examine a process of reclamation occurring in Japan's maternity industry. This method employs techniques of Zen and yoga and advocates a New-Age spiritual philosophy encouraging the oneness of the mother and emerging baby. What is remarkable about this technique is that it reflects a cultural trend in Japan, one that I call reverse Orientalism, where "ancient Oriental" traditions are essentialized. I then place the activities I observed at shrines and temples specializing in services for safe childbirth in the broader context of popular religious practices.

Shades of Grey Surrounding Pools of Red

Tōyō-tama-hime must give birth in a parturition hut, removed from the company of people, including that of her husband. Systems of ritual purity in Japan hold that the blood of menstruation and childbirth is impure and defiling. A parturition hut

separates the birthing women and her child – both considered impure by extension – from the rest of society, the *kami* (gods) and buddhas, and contains the pollution of childbirth. Where can we place this model for childbirth in the larger discourse of ritual purity generated by scholars?

Sir James Frazer's ideas about magic, primitive religion, and taboo are present in this early example of childbirth ritual and attitudes towards the birthing body in Japan.⁵ His work may be anachronistic and his methodology rooted in nineteenth century armchair anthropology, but scholars still draw on ideas presented in *The Golden Bough* when analyzing issues of ritual purity. Tōyō-tama-hime's childbirth experience is steeped in superstition and magic. Frazer considered magic a necessary stage in a society's development, before it was able to comprehend the notion of a greater power, a force that required propitiation and assurance it was loved or feared.

Another aspect of "primitive society" identified by Frazer concerned the reluctance to separate notions of uncleanness and holiness: the two states were classified under the same category, "taboo." A person in this state was considered "dangerous and in danger."⁶ One way to control the danger was to "seclude" people under taboo to ensure "spiritual danger" did not spread to the community and to also protect them. This "primitive" logic supports the structure of the *ubuya* and the way early Japanese society handled childbirth. Frazer himself declares much of this reigns supreme in the sphere of imagination, but imagination alone was strong enough to create a real sense of danger. If we consider the pregnant and birthing premodern body, though, there was nothing imaginary about the dangers inherent in childbirth.

⁵ James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, ed. Robert Frazer, a new abridgement from the second and third editions ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 181.

Durkheim, concerned with how a “tissue of illusions” can be the basis of human development and the foundation of society, deconstructed religion to the binary classification of the sacred and the profane.⁷ Interdictions set up to “protect and isolate” the sacred from the profane were enforced with series of rites, the “rules of conduct” that guided proper behavior. The walls of the *ubuya* established the boundary between the sacred and the profane. What did this mean for the larger society in which birth occurred?

Mary Douglas’ work on systems of ritual purity builds on the ideas presented by Frazer and Durkheim that taboo and interdiction were put in place to separate the sacred from the profane.⁸ The maintenance of a community’s welfare is the main reason for structuring elaborate sets of rules regarding proper ritual behavior. Violations of taboo destroy the community’s equilibrium and threaten social harmonies and hierarchies.

Women, whose bodies bleed uncontrollably and whose pregnant bellies advertise the private world of sexuality, are easy targets for taboo during menses, pregnancy and childbirth. Douglas’ theories on the body illustrate how the women’s body threatens social harmony. An ideal society is fully enclosed; its margins, its openings, and its interstices, however, are vulnerable to penetration, and they must always be guarded, or the society will collapse. The body, Douglas finds, is thought of in the same way and her conclusion that “social conditions lend themselves to beliefs which symbolize the body as an imperfect container which will only be perfect if it can be made impermeable”⁹ points towards the female body, with its uncontrollable

⁷ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 52.

⁸ Mary Douglas, "Pollution," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1968).

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge Press, 1996), 159.

effusions of blood and with its orifices that must be penetrated in order for it to fulfill its biological destiny. On a symbolic level, her body challenges, even threatens, the integrity of society and its illusions of social order.¹⁰ Look at the examples of cultures around the world, where women's bodies must be completely covered; exposed female flesh arouses male passion leading to social decay. Or, when couples fail to produce offspring, so often societies root the biological deficiency in the female's body. Communities consider her a threat to their well-being because she does not contribute to their expansion. Does a structure like the *ubuya* convey a sense of impermeability? Do its walls contain the flow of blood that can otherwise not be stopped? It would seem so.

Here we move into the area of ideology, which too is subject to the volatility of religious ideas. In this regard, Douglas extracts an important point from Durkheim concerning the idea that religious symbols only represent "abstract ideas;" moreover, religious experience involves "coercive moral force." Douglas argues that "religious ideas are volatile and fluid; they float in the mind, unattached, and are always likely to shift, or to merge into other contexts at the risk of losing their essential character..."¹¹ Ultimate truths cannot possibly exist, as truth is inextricably embedded in social context, and that is in constant flux. Hence, taboos set in place are subject to ebb and flow with the tides of social change

Taboos, like religious experience and religious interpretations, are also subject to ideologies of gender, reproduction, and sexuality, something Kathleen O'Grady

¹⁰ Extending this metaphor to the Buddhist world, Bernard Faure explains that the corporeality of women, in particular their orifices that are penetrated and the fluids they exude, excludes them from the Buddhist notion of non-duality. Please see *The Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 57.

¹¹ Douglas, "Pollution," 337..

identifies in her analysis of menstrual segregation in Leviticus 15.¹² O'Grady argues that a complex process is at work regarding the ideation of holiness of a woman presented in the text that has been lost by the simplistic "bipolar" readings of the taboo based on the dualism of pure and impure suggested in many interpretations. These misinterpretations have been deployed to construct a glass ceiling for women in clerical positions in both Judaism and Christianity and to prevent them from participating in ceremonies.¹³ Along the same line, Kristin de Troyer argues that fluids produced by men also fall under the conceptual categories of impurity and pollution in some religious texts, but semen has never been a reason for refusing men ordination.¹⁴ Ultimately, morally infused interpretations of menstruation are not the reason proscriptions around menstruation are constructed in Leviticus 15; rather, the text addresses the ritual necessity for separation.

The fluidity and volatility of religious ideas Douglas identifies clearly express themselves when it comes to issues of pollution and the female body. Laws of blood pollution are put in place for the ostensible maintenance of social equilibrium for the good of all, yet these laws are shifting and often manipulated. The excuse of blood is used in many cases to subjugate women. Take, for example, the recent case of women from the western part of Nepal demanding to be released from a blood taboo imposed upon them during their menses when they are locked in an unhygienic cow shed for

¹² Kathleen O'Grady, "The Semantics of Taboo: Menstrual Prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible," in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity*, ed. Kristin De Troyer, et al., *Studies in Antiquity & Christianity* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴ Kristin De Troyer, "Blood: A Threat to Holiness or toward (Another) Holiness," in *Wholly Woman Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity*, ed. Kristen De Troyer Judith A. Herbert, Judith Ann Johnson, Anne-Marie Korte (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 45-46.

four days.¹⁵ We might argue that the category of separation is part of this taboo, but clearly laws were put in place to subjugate them. They won their case, proving that social concerns about containing danger are indexed to a shifting moral structure. A grey area certainly surrounds the pools of red deposited by women.

Kathleen O'Grady explains why the menstrual blood receives considerable ritual attention:

...it is not likely incidental that menstrual blood becomes a primary focus of so many sacred texts (in every major religious tradition) since menstrual blood, more clearly than any other taboo substance or state, is situated at an ambiguous semantic crossroads, expressing both the blood of life itself, the most sacred of substances, with the shedding of blood, in a "sacrificial" gesture. Not surprisingly, this shifting valence between life and death requires ritual attention. Menstruation, in all of its ambiguity, becomes the epitome of the ambivalent resonance (purity-impurity; sacred-unclean) imprinted in the linguistic container "taboo."¹⁶

The ambiguous semantic crossroads are actually a larger intersection where not only issues of purity and impurity, hygiene and sacrality, and magic and religion meet, ideologies of gender, sexuality, and reproduction also pass through. What is more, the category of taboo as a category is more than a linguistic container, it has a far deeper history and is implicated in the playing out of these ideologies.

Let us briefly look at the Hua of Papua New Guinea, who live in a region where men are noted for their extreme aversion to the blood, fluids, organs, and biological functions association with women. However, Hua males imitate menstruation and think they experience pregnancy and Hua women are initiated as males once they reach menopause, if they have given birth to more than three children, cultural practices Anna Meigs links to a complex symbolic system of food,

¹⁵Shushil Sharma, "Women Hail Menstruation Ruling," *BBC News*, September 15 2005.

¹⁶O'Grady, "The Semantics of Taboo: Menstrual Prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible," 28.

sex, and pollution.¹⁷ Early studies characterized Hua culture as chauvinistic, but later research replaced “male antagonism” towards women with male envy of women’s ability to procreate and awareness of women’s importance in providing sustenance for the community.¹⁸ Neonates are considered extremely polluted, especially the firstborn, because they absorb the mother’s accumulated pollution; hence, a productive mother has had all of her pollution purged through her children.¹⁹ In this case of the Hua, a simple binary explanation cannot explain why women’s blood is abhorred by men and considered taboo. The ambivalent resonance that blood evokes has much to do with the permeability between these various states of purity and impurity and sacred and unclean, as it does their opposition.

The moral quandary presented by menstruation and lochial blood is coupled with the concern for uncleanliness. The one area of Douglas’ study that bears directly on a discussion of ritual purity and women’s blood is the idea that ritual purity systems do not evolve out of concerns of hygiene.²⁰ While her discussion focuses on the dietary rules laid out in Leviticus, her problematization of the issue can be extended to include ritual purity systems that govern a wide range of events. Basically, societies constructed their universes based on “principles of patterning,” where typologies and categorizations determined standards of cleanliness. In the

¹⁷ Anna S. Meigs, *Food, Sex, and Pollution: A New Guinea Religion*, 2nd ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14-17.

¹⁹ Often the neonate is considered polluted and a ritual specialist who has been invested with the powers to absorb the pollution must catch the baby. If the ritual specialist is not present, the newborn baby cannot be touched. Thérèse Blanchet, who documented attitudes towards birth in rural Bangladesh, stepped in to catch a baby whom no one wanted to catch because of its polluting properties. She then had to undergo a series of cleansing rituals to erase all the pollution she accumulated. Please see *Meanings and Rituals of Birth in Rural Bangladesh: Women, Pollution, and Marginality* (Dhaka: University Press, 1984), 29.

²⁰ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 46.

Hebrew bible, according to Douglas, there is no reference to a pig's uncleanness; rather, the pig does not conform to the categorization of cattle as a cloven-hoof ruminant. Three modes of life – earth, water, sky – constitute the universe in the Hebrew bible. Douglas describes how “[i]n the firmament two-legged fowls fly with wings. In the water scaly fish swim with fins. On the earth four-legged animals hop, jump or walk. Any class of creatures which is not equipped for the right kind of locomotion in its element is contrary to holiness.”²¹ Constituents of the animate world that fall out of the categories are considered unclean.²²

The basis for understanding the difference between “clean and unclean meats” is based on a structure of holiness which Douglas characterizes as oneness: “To be holy is to be whole, to be one; holiness is unity, integrity, perfection of the individual and of the kind. The dietary rules merely develop the metaphor of holiness on the same lines”²³ as do rules governing ritual purity systems surrounding menstruation and childbirth.

Finally, a refrain running through studies of blood pollution concerns the notion of birth as a life transition or rite of passage, one explanation for the abundance of ritual activity designed to separate parturient women and neonates from all that is sacred. To elucidate the proscriptions and rules that spring up during this period, Douglas turns to the work of Van Gennep, who

²¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

²² For a thorough analysis of the processes of categorization that occur in contemporary society, please see Ralph Bulmer, “Why is the Cassuary not a Bird? A Problem of Zoolological Taxonomy Among the Karam of the New Guinea Highlands,” *Man* 2 (1967) pp. 5-25. In this article, Bulmer discusses how the special taxonomic classification of the cassowary actually conveys meanings for a various number of taxonomies. Karam zoological taxonomy differs from how zoologists would categorize creatures and demonstrates how culture overshadows “objective biological facts.”

²³ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 55.

saw society as a house with rooms and corridors in which passage from one to another is dangerous. Danger lies in transitional states, simply because transition is neither one state nor the next, it is undefinable. The person who must pass from one to another is himself in danger and emanates danger to others. The danger is controlled by ritual which precisely separates him from his old status, segregates him for a time and then publicly declares his entry to his new status.²⁴

Why danger? In this regard, the theories of Mary Douglas and Van Gennep do not sufficiently address the ritual behavior around childbirth. The perils of childbirth cannot be controlled by ritual. What is more, danger is not the pre-eminent concern in childbirth; it is the uncertainty that catches people off guard. If the woman and her baby move gracefully from one room to the next, her body has done what biology programmed it to do and the course of nature followed. If the passage is tumultuous – prolonged or blocked labor; fetal distress; prematurity; hemorrhage; neonatal death; maternal mortality – no sufficient ritual response can address the symbolic collapse of life in process run amok or terminated, the giver of life destroyed or turned destroyer.

To simplify the process, societies assign the categories of life and death to negotiate the uncertainties surrounding childbirth, what Mary Douglas and Van Gennep consider to be “the indefinable.” It is this interplay of life and death a woman and her baby are thought to experience during the perinatal period that forms a main concern in Japanese religions. In the following section, I explore how the permeability between life and death is understood in customs and religious traditions concerning childbirth.

The Crocodile, the Corpse, and the Hut on the Beach

To return to the story of Tōyō-tama-hime. The nesting instincts of the luxuriant jewel princess urge her to vacate her aquatic home and have constructed a parturition hut thatched with cormorant feathers where she can give birth safely on land. Labor begins prematurely, however, and she must deliver her child in the

²⁴ Ibid., 97.

unfinished hut. Her husband, committing a grave indiscretion, peers through the roof to watch his wife give birth to his child. Shamed and humiliated, the new mother reverts to her original form in all its monstrosity and slithers back into the sea, abandoning her marriage, and more heartbreakingly, her child.

Three points are significant here. First, shame is associated with childbirth. Where does this shame come from? It comes from breaching the rules of ritual purity associated with taboos surrounding the blood of childbirth and menstruation. Second, rules are clearly in place outlining how childbirth should be conducted – in the confines of a hut, removed from society. The most provocative feature of this story is the notion of the birthing woman as monster.

To begin with the first point. In Japan, systems of ritual purity guide behavior ranging from the quotidian to the sacred, behavior at home and actions concerning the *kami* and the Buddha. Namihira Emiko outlines a framework of ritual purity apparent in the behavior of Japanese every day life constructed by three categories, *hare*, *ke*, *kegare*.²⁵ She classifies *hare* as a sacred state and includes within the category matters having to do with happiness, virtue and goodness; things that are out of place; and, all that is pure and clean. *Ke* involves the profane, normal things of daily life. It implies a state of neutrality. The third constituent is *kegare*. Like that which Namihira classifies as *hare*, it involves something out of the normal course of things, but also includes filthiness, dirt, and uncleanness. There is a moral component to this state that involves evil and sinfulness. Unhappy events and bad fortune also constitute this category. Namihira considers the blood of menstruation and childbirth to be examples of *kegare*.

Namihira emphasizes these categories reside in time and space in Japanese life and movement between them is dynamic. Furthermore, unlike the dualistic universe

²⁵ Emiko Namihira, *Kegare no kôzô* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1984).

envisioned by the likes of Frazer, Durkheim, and Douglas, where interdiction separates two opposing states, Namihira brings to our attention that the element of *ke* creates a buffer zone of neutrality. Jane Marie Law adds to this interpretation of purity and impurity in the Japanese world with her insight into the primary function of Shintô ritual involves “[c]ontrolling the movement between states of purity and pollution.”²⁶ The ritual activity Namihira discusses is located outside the purview of Shintô and is, in fact, considered a system of belief and practice of the people (*minkan shinkô*).

Nevertheless, the *Nihongi* and the *Kojiki* provide the first textual support for ritual purity systems in the in a narrative involving a distraught husband, the deity Izanagi, who wants his wife, Izanami, to return from death, the land of Yömi, where she languishes after dying in childbirth: the progeny of these two deities include the world – the nation of Japan – and all its deities.²⁷ Izanagi begs his wife to return for the two have not yet finished their procreative duties. Izanami has already “eaten at the hearth of Yömi” and must remain there, but she is enchanted by the magnitude of her husband’s love and retreats to a hall within Yömi to petition the deities to permit her to return. Impatient to be with his wife, Izanagi sets out to find her, lighting a tooth of a hair comb to illuminate his way. The flame reveals the corpse of his wife, “squirming and roaring” with maggots; although, even in death, she continues producing deities.

Horried at the site, Izanagi flees; his wife, having suffered the indignity of being viewed in this state, dispatches the “hags of Yömi” in pursuit. Interestingly,

²⁶ Jane Marie Law, *Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of the Japanese Awaji Ningyô Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 60.

²⁷ Philippi, *Kojiki*, 61-67. The same narrative appears in the *Nihongi* in the first chapter. Please see W.G. Aston, trans. *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D.697* (New York: Cosimo, 2005), 22-26.

Izanami and Toyo-tama-hime share the same shame. The chase scene involves a feast of sorts, as the hags devour the various foods that grow out of the actions performed by the retreating deity to protect himself. Finally, Izanami meets up with her husband and they divorce. She threatens to kill one thousand of Izanagi's people, the subjects of his country, every day and he counters by vowing to build one thousand five hundred parturition huts every day. The explanation for these actions: "This is the reason why one thousand people inevitably die and one thousand five hundred people are inevitably born every day." Aside from the fact that population replacement in the nation is elliptical, early systems of ritual purity hold that corpses remain out of site, and childbirth takes place in a hut that is removed from society. Furthermore, social order is threatened when these taboos are broken, the body and the nation, are parallel symbolic structures.

This leads into the second point. While many communities consider death to be the most polluted state, childbirth is not far behind; in fact, death and childbirth receive similar ritual treatment. Corpses and the parturient women must not be observed. Both fall under the category of *kegare*. The collapse of symbolism suggests not only are they dangerous, they are powerful – in their uncertainty and in their reminder that death and life are situated in closer proximity than is comfortable for humans. This concern about the permeability between life and death, a theme that runs through rituals of safe childbirth, finds its earliest expression in stories like that of Izanami and Izanagi's acts of creation and destruction and Tōyō-tama-hime's shapeshifting. With these two stories, we are dealing with two meteorically opposing issues: attitudes towards the woman's body and the greater issue of childbirth as a nexus for life and death. The nexus plays out in the parturition hut.

Tanigawa Kenichi, characterizes the *ubuya* of Wakasa Bay in the north of Kyoto prefecture, as "borders or boundaries" between the other world and this

world.²⁸ Together with Nishiyama Yayoi, Tanigawa analyzes the customs of parturition occurring in the region of the bay of Wakasa in the Japan Sea bordered by Kyôto and Fukui prefectures.

The locations of these parturition huts, on beaches close to the sea, reflect the cosmological understanding held by the people of this region that the other world exists beyond the sea. In this conception of birth, a passage occurs from the other world to this world. The beach is the nexus of life and death and the parturition hut is the temporary structure built for the transition to take place.²⁹ A dominant feature of Japanese religiosity involves the understanding that ancestors continuously cycle between the other world and this world. The community of Wakasa Bay plays out this notion of cosmology with the custom of building parturition huts near the seashore so the journey from the other world is more conveniently undertaken.

Let me pause here to reflect on the geography of the seashore. Unlike the beach along a lake or river, the seashore is not a stable place. A place of geographical ambiguity, at the same time it can be land or not be land and this change is dependent on the flux of the moon. Wave energy driven by the seasons contributes to the ever-changing contours. The water deposits debris and detritus that comes from far away places, including corpses of marine specimens and sometimes more substantial corpses.

The community of Wakasa bay burn the structures once the baby safely arrives, although, Tanigawa does not explain what happens to the huts when childbirth goes wrong. With the last flickers of the extinguishing flames, the child's existence in this world is established. The impermanence of the hut is reflected in the impermanence of the location on which it is built. Why? The seashore is an active,

²⁸ Kenichi Tanigawa and Yayoi Nishiyama, *Ubuya no minzoku*, 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

dynamic location mirroring the active process of birth. The shape shifting, transformations, and uncertainties of the process of birth are contained and then disposed of, perhaps washed away into the sea, to be taken far away from land and society. Tanigawa points out that rituals of life and death, those conducted in *ubuya* and houses of mourning, share many similarities.³⁰ The line between the sacred and the profane in these types of rituals, Tanigawa notes, is permeable and “one can fall into the other in an instant.”³¹

The community of Wakasa considered parturition huts as sacred spaces; in contrast, the *ubuya* in many other regions, particularly in mountainous areas, were associated with taboo and women gave birth in these places so they would not defile the gods. The volatility of religious ideas identified by Douglas appears in the custom of the *ubuya* and also reminds us that what is laid out in text and doctrine and what occurs in practice are often quite different: one community considers the *ubuya* sacred, another community treats it as a place of pollution. A major reason for this is the fact that, as Cazeneuve notes, the thing itself is not taboo, it is the symbolism surrounding it that is.³² The uncontrollable blood of women, blood that is closely linked to issues of life and of death, blood that starts and stops on its own accord, is a metonym of control and can be wielded as an ideological tool that is invested with much symbolic meaning, dependent on the variables of geography, economy, and society.

For the third point, this scene reaches a fascinating climax where the birthing body, cosmogony, and interdiction meet and out of this convergence a monster emerges. Mothers easily understand the shapeshifting that occurs during childbirth,

³⁰ Ibid., 19.

³¹ Ibid., 20.

³² Jean Cazeneuve, *Sociologie Du Rite* (France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971).

transmogrifications that must terrify fathers. Why does Tōyō-tama-hime become a crocodile – a reptile that has never set foot on the archipelago and exists only in the imaginations of the compilers of the *Kojiki*?

The birthing body takes on a life of its own, with tremors, grunts, and growls that explode out of nowhere as the body is overtaken by uncontrollable urges to expel the organism from within. On one level, the creators of this story do not express their sympathy for birthing mothers; they articulate their fears about the metamorphoses the bodies of mothers undergo. On a deeper level, this story reveals their concerns about the body politic and the transformations incurred by the nation if ideologies were ignored, systems of ritual purity breached. Without a doubt, the story of a princess changing into a monster because of an indiscretion had a salutary effect on the behavior of the audience of the text.

As an analogue, let us look at Leviathan, the sea monster that appears in Psalms 74 and 104 of the bible intent on destroying the universe created by his archenemy. Timothy K. Beal points out that appearance of the sea monster in Psalm 74 occurs with the Babylonian army invading Jerusalem and desecrating and destroying the Jerusalem Temple, precipitating a “political and theological crisis.”³³ The monster, associated with chaos and disorder, threatens social, civic, political, and cosmic order. This theme resonates in the story of the princess turned into crocodile. In this case, the mother pays the price for the breach of taboo and cosmic balance can only be restored if she relinquishes her earthly relations. Incidentally, Tōyō-tama-hime’s love for her husband is so strong that she sends her sister to land to give him a loving missile and to take care of her son, whom the aunt eventually marries. The foreignness of the beast suggests a tactic to arouse fear and suspicion.

³³ Timothy K. Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 27.

Gerald Figal broaches this topic in *Civilizations and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* in his investigation of how the folk movement and its interest in the supernatural (*fushigi*) formed the basis of the modern Meiji state.³⁴ Figal explores how social, political, and economic foment, the birthing pains of the emerging nation-state, coupled with “strange things and strangers among the populace at large”³⁵ disconcerted the people of the nation (“disturbed the emotional safety of many”). These “foreign threats and internal political upheavals” were to be expected, but they were also stoked by the state in order to destabilize its population and make it more easily governable. So, the government manufactured ghost stories to scare its population into obedience. This is by no means an innovative tactic and its lack of sophistication indicates it was a pretty handy tool wielded by administrations of premodern societies and developed nations alike.

A Special Hell for Women: the Blood Pool Sūtra

Buddhism brought the notion of female pollution to Japan with the *Ketsubonkyō* (Blood Pool Sūtra), a hymn depicting women’s relegation to a special hell for committing the sin of defiling the gods and bodhisattvas because of the blood they shed in menstruation and childbirth. Yagi Tōru emphasizes that while Buddhism is an imported tradition, and many customs were long in place before it entered the archipelago through Korea in the mid-seventh century, it becomes clear while exploring the ethnology of birth in Japan that a Buddhist cosmology and world view permeates issues of reproduction, gender, and sexuality, a theory that applies pressure on discourses of authenticity and autochthony.³⁶

³⁴ Gerald Figal, *Civilization and Monsters: Spirits of Modernity in Meiji Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 197.

³⁶ Tōru Yagi, *Nihon no tsūka girei, Bukkyō Daigaku yōryō bunka sōsho; 4* (Kyoto: Bukkyō Daigaku Tsūshin Kyōikubu, 2001), 3.

The *Ketsubonkyô* came to Japan from China during the Muromachi period. It is based on the story circulating in the Ming dynasty of China (1368-1644) concerning Mahāmaudgalyāna, the filial son who travelled to Avīci Hell to save his sinful mother.³⁷ He is known also as Mu-lien and Mokuren. In the story of the *Ketsubonkyô*, Mokuren views women imprisoned in a pool of menstruation blood, forced to drink the substance as punishment for defiling the deity of the earth with their blood shed in childbirth and polluting the water drunk by holy men when they laundered their dirty, blood-soaked garments.³⁸

Takemi Momoko and Yagi Tôru find that the evolution of ideology emanating from the *Ketsubonkyô* begins in the early texts with women being consigned to hell for blood shed at childbirth, but by the Edo period, menstrual blood alone was enough to relegate women to Blood Pool Hell. Glassman, drawing on Matsuoka Hideaki, asserts this theory has been disproved.³⁹

Death in childbirth also became entwined with the *Ketsubonkyô*, and the sūtra took on salvific properties as it was thought to save those unfortunate women from consignment to Hell. Yagi Tôru sees the sūtra's influence in the memorial service (*nagare kanjô* or *kawasegaki*) for women who died in the late stages of pregnancy or

³⁷ For an English translation of the story, please see Victor H. Mair, ed. *The Shorter Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1095-1127. Hank Glassman points to the version of the prosimetric tale told in the Yü-lan p'en ching, or the Urabonkyô available in Iwamoto Yutaka, *Jigoku meguri no bungaku* (Tokyo: Kaimei shoten, 1979), 81-133. In this story Mu-lien or Mokuren travels to the realm of the hungry ghosts to save his mother.

³⁸ Momoko Takemi, "'Menstruation Sutra' Belief in Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 10, no. 2-3 (1983).

³⁹ Hank Glassman, "The Religious Construction of Motherhood in Medieval Japan" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 2001), 138. Matsuoka Hideaki, "Waga kuni ni okeru Ketsubonkyô shinkô ni tsuite no ichi kôsetsu," in *Sôgô joseishi kenkyû kai*, eds., *Josei to shûkyô* [Nihon josei shi ronshû 5] Tokyo: Yoshikawa kôbunkan, 1998), 257-280.

childbirth (*ubume*). In this service, a cloth strip with the invocation of the Buddha (*namu amida buttsu*) printed in vermilion was fastened to four poles placed on a bridge or passage way traversed by many people.⁴⁰ Passers-by poured water from a bamboo ladle over the invocation. It was a custom practiced throughout the country to help *ubume* gain entry into paradise (*Jô buttsu*).⁴¹ As the vermilion letters – the symbolism of red explicit in its meaning – fade away from the water poured by many people, the woman’s entrance to paradise was ensured. Yagi sees this special service possessing magical qualities. The Osaka temple Shôsen-ji also held a riverside service using the *Ketsubonkyô* until the 1970’s.⁴²

The folklore behind this custom holds that *ubume* remain for a long time in this world, appearing frequently at roadsides at night, asking passers-by to hold their babies.⁴³ The legend of the ghost of the pregnant woman who has died before delivering her baby exists in many localities throughout Japan and the apparition represents pregnant women who have died in childbirth. Yagi Tôru sees this

⁴⁰ Bernard Faure points out the apotropaic properties of blood are captured by the color red in Japan. Red takes on the meaning of life in exorcisms and the red colored *hara-obi* were considered to have magical meanings. Please see *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity, and Gender* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 71.

⁴¹ Yagi, *Nihon no tsûka girei*, 3. References to this practice appear also in Shinmura Taku, *Shussan to seishokukan no rekishi*, 2 ed. (Tokyo: Hôsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 1997), 150 and in the fourteenth chapter of the *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei* (Tôkyo: Daiichi hôki shuppan, 1975). Hank Glassman attempts to date the service and finds references in sixteenth century sources to a ritual called *nagare kanjô* performed by fisherman and also a medieval source where ritual specialists called *itako* conduct the service, but it is unclear if the services were directed at *ubume*. For further information on the service please see Hank Glassman, "The Religious Construction of Motherhood in Medieval Japan," 149-150. Takemi Momoko locates the idea of women who die in childbirth being consigned to Hell to the *Nihon ryôiki* and the *Konjaku monogatari-shû*, but she notes that the *Ketsubonkyô* does not appear in these works. Please see "Menstruation Sutra' Belief in Japan," 238.

⁴² Takemi, "Menstruation Sutra" Belief in Japan," 241.

⁴³ Yagi, *Nihon no tsûka girei*, 4.

characterization and objectification of women as part of the chauvinistic attitudes of the Samurai period.



Figure 1-5 An image of *ubume* by Toriyama Sekien (1712-1788).

Ultimately this practice reflects an attitude that death in childbirth was considered a social transgression as well as a sin. Hank Glassman argues that changes in family structure that occurred in the medieval period, a masculine time in Japan's history, brought about this attitude towards women. Up until Japan's medieval period, women were considered lifelong daughters of a household and received inheritances of property and land. A drastic turn-around occurred as Samurai culture with its chauvinism and militaristic bent took over the body politic: women lost their status as inheritors and become defined solely by their ability to bear children. They were married into households where they were expected to produce heirs.⁴⁴ Dying before producing heirs was not only a sin, it was a major social transgression.

Bernard Faure demonstrates how the recital of the *Ketsubonkyô* was originally intended for funerals but came to be used for pregnant women and by the time of the Edo period the notions of female blood and death were conflated in order to control women. Soteriology for women in the Buddhist tradition, he argues, was based on

⁴⁴ Glassman, "The Religious Construction of Motherhood in Medieval Japan", 142-43.

exploiting women's fears so that the men in charge of Buddhism in Japan could control them.⁴⁵



Figure 1-6 An image of an *ubume* from the *Hyakkai-Zukan* by Sawaki Suushi, c. 1737.

Japanese Buddhism has practiced unique forms of control over women, such as the early institution of the five hindrances (*nyonin gosho*) that prevented women from attaining enlightenment and the insistence that nuns obey priests (*hakkyohô*). The sacred areas into which women are not allowed entrance (*nyonin kekkai*) that I mention in the beginning of this chapter abound in Japan. Women's impurity is the reason for these exclusions. Nakano Yuko attributes the perpetuation of this discrimination to religious confraternities (*kô*), the main activity of which including the chanting of poems praising Buddhist doctrine (*wasan*) and sūtras.⁴⁶ The

⁴⁵ Bernard Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 78.

⁴⁶ Yuko Nakano, "Women and Buddhism - Blood Impurity and Motherhood," in *Women and Religion in Japan*, ed. Akiko Okuda and Haruko Okano, *Studies in Oriental Religions* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998).

prophylactic properties of the sūtra saved women from going to Hell and enabled them to achieve enlightenment. Nakano contends that ultimately, Japanese Buddhism did not encourage women to attain enlightenment, as the practice of chanting the *Ketsubonkyô* reinforced their inherently sinful nature, and in effect, further marginalized them. The Sôtô sect teaches the sūtra, attracting a lot of women followers seeking salvation. Takemi refers to the sect's initiation ceremonies, where women are presented with copies of the *Ketsubonkyô*. Ultimately, women in Japan are not separate from their blood, evoking the primitive notion of contagion introduced by Sir James Frazer: menstrual blood is impure, and women, by association are impure too.⁴⁷

I now shift the discussion to explore post-War and contemporary praxis concerning blood pollution. This was a time where Japanese society underwent rapid transformation and attitudes towards the bleeding body, especially expressed in cultural practices in rural areas, shifted dramatically. Most importantly, a time of attenuation on all fronts, women simply could not be constricted by systems of ritual purity that forced them into seclusion during menstruation and parturition. There were simply not enough hours in the day. Let us observe how changes in lifestyle demands precipitated changes in praxis.

Segawa Kiyoko writes that women were required to live in special community-owned huts or isolated rooms during their menses and childbirth, where they cooked their meals and slept.⁴⁸ This practice continued up until the nineteenth

⁴⁷ Sherry Ortner discusses how an underlying cross-cultural concern is that the contagion element of pollution will spread to all aspects of society if not ritually controlled. Please see "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" in *Women, Culture, and Society*, eds. M.Z. Ronaldo and L. Lamphere, pp. 68-87 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 72.

⁴⁸ Kiyoko Segawa, "Menstrual Taboos Imposed Upon Women," in *Studies in Japanese Folklore*, ed. Richard Mercer Dorson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 239.

century. This period of abstinence was communal; women were joined by their female neighbors and daughters, and there are even recollections of it being a festive time.



Figure 1-7 A scene of Blood Pool Hell from an *emaki* displayed at Narai-ji, Amanohashidate, Kyoto Prefecture.

Festivity, Food, and Shortcuts

Attempting to find a logic of taboo, the idea that forced segregations were celebratory has circulated amongst feminist scholars, Kathleen O’Grady points out.⁴⁹ No matter how women handled the restrictions imposed upon them, or how

⁴⁹ O’Grady, "The Semantics of Taboo: Menstrual Prohibitions in the Hebrew Bible," 21. Carol Delaney falls into this circle of scholars by revealing that during her fieldwork in a Turkish village, menstruating women occasionally visited her house (“a kind of “menstrual hut””) to drink tea and eat during Ramadan since the anthropologist did not keep fast. Under Islamic guidelines, menstruating women may not touch the sacred Qur’an, enter a mosque, or fast during Ramadan as this introduces an unwelcome profaneness. As menstruation sullies the “spiritual reward” of the fast, women did not abstain from food and drink – but they imbibed

scholars try to reinterpret texts, the fact remains that the blood of menstruation and childbirth was considered defiling and restrictions against the menstruating women were codified.

These ideologies influenced practices even into Japan's post-War period. In many communities, women lived apart from their families for almost one third of the month. Restrictions of ritual purity, however, slowly loosened to allow women to perform their rituals of separation and confinement at home, and the focus of the sacred area that required most ritual attention was the hearth fire (as Mary Douglas says, sex involves two people, cooking only one). During menses, women would build a new fire, after which they would extinguish and start again when they were pure again. They also cleaned all the pots and pans they used during time. Other members of the family faced restrictions also, such as prohibitions against going near the household hearth. In other communities, indirect pollution occurred if a woman ate food cooked by fire. The period of ritual separation was brought to a close, in many communities, with the act of a communal cup of tea shared by the family. Or, women washed themselves in rivers or in the ocean to purify themselves.

Anne-Marie Korte, drawing on Susan Starr Sered's analysis of blood rituals in women-centered religions, notes that that within the framework of these traditions, little emphasis is placed on "natural bloodshed"; rather, ritual systems develop around food and food preparations. Food is the intermediary between the celestial and the terrestrial, and women, for the most part, are responsible for its preparation. These rituals, Korte argues, elevates women's status to sacred, as oftentimes the food products themselves are considered sacred, not only because they become ingested, but also because they are a bridge between two worlds and are capable of bringing

surreptitiously and Delaney's house provided a comfortable place to break the rules. See Carol Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil: Gender and Cosmology in Turkish Village Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 94.

together the living, the dead, and the gods.⁵⁰ Carol Delaney, in her ethnography of a Turkish village, notes, however, that the community considers the act of cooking food mundane. It is the baking of bread from which women must abstain when they are menstruating.⁵¹ The logic of reproduction in this village finds a parallel between baking bread – the food requires the germination of yeast from one batch to the next – and procreation: both require a process of reproduction. Breadmaking itself is not considered sacred, the process of transferring live yeast to each successive batch is. Additionally, the pollution associated with menstruation is thought to interfere with the mysterious, creative process of rising dough. Yet, women’s sacrality or the powers their polluting bodies possess do not translate to better life conditions.

Segawa Kiyoko notes that Japanese have “freed themselves”⁵² from the restrictions of pollution practices in contemporary society, the implication being that these constraints were burdensome and discriminatory. Segawa also points out soon after the Meiji government was installed restrictions were lifted against eating meat, for the government wanted a healthy, strong nation, and women were relieved from being sent to the *kariya* during their menstruation.⁵³ Drawing again on Sered, Korte explains blood of menstruation and parturition as seen in male-dominated religions confirms women’s “otherness” and is defined from the husband's perspective, noting

⁵⁰ Anne-Marie Korte, "Female Blood Rituals: Cultural-Anthropological Findings and Feminist-Theological Reflections," in *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood*, ed. Kristin De Troyer (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 171. ; Susan Sered, *Mother, Sacred Sister: Religions Dominated by Women* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁵¹ Carol Delaney, *The Seed and the Soil*, 95.

⁵² Segawa, "Menstrual Taboos Imposed Upon Women," 249.

⁵³ Kiyoko Segawa, *Onna no minzokushi: sono kegare to shinpi* (Tokyo: Tokyo Shoseki, 1980).

that the women's children and parents are usually not affected by the pollution of her blood.⁵⁴

Women in Japan resisted the conditions placed upon them and employed strategies to bypass inconvenient blood proscriptions by buying *o-fuda* (purifying charms) from Kôyasan or the head temple of the Tendai sect. We see a similar inversion occurring, where women used the *Ketsubonkyô* as an amulet for safe childbirth practices. Pregnant women up until the 1970s travelled to Shôsen-ji to purchase a *Ketsubonkyô omamori* which they would insert inside their *hara-obi*. After a successful birth, they cut out seven characters from the charm that represented the sounds of the Bodhisattva Jizô, and drink one a day in water over seven days. The new mothers would visit the temple to exchange the cut-up charm for a new one that they would keep close to their bodies until they completely recovered.⁵⁵

Edward Norbeck discusses practices of ritual purity he notices in his field research during the 1950's. Menstruating women were considered polluted and could not perform food offerings to the *kamidana* and *butsudan*. They cooked their families' meals on a separate fire. After their menstruation was over, a new fire was built. They also lived separately from their families during that period. He points out, though, how a shift in attitude towards women took place during the 1950's, as women no longer had to avoid shrines for fear of defiling the kami.⁵⁶

Differing attitudes towards taboo are reflected in the geographies of Japan, a plurality of practice Japanese scholars emphasize in their analyses and a point that is missed by many Western researchers who tend to base their analyses on the meta-

⁵⁴ Korte, "Female Blood Rituals: Cultural-Anthropological Findings and Feminist-Theological Reflections," 176.

⁵⁵ Takemi, "'Menstruation Sutra' Belief in Japan," 243.

⁵⁶ Edward Norbeck, "Pollution and Taboo in Contemporary Japan," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 8, no. 3 (1952): 272.

ideologies laid out in texts. In her framework of ritual purity, Namihira Emiko illuminates the differing attitudes and praxes of interdiction in a village located in a valley, a village near the seashore, and a rural community. Takatori Masao, in his overview of Shintô practice, points out how taboo behaviors are strictly enforced in fishing villages because of the dangerous nature of the livelihood.⁵⁷ This is a point Yoshimura Noriko brings up in her studies of childbirth practices in the prefecture of Ehime.⁵⁸ In agricultural communities, there are no taboos that enforce the separation of the birthing body from the rest of the community and it is customary for husbands to assist their wives during labor. She contrasts this attitude to that of the island fishing villages that dot the inland sea where severe taboos are in place restricting fathers access to the birth of their children. She also attributes this to the dangers inherent in the fishing industry.

Harnessing the Creative Force of Dirt in Contemporary Japan

Ohnuki-Tierney traces a link between ancient and contemporary understandings of impurity, where the locus of impurity in pre-modern times rested in oozing corpses, the handling of which was considered impure. This terror of “people dirt” made its way through history, and the contemporary Japanese person performs rituals such as hand washing, gargling, and shoe removal to rid themselves of people dirt.⁵⁹ Takatori Masao and Hashimoto Mineo affirm these notions. They also note that contemporary concerns about pollution exist today where people who are experiencing bad fortune at home decline official public positions and people whose

⁵⁷ Masao Takatori, *Shintô no seiritsu* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1993).

⁵⁸ Noriko Yoshimura, "Shizoku Sanchi/Kasumigai no shussan minzokushi: fûfu kyôdokei shussan shûzoku ni miru anzan he no shisen," *Kokuritsu Reikishi Minzoku Hakubutsukan Kenkyû Hôkoku* 141 (2008).

⁵⁹ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan: An Anthropological View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 36. See also Namihira Emiko, *Kegare no Kôzô*.

bodies are polluted avoid crossing through the red gates demarcating the sacred area of the shrine, stem from the paradigms of ritual purity laid out in the *Kiki*.⁶⁰

My experience of Japanese attitudes towards people dirt occurred in the obstetrical clinic in Kyoto where I gave birth. Prenatal appointments provided rich fieldwork data; even more so, because I had experienced pregnancy and childbirth in two other countries in addition to Japan: Canada and the United States. Attitudes towards blood and hygiene were especially revealing; however, they conflicted with the practices of ritual purity I have discussed throughout this chapter.

In North America, technicians don surgical gloves before taking blood from patients; however, the midwife who attended my pregnancy and birth never once used gloves when she extracted my blood. In North America, patients in North America cover their bodies with disposable paper blankets when medical practitioners examine them; in Kyoto, I never had to deal with the awkwardness of paper blankets. A crocheted acrylic blanket in a feminine pastel color lay in a basket in the curtained-off changing room that we draped it over our exposed bodies during examinations. I liked the ‘home-like’ touch of the blanket, but every time I picked it up, I cringed at the thought of the germs to which I was exposed because the same blanket was used throughout the day.

What, then, is the attitude towards “people dirt” in the maternity clinic if nurses handle vials of blood without gloves and patients cover their naked bodies with communal blankets? Mary Douglas’s analysis of the creative force of dirt provides an insight into the ritual activity occurring in the Japanese maternity clinic:

⁶⁰ Masao and Hashimoto Mineo Takatori, *Shûkyo izen* (Tokyo: NHK Bukkusu, 1990; reprint, 35th Edition), 31.

In its last phase then, dirt shows itself as an apt symbol of creative formlessness. But it is from its first phase [in its potent and dangerous form as dirt] that it derives its force. The danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power. Those vulnerable margins and those attacking forces which threaten to destroy good order represent the powers inhering in the cosmos. Ritual which can harness these for good is harnessing power indeed.⁶¹

The medical clinic is a highly ritualized environment. When the pregnant woman enters the clinic, she first hands her “*bosshi teccho*” (maternity passbook) and consultation card to the front desk staff, then produces a sample of urine to be analyzed for protein, then takes her blood pressure, and then waits to be summoned to the consultation room. Upon entering the room, where she meets first with a midwife or nurse, she steps on a scale, and then places herself on an examination table where an abdominal ultrasound is conducted, first by the midwife, and then the doctor, to measure the fetus’s weight, length, head circumference, and any abnormalities in its organs. The next stage involves a transvaginal ultrasound to determine the possibility of early labor, which is conducted in a separate area. At this point the woman must undress from the waist down and cover herself with the communal blanket. The ritual is concluded with the woman re-entering the examination room fully clothed, and discussing the results of the examination with either the midwife, nurse, or obstetrician. She then leaves the consultation room and returns to the waiting area to schedule the next appointment and pay the bill.

I propose that the ritual framework is structured on a symbolic level to transform the dangerous “people dirt” into a highly constructive force, that of the generative power of giving life. The many stages the pregnant woman goes through, from the time she enters the clinic to the time she is half-undressed, is a process that ritually cleanses her of accumulated “people dirt,” so that when she dons the blanket,

⁶¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 162.

she is in a purified state, at the height of her ability to generate new life – she is sacred.

Another point worth mentioning is that the people dirt and the attitudes towards it have little to do with germs and hygiene. We are dealing with conceptual categories. David Haberman points out a similar categorization occurring with pollution in his study of the river Yamuna, considered the sacred sister of the Ganges in the Hindu tradition. The river is in the throes of an environmental crisis due to human neglect, and agricultural and industrial overflow, precipitating a religious crisis, as the body of water plays an integral part in the ritual life of Hindus throughout India. Yet, devotees continue practices of bathing in the water and drinking it. At a major festival, Haberman asks devotees how they feel about the pollution and how they are able continue the same ritual practices. He receives the response: “Yes, the river is polluted. But today our hearts are unpolluted, so there is no problem.”⁶² In this regard, pollution is a cultural construction – not to say it does not exist, but how it is viewed sheds light on systems of practice and belief. The dirtiness caused by humans reflects a scientific perspective; ideas of purity and pollution reflect ways cultures categorize their universes, develop ritual systems and customary behaviors that organize social bodies; and express their relationships with the divine.

Fluidity and Volatility in the World of Ritual Pollution

The pregnant woman in Japan might be sacred in the maternity clinic, but in the discursive space of gender, sexuality, and reproduction in the world of religion, her status is not so clear. Dyads, triumvirate frameworks, and ambivalent resonance do not explain why one community celebrates a women’s reproductive functions and another considers them defiling. Or, why one community upholds a woman’s sacred

⁶² David L. Haberman, *River of Love in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 131-32.

powers of procreation and At the intersection of systems of ritual purity and ideologies of gender, sexuality, and reproduction.

Yagi Tôru, although recognizing that notions of *kegare* are behind the difficulties women faced in Japanese society up until very recently – childless women or women producing twins were thought to have some mark against them – discusses the double standards faced by women regarding their blood and biological functions.⁶³ In the region of the Izu islands, communities consider women polluted and restrict their activities with taboos; yet, at the same time, they are also considered closer to the gods than men and are highly revered ritual specialists. These island women perform a dual role of presiding over ceremonies and festivals as shamans as well as assisting the women of their communities with their childbirths. While this double standard is an extreme example, women throughout Japan face conflicting attitudes towards their gender and sexuality.

In addition to conflicting attitudes, women face shifting moral structures. Tsujimoto Masanori points out that the seven-day period of separation required of a post-parturient women laid out in the *Engishiki* was extended during the interval between the Heian period to the Muromachi period, where the period of pollution was lengthened to thirty days and points towards a heightening level of discrimination against women as Japan entered a militaristic and male-dominated period in its history.⁶⁴

Relying on text alone, Michele Marra suggests that although Japanese worshippers experienced pluralistic devotional practices, taboo is a unifying element. From the tip of present-day Hokkaido to the tip of Okinawa, all Japanese understood

⁶³ Yagi, *Nihon no tsûka girei*, 6-7.

⁶⁴ Masanori Tsujimoto, "Josei sabetsu to kegare," in *Kegare ishiki to buraku sabetsu wo kanaeru*, ed. Masanori Tsujimoto (Osaka: Chuo Seppan Insatsu Kabushiki Kaisha, 1999).

that particular practices were taboo, an assertion I do not agree with. The *norito* (Shintô ritual prayers) laid out the list of offences. He refers to the *Goryôsha Bukkiriyô* (An Ordinance to Subjugate the Spirits of the Dead, 1403), where impure objects and events and women's period of purification is listed: "Among them was the impurity caused by blood during a woman's monthly periods – in which she was sheltered from public view for eleven days – as well as at times of birth, which required a confinement of only ten days. Abortion was considered a most defiling act because of the presence of blood and death: seven days was the penalty for the woman acting in the first three months of her pregnancy, and thirty for those who underwent abortion later."⁶⁵ When issues of ritual purity are discussed in the Japanese context, the region and the historical period must be clearly stated. While there may be certain universal components to systems of ritual purity, how they are put into practice is another story.

Ambivalent resonance does not run through systems of ritual purity designed to handle the concerns of female blood. Society's shifting attitudes towards women determines these rules using the convenient category of blood pollution. Systems of ritual purity are not only categories, but also provide a barometer of a society's shifting attitudes towards women.

In the following section, I address commodification, commercialization, and secularization in rituals of safe childbirth in Japan. In this section, I first explore commodification of spirituality that I see occurring in a natural birthing technique called Sophrology. Not only does this example illustrate how the "ancient wisdom tradition" of Zen is stripped of its meaning and repackaged to market the technique, it also provides a glimpse into a process of reclaiming childbirth as a uniquely Japanese experience. More importantly, in Sophrology, we see the Zen tradition secularized.

⁶⁵ Michele Marra, "The Buddhist Mythmaking of Defilement: Sacred Courtesans in Medieval Japan," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52, no. 1 (1993).

Then, I move on to a discussion of processes of commercialization and secularization apparent in religious activity associated with rituals of safe childbirth.

The “Privatization of Asian Wisdom Traditions” and The Zen of Having Babies

Matsunaga Akira, an obstetrician in Kumamoto Prefecture, began teaching Sophrology, a natural childbirth method, in his private maternity clinic in 1986. He imported it from France, adapting the technique “to meet the needs of the Japanese because of the vast differences in culture, *weltanschauung*, and customs between the two countries.”⁶⁶ This involved adding the “Oriental training techniques...[of] Japanese Zen and Indian Yoga.”⁶⁷ He then returned the reconstituted version – a hybrid of “both Occidental and Oriental cultures”⁶⁸ – to France a decade later, claiming in marketing materials that the “Japanese style” of Sophrology impressed a French audience at two hospitals in France in 1986. He formed the Japan Sophrology Association in 1993 and by 2002, three hundred maternity clinics around the nation had adopted Sophrology as their main method of natural childbirth training.⁶⁹

Matsunaga incorporated Sophrology into his practice to replace the Lamaze method, a natural childbirth method used uniformly throughout Japan during the 1970s and 1980s. In essence, the Lamaze technique teaches a breathing technique that helps women “shut off” pain. In contrast, Sophrology trains the mother-to-be to view labor pain as a positive and necessary energy for safely delivering her child.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Akira Matsunaga, *21 Seiki no pojiteibu shussanhô - sofuroroji- no susume* (Tokyo: Bungeisha, 2002), 9.

⁶⁷ Akira Matsunaga, *Sophrologic Preparation for Maternity*, trans. Teruko Matsunaga (Kumamoto: Japan Sophrology Association, No Date), 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁹ Matsunaga, *21 seiki no pojiteibu shussanhô*, 9.

⁷⁰ Lamaze originated in the Soviet Union and became the nation's "official method of childbirth" in 1951. Ferdinand Lamaze and Pierre Vellay, French obstetricians, travelled to Russia to observe childbirth practices in the same year and brought the method back to France, making some adjustments. Lamaze published *Painless Childbirth* in 1956. The Catholic church led by Pope Pius XII sanctioned the method

Matsunaga characterizes Lamaze as “mind-control painless labor,” (*seishin yobôshô mutsû bunben*) and in Japan, this method was synonymous with childbirth. In his eyes, the method fed women the false impression that they could make pain disappear.⁷¹ Unimpressed by the claims of this method – labor pains are not something that can be imagined away – Matsunaga focuses on teaching women to think of labor pain as positive energy, the power of which they can harness to help them bring their babies into the world.

Evocations of Zen and Yoga and references to “positive energy,” abundant in the Sophrologic training materials alert us to a New Age spiritual approach that has also claimed a stake in the maternity industry in both North America and Japan. Matsunaga’s adopts a processual approach to childbirth, emphasizing that mother and baby work together as one in order to make the birth come about and deploys what could be considered “New Age techniques” to develop the connection between mother, child, and childbirth. Basically, women train to give birth by developing their minds and their bodies. Classes are offered at clinics around Japan and women can order books and audio materials for practice at home. Women are guided through “image-training” to develop relaxation techniques and a series of poses, stretches,

and from then on its popularity spread. An American woman who gave birth in Paris with Lamaze in 1955 introduced the method to the United States in 1959 with the publication of her book, *Thank You, Dr. Lamaze: A Mother's Experience in Painless Childbirth*. The technique used primarily by educated, middle-class women achieved a high level of popularity throughout the 1960's and 1970's. It involved six weekly sessions attended by both pregnant women and their husbands, who would become labor coaches in the delivery room. Breathing techniques are the focus of the practice, although other issues having to do with women's participation in the childbirth process are addressed. Wendy Simonds' criticism of the method is that it simply reinforced the doctor's authority, as it made the woman obedient: "Mother, coached by Father, behaves herself while Doctor delivers the baby." Please see Wendy Simonds, et al., *Laboring On: Birth in Transition in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 34-37.

⁷¹ Matsunaga, *21 seiki no pojiteibu shussanhô*, 26.

exercises involving muscular contractions and releases, and kegel exercises. The basic pose (*kihon shissei*) is the semi-lotus position, “the posture of zazen,” in which the woman practices many of the techniques and into which she will place herself as her labor progresses from the first stage (contractions) to the second stage (active pushing of the baby through the birth canal).

Sophrology, taking Western methods of pain management and infusing them with Eastern practices of mind and body integration, frames childbirth as a spiritual event, placing the woman and baby at the center of the process. Matsunaga’s medical philosophy holds that the doctor is only present to intervene if complications arise.⁷² This attitude is reflected in the general population of obstetricians and midwives, who eschew administering pain medication during labor and avoid performing caesarean sections, although, as I shall discuss, reliance on these procedures is increasing in Japan. This approach also brings to mind the traditional method of childbirth that involved intense ritualization that Helen Hardacre notes in her research on *mizuko kuyô*⁷³ and I discuss throughout this dissertation. Although, the ritualization created by Sophrology has been filtered through an exotic, multicultural lens and draws from a bricolage of traditions.

The website of the Japan Sophrology Association lists numerous facilitators, either obstetricians operating out of maternity clinics or independent midwives, throughout the country – a total of about five places around Kyoto – but when I inquired about classes in the fall of 2006, the contacts revealed they no longer offered training. I discussed Sophrologic training with a Kyoto-based midwife and she noted the technique had indeed achieved a moderate level of popularity during the 1990’s

⁷² Matsunaga, *Sophrologic Preparation for Maternity*.

⁷³ Helen Hardacre, *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997).

but had grown out of fashion, classes in maternity yoga and water aerobics the preferred prenatal activities for many women.

A Not-so-Silent Takeover and The 'New Age Melting' Pot

A form of self-exoticization is evident in Sophrology. A Japanese obstetrician infuses selected strands of traditions plucked from the exotic East into a Western practice and repackages the product to distribute back to Europe. It also attracts a Japanese clientele who view this technique much the same way as do Europeans: exotic remnants from “mystical” traditions of a former age. What is more, this tendency to exoticize elements of Asian religions is commonly thought of as a predilection of the West, but here we have a case of an appealing feature of Japanese religions being resuscitated domestically.

With this example of Sophrology a variety of points are worth mentioning. First, what we see occurring here is a two-pronged process, one that involves the “commodification of religion as spirituality”⁷⁴ and another, the “Privatisation of Asian Wisdom Traditions,” contemporary phenomena Jeremy Carrette and Richard King explore in their book *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, an examination of the corporate world’s project to strip down the philosophies of major religious traditions and “sex them up” to sell their products.

Carrette and King unpack a discourse of spirituality purveyed by corporations and institutions the mandates of which are driven by contemporary capitalism. They see this as a “silent takeover of the ‘religious’”⁷⁵ spurred on by the neoliberal policies associated with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Many of the economic policies developed over the last two decades have appealed to the interests of the very few; namely, a small pool of large corporations and wealthy investors.

⁷⁴ Jeremy and Richard King Carrette, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2005), 15.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.



Figure 1-8 The author (wearing a black t-shirt) participating in a maternity yoga class held at Saeki Maternity Clinic in Kyoto, October 2006.

The most prominent name associated with neoliberalism is Milton Friedman, ultra-conservative professor in the University of Chicago's Economics Department who headed the Chicago School of economics during the 1950's.⁷⁶ Friedman's project involved developing a pure state of capitalism that would operate without regulations and trade barriers, based on the *laissez-faire* conviction that the free market operated on the same principles regulating nature. His antidote to struggling economies involved introducing a 'shock' that would first destabilize the economy and then allow it to self-regulate. The Chicago School influenced not only economic policies

⁷⁶ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knoph Canada: 2007), 56-63.

enacted by Reagan and Thatcher but also countless other political bodies throughout the world that represent the broad spectrum of political ideologies.

It is in this economic climate that the commodification of religion has occurred argue Carrette and King, solely for corporate gain and to keep the wheels of consumerism rolling. They turn to the perfume industry – an industry the success of which depends on a clever fusion of its products with the exotic– and extract examples like “Samsara” perfume, ‘Zen’ deodorant, and ‘Spiritual’ body spray.⁷⁷ Their major concern is that these companies who market the spiritual and the religious seem to “endorse” the traditions they associate with their products; however, these companies also distance “themselves from any engagement with the worldviews and forms of life that they represent.”⁷⁸

Matsunaga’s use of *zazen* raises this concern. He associates his ‘product’ with an appealing quality of the tradition, but does not acknowledge the tradition’s entire history. The appropriation of Japanese Zen, especially when it is done within the nation’s borders, is concerning considering the sect’s involvement in the jingoist movement driving Japan’s imperial policies that led to violent colonial takeovers throughout Asia and South Asia and activities in World War II.⁷⁹ Furthermore, Matsunaga reduces the entire contemplative practice of *zazen* to an exercise “in the cross-legged position” (*agura shissei*) that strengthens the inner and outer thigh muscles.⁸⁰ Basically, by deflecting attention away from the pose’s association as a

⁷⁷ Carrette, *Selling Spirituality*, 16.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁹ For further discussion on this topic, please see Robert H. Scharf, “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism.” In Donald Lopez, ed., *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 107-160 and Victoria Daizen, *Zen at War* (Lanham, MD; Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

⁸⁰ Matsunaga, *21 seiki no pojiteibu shussanhô*, 100; Matsunaga, *Sophrologic Preparation for Maternity*, 11.

tool used by practitioners involved in contemplative activities and erasing all the physical demands of Zen, Matsunaga reduces an entire tradition into a groin stretch. He then recasts the pose as an effective posture in which to bring life into the world.⁸¹ Incidentally, the common position traditionally used by birthing Japanese women was the squatting position, but its obvious associations are far too mundane, profane, and not sexy. Giving birth in the semi-lotus position transforms childbirth into a spiritual event, something that Matsunaga emphasizes in his marketing of the method.



Figure 1-9 “From Lamaze to Sophrology” A page from 21 Seiki no Pojiteibu Shussanhô - Sofurorogi- no Susume.

⁸¹ Hakuin (1686-1768), a Zen priest of the Rinzai school and largely responsible for revising the Zen tradition writes extensively about the physical demands of the practice in his autobiography in a chapter entitled "Zen Sickness." His commitment to practice eventually made him very ill and he spent much of his life seeking help from medical practitioners for a cure. Please see Hakuin, *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin*, translated by Norman Waddell (Boston: Shambala, 1999).

This leads into the second theme explored by Carrette and King, where “the wisdom of diverse ancient civilisations becomes commodified in order to serve the eclectic interests of ‘spiritual consumers’ in the contemporary New Age marketplace of religions.”⁸² While Carrette and King associate this with colonialist attitudes held by Europeans towards Asia, Matsunaga’s use of “ancient” techniques challenges the model the authors lay out. The marketplace of religions is bustling in the East as it is in the West and spiritual consumers, as well as the marketers of mysticism, operate within their own borders with equal finesse; although, the authors do note a process of domestic “repackaging” and peddling that occurred in India with Yoga. Associated with Hinduism, the practice involved the “prolonged application of ‘psychosomatic’ techniques designed to undermine egocentricity, discipline desire and transform one’s perspective upon reality.”⁸³ However, teachers like B.K.S. Iyengar popularized Yoga in the late 1930’s, and then exported the practice to the West, generating exorbitant earnings along the way. The transformative qualities of yoga taught today have more to do with relaxation, flexibility, and altering one’s body mass index than with removing the baggage of the self. The case of Sophrology challenges the conventional understanding of Orientalism applied by Carrette and King, and speaks more to issues of capitalism and secularism and the deracination of traditions in order to market a product or service that appeals to a wide audience.

Sophrology also invokes the notion of reclamation of childbirth, which had been taken over by Western medical practices and techniques. As I discuss in the second chapter of this dissertation, when Japan underwent an intense process of modernization in the Meiji period, it introduced German medical practices through texts. The modern Japanese obstetrical system is based on the European model. And

⁸² Carrette, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, 87.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 116-17.

as I discussed previously, childbirth in Japan was associated with the Lamaze technique. By “orientalizing” childbirth, Matsunaga attempts to recast childbirth in a culturally specific way, reclaiming the process as a “Japanese” way of giving birth. This tendency to emphasize a Japanese way of birth is evident in Yoshimura Noriko’s advice to women in her work *Kodomo wo umu*, which I discuss at length in the following chapter. She also encourages women to prepare for birth by practicing Yoga and Zen meditation.⁸⁴

Carrette and King’s study looks at religion through the frame of neoliberal economic policies that have spread throughout the world, harnessing government policy, corporate culture, and consumer in a global marketplace of ideas, an “iron cage” of consumerism as it were. Max Weber identified this trend over one hundred years ago, pointing out the intimate connection between Protestantism and capitalism.⁸⁵ In Weber’s time, work became the modern expression of monasticism, technology took over the lives of people, and the ethic of accumulation replaced the concern for self-cultivation. Much later, R. Laurence Moore’s study in 1994 examined how religious institutions in the nineteenth century in the United States embedded themselves in the burgeoning world of commerce and contributed to the development of a class of citizens whose financial means allowed them to buy “culture.”⁸⁶

Now, consumers can buy “spirituality.” Carrette and King contribute to the studies of Weber and Moore with their comprehensive exploration of how religion is “rebranded” as spirituality, and the implications of this rebranding. With the emphasis

⁸⁴ Noriko Yoshimura, *Kodomo wo umu* (Kyoto: Iwanami Shoten, 1992), 230.

⁸⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁸⁶ R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 4.

on individual systems of spirituality that reached its greatest expression during the 1990s funnelled through corporate marketing campaigns, people's spiritual lives rest on the same plane as do their consumer lives: they are as engaged with worldly issues as they are with filling their homes with brand-name clothes, appliances, and furniture. Individuals buy from corporations that sell products marketed to promote spirituality, which has been "turned into a product or a kind of brand name for the meaning of life," ensuring their "place in the nirvana or heaven of corporate capitalism."⁸⁷ Furthermore, the corporate takeover of spirituality has allowed these same corporations to continue attaining high quarterly earnings, all the while avoiding taking responsibility for their complicity in the continuation of social ills like poverty and injustice that Carrette and King feel they are linked.⁸⁸ And consumers are happy to continue buying from these organizations as their purchases fill their "spiritual" needs.

Matsunaga Akira's treatment of Sophrology illustrates how the spiritual has been commodified in a secular society. It also speaks to a process of cultural reclamation. Sophrology also alerts us to a tendency in the Japanese maternity industry where the biomedical interfaces with the 'religious,' a relationship that, as I shall demonstrate, has existed throughout Japan's history of religious rituals of safe childbirth. The "spiritual takeover" of religion by corporations identified by Carrette and King resonates with Japan's maternity industry. Do we see a similar takeover occurring in rituals of safe childbirth? How do the religious institutions associated with distributing *hara-obi* and amulets attract pregnant women and their families? Have the wheels of consumerism and capitalism so overtaken the religious purposes of the shrines and temples involved in this lucrative industry that they have

⁸⁷ Carrette, *Selling Spirituality*, 53.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

overlooked their “corporate responsibilities?” Are the unknowns and “what ifs” of pregnancy exploited by these religious sites? I address these questions in the following section.

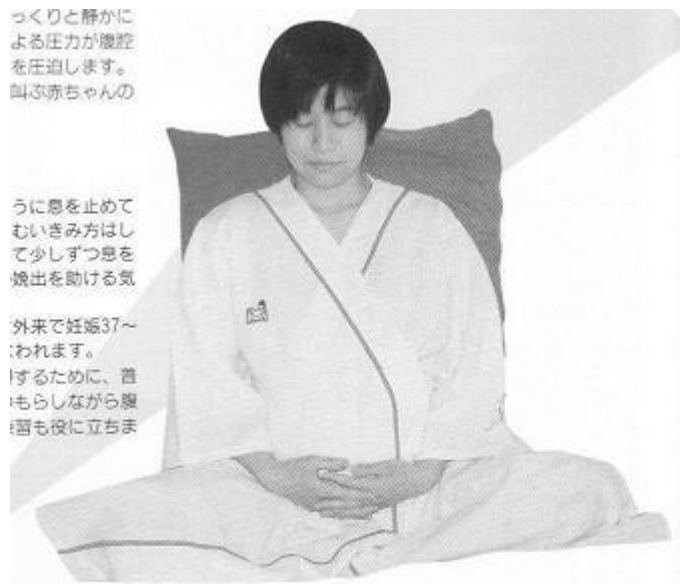


Figure 1-10 Woman in labor using the method of Sophrology.

Of Department Stores, Train Lines, Religious Recreation, and Healing:
Commerce and the Temple

In October 2008, I presented a paper on rituals of safe childbirth in Japan for the Japan Studies Association of Canada (JSAC) at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. During the question and answer session following the panel presentations, a Japanese scholar based in Canada commented on my paper and that of a fellow panellist dealing with rituals of aborted fetuses (*mizuko kuyô*). He considered the religious activity around these topics “sinister” and asserted that avaricious priests and monks stoked irrational fears and superstitions based on the uncertainties of pregnancy and guilt over decisions to abort to generate income for their organizations.

This suspicious attitude was present in a conversation I had with Yoshimura Noriko, a scholar based in Wakamoto, Ehime Prefecture whose research on childbirth I discuss extensively throughout this dissertation. She scoffed at the proliferation of *Shichi-gosan* events held by temples and shrines, implying that the organizations appropriated the custom, the basis of which having no religious foundation, for the sole purpose of adding to their coffers. Another scholar, who was also the head priest of a Shin-Buddhist temple in Kyoto, insisted that temples that administered prayers for safe childbirth were not “really religious.” He guided me towards Kishimojin, a deity that he considered a traditional Bodhisattva overseeing birth and children’s welfare. Interestingly, Kishimojin is no longer a popular deity for safe childbirth, a topic I discuss in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

These attitudes reveal an uneasy relationship with religion and religious practice, but we must keep in mind that these are the opinions of scholars. The popularity of rituals of safe childbirth amongst Japanese people is clearly evident, the bustling activity at temples and shrines an obvious indicator. Of all the mothers with whom I discussed their religious activities, only one indicated that she refused to purchase amulets and services because of the expense. One mother laughingly told me that she only visited a temple for safe childbirth during her first pregnancy and that she did not bother to have services for her younger children. Another mother had no use for rituals of childbirth as she had experienced prenatal loss and her subsequent deliveries required surgical intervention; she paid much money to a Buddhist temple, however, to ensure her lost child’s soul would be taken care of for eternity. Aside from these few marginal voices, mothers and their families I met throughout Japan’s Kansai region visited shrines and temples during pregnancy and purchased amulets and services. As I listened to these various viewpoints, I struggled with reconciling the conflicting attitudes.

Is the discourse of spirituality emanating from corporations identified by Carrette and King present in the organizations administering prayers for safe childbirth? As we are dealing with a fairly sensitive medical issue and a multitude of conflicting emotions surrounding it, are these religious organizations capitalizing on people's insecurities? Does the close relationship between commerce and religion at sites associated with safe childbirth suggest corruption and spiritual profiteering on the part of monks and priests? With these questions in mind, let us look at processes of commoditization and commercialization in Japanese religions.

In their book *Practically Religion: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*, Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe introduce the entrepreneurial activities of Ishidô Ekyô, priest in charge of Nakayama-dera's administrative affairs.⁸⁹ Ishidô, applying a business model approach to temple affairs, designed a "temple department store," where visitors could visit sub-temples within the complex to petition a variety of buddhas and deities overseeing such concerns including crying babies, aborted and miscarried fetuses and stillborn babies, traffic safety, leg problems, and safe childbirth. Ishidô's grandfather was a close friend of Kobayashi Ichizô, the founder of Hankyû Railway and department store. Notably, the railway has a station at the foot of the temple grounds. The relationship between the corporation and the temple is still very close. For the Kodomo no Hi (Children's Day) festival the temple hosted in May of 2007, children were treated to a free miniature train ride sponsored by the company – the Hankyu logo prominently displayed. Ishidô expanded the temple's menu of yearly events and festivals by including the *Shichi-go-san* festival to the temple in response to the shifts in demographics in the 1980's. While the number of pregnant

⁸⁹ Ian and George J. Tanabe Reader, Jr., *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1998), 206.

women visiting the temple might be in decline; at least, their growing children could continue to provide the temple with a regular income.

Reader and Tanabe use phrases like “process of diversification” and “expansion of its areas of specialization” and “by capitalizing on the social patterns within the contemporary market”⁹⁰ as they describe Ishidô’s activities. This is not surprising as they argue throughout their book that peddling in spiritual and religious matters does not mean that religious institutions have to ignore their need to generate profit, attract more “clients,” and develop and enhance marketing techniques. Religion, they argue, has to continue, and it can only do so if religious institutions remain in operation. As such, religious organizations are “commercial enterprise[s].”⁹¹

They set this religio-commercial activity in the larger framework of popular religion, where people (clients) visit temples and shrines for to receive “practical benefits” (*genze riyaku*) in the form of the performance of rituals or amulets and talismans, all for which they pay. Reader and Tanabe consider *genze riyaku* “a normative and central theme” in Japanese religions.⁹² What are the implications of non-religious activity occurring on religious sites? What does *genze riyaku* tell us about Japanese culture and society?

While Reader and Tanabe do not ask these questions in depth, Nam-Lin Hur explores such implications in his study on Sensô-ji Buddhism in the Tokugawa era titled *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan: Asakusa Sensôji and Edo Society*. As a “cultural center of prayer and play,”⁹³ the recreational activities occurring on and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 207.

⁹¹ Ibid., 226.

⁹² Ibid., 14.

⁹³ Nam-lin Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan: Asakusa Sensôji and Edo Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 27.

around the grounds of Sensō-ji concerned the bakufu of Edo and riled religious leaders. Importantly, commercial enterprises that set up near the temple such as theatres, prostitution, gambling, and retail diluted the ideas of Buddhism as a vehicle for attending to the dying and dead and the temple as a place that protected its parishioners. The bakufu issued social reforms to suppress the social deterioration that they thought these types of activities engendered. Putting aside these moral issues, the value of which are debatable, the problem of social deterioration was real.

Hur highlights the religious and social conditions out of which Edoites came to see the temple as a place of recreation and devotion. For example, labor conditions and a political structure of the city resulted in a disproportionate number of men to women. Hordes of lonely bachelors seeking pleasure created a demand for a thriving entertainment district.⁹⁴ Also, rapid urbanization broke down community networks and isolation descended upon Edo society. With this came a collapse of communal worship, a devotional framework present in agrarian communities, and individual worship practices blossomed in the vacuum.⁹⁵ In this climate *genze riyaku* developed, a category of religious practice Hur sees as appealing to desperate people. He comments: “In the helplessness, Edoites took refuge in prayer and threw themselves on the mercy of deities.”⁹⁶

Hur also discusses the proliferation of pilgrimage sites from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, an institutional response to not only the change in devotional practices of Edoites – more and more people were seeking miracles – but to the fragmented nature of religious worship. His summation of the religious climate

⁹⁴ Ibid., 136.

⁹⁵ I discuss this issue in more detail in Chapter 5 with my exploration of devotion to Hāritī, a popular deity in Edo society venerated by women seeking help during childbirth.

⁹⁶ Hur, *Prayer and Play in Late Tokugawa Japan*, 203.

in Edo: “For Edoites, the Sensōji sakariba [amusement quarters] was truly a fictional utopia, where even the lowest classes could freely search for self-liberation in the commercialized play markets. The commodities available at these markets provided Edo townspeople with nothing less than a cultural ghetto of spiritual communitas.”⁹⁷



Figure 1-11 Hankyu railway display at Nakayama-dera’s Kodomo no Hi festival, May 5, 2007.

Do the families that descend on Nakayama-dera’s *Shichi-go-san* celebration lose themselves in a similar communitas? Japan is a consumer-oriented culture overtaken by department store and railway line conglomerates. While this is not problematic in itself, the fact that consumer culture leaks into all spheres of public life raises questions. Carrette and King and Hur in their respective studies identify alienation as the reason behind corporations taking over religion and people flocking

⁹⁷ Ibid., 225.

to a religious site *cum* amusement park in search of self-liberation. Reader and Tanabe also address these concerns but consider fusions of commerce and religion and individualized devotional practices as necessary developments in Japanese religions: “If the spirituality of *genze riyaku* aims at a better materialism, materialism can be said to breed a persistent spirituality. Though distinguishable by their different color and texture, the threads of both are woven in a common cloth.”⁹⁸ This understanding is naïve and Reader and Tanabe, in their apologetic stance, overlook the issue of alienation.

Secularization, it has been argued, has contributed to alienation, a theme Ama Toshimaro plays with in his translated book *Why Are the Japanese Non-Religious? Japanese Spirituality: Being Non-Religious in a Religious Culture*. Japanese consider themselves non-religious people, yet Ama points out that in 1996 eighty million people visited shrines and temples in the New Year to celebrate *hatsumôde*, the first shrine and temple visit of the year.⁹⁹ Ama concurs, however, that any trace of religion has been eviscerated from religious events like *hatsumôde* and the numerous festivals that occur on a daily basis throughout the nation, and they have simply become cultural events. The prayer and play composite has worked its way from the Tokugawa period into contemporary Japan, creating a vast space for commercial enterprises to insert their presence.

Basically, Nakayama-dera, Obitoke-dera, and Suiten-gu promote religious brand-consciousness, a marketing technique vilified by the anti-globalization movement and one that arouses the suspicions of Carrette and King. Do they engage in sinister activities? I do not think so. Religion and healing are closely intertwined

⁹⁸Reader, *Practically Religious*, 118.

⁹⁹ Toshimaro Ama, *Why Are the Japanese Non-Religious? Japanese Spirituality: Being Non-Religious in a Religious Culture*, trans. Ama Michihiro (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2005), 3.

categories. The organizations do not attempt to replace medical professionals. There is also a high level of “corporate responsibility” in their activities. At Nakayama-dera’s Kodomo no Hi celebration, NGO’s and volunteer groups were also present along with Hankyu railway and Babies R’ Us. While I think it is not out of place to feel slightly manipulated when confronted by the clearly Caucasian drooling poster child of the Babies R’ Us advertisement at Nakayama-dera, the activities occurring on the grounds of these organizations do serve a purpose for honoring pregnancy and childbirth.

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney addresses this issue in her book *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan*.¹⁰⁰ Using the term “health maintenance,” Ohnuki-Tierney points out the growing popularity of religious organizations associated with health issue in recent times, especially amongst the elderly, for whom tours are arranged.¹⁰¹ She notes that where once a stable support system took care of the elderly, now they have to seek ways to ensure the maintenance of their health, and trips such as these to religious sites known for their healing services have become one way. I argue that this is part of the alienation I see occurring in these *genze riyaku* services and religious outings.

Ohnuki-Tierney also notes is the schism between the highly technologically advanced society of Japan and the tendency of its constituents to visit religious sites for such concerns as safe childbirth, protection against calamity, and prosperity. And, like the writers I have mentioned previously, the recreational dimension of excursions to these sites is an important aspect of the experience. She sees these visits as a “microcosm of urban Japan.”¹⁰² Her position of neutrality clearly sheds light on the fusions and transformations occurring in religion in Japan.

¹⁰⁰ Ohnuki-Tierney, *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan*.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 144.

Ohnuki-Tierney also illuminates the diachronic nature of temples specializing in medical issues illustrating how they transform themselves to meet the changing needs of individuals. She attributes this to clever, entrepreneurial monks or priests who add specialties to their temples in response to contemporary needs, social change, and cultural trends, like the deity of smallpox now overseeing contagious diseases. Drawing on Geertz, she argues these transformations must emerge from a “socially established structure of meaning”¹⁰³ to have cultural relevance and selling power in the religious marketplace. Clearly, religious organizations throughout Japan have responded to demographic shifts, as they have done throughout the nation’s history.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 158. Ohnuki-Tierney refers to Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1976) in K.H. Basso and H.A. Selby, eds. *Meaning in Anthropology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 12).

CHAPTER 2

STATE STRATEGIES TO INCREASE JAPAN'S BIRTHRATE: UNCOMFORTABLE BEDFELLOWS AND WALKING THE (PILLOW) TALK

On Tuesday, June 27, 2006, I attended a press conference in Tokyo at The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan given by Inoguchi Kuniko, the Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs. The following announcement was included in the information package distributed to members of the audience:

“This Koizumi “child” has been given a deceptively simple mission by her political pro-genitor – to make babies! Kuniko Inoguchi is officially Minister of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs. But her real job is to re-start the Japanese birth machine, by providing enough incentives for women to want to have children again. She is battling with the work environment, where women must choose between their career and their children; and with the social environment, with too few kindergartens, schools and even now pediatricians to care for the children. She must also fight with her own political majority – LDP leaders generally prefer the status quo to promotion of women in Japanese society.

But Inoguchi is not the traditional housewife type. She will not be nicknamed the Ironing Lady. After studying at Yale, Sophia and Harvard, she became one of the most respected university professors in the country. She then became a member of various policy councils dealing with issues as “feminine” as defense and administrative reform. She has now been given a job crucial for the country. All this while taking the time to educate her two daughters.”¹

This announcement reflects the views of the “Professional Activities Committee” of the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan and does not do justice to Minister Inoguchi's achievements in politics and academia. Up to her election in September 2005 to serve as a Member of House of Representative, she maintained an active

¹ Announcement for a Press Conference for Kuniko Inoguchi issued on June 23, 2006 by the Professional Activities Committee of The Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, Tokyo, Japan.

political profile, acting as President to the Conference on Disarmament in 2003 and as co-chair of the Standing Committee on Mine Clearance, Mine Risk Education and Mine Action Technologies, to name just a few of her appointments. She held a professorship in the Faculty of Law at Sophia University in Tokyo and a visiting fellowship at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs. Her prize-winning publications include *War and Peace* (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Press, 1989) and *An Emerging Post-Hegemonic System: Choices for Japan* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1987).

In her presentation, Minister Inoguchi did not characterize herself as the holder of the keys to Japan's baby-making machine. She did stress, however, the primary responsibilities of her job involved increasing the low birthrate that threatened "the very existence and viability of Japan." Japan's birthrate measured 1.25% in 2005, a statistic translating into a depopulation of 20, 000 people, the first population decline since the Japanese government began tracking demographic trends in 1899. Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, who served office from April 2001 to the fall of 2006, created the Ministry of State for Gender Equality and Social Affairs (*shôshika • danjokyôdô*) in 2005 to deal exclusively with issues involving gender inequality.²

The various policies Inoguchi outlined in her presentation involved placing the responsibilities of childbirth and childrearing on the shoulders of society and developing measures that cultivate better family life, such as fostering work-life

² The minister of state for who replaced Inoguchi is Kamikawa Yoko, whom Abe Shinzô appointed when he took over office of the Prime Minister in September 2006. Kamikawa retained the position when Fukuda Yasuo replaced Abe Yasuo as Prime Minister in September 2007. The name of the ministry has also been changed to Population and Gender Equality Issues. In Japanese, the name of the Ministry includes reference to the nation's declining birth rate. In August 2008, Prime Minister Yasuo appointed Nakayama Kyoko as the Minister. Currently, Aso Tarô is Prime Minister.

balance and reducing economic difficulties faced by expectant parents and parents of school-aged children. The aim is to make family-life more attractive to Japan's young people. Minister Inoguchi couched these proposals in the rhetoric of gender equality, the cornerstone of her Ministry and the absence of which she considers the root cause of Japan's low birthrate.

She drew our attention to the lack of gender equality in Japanese society, illustrating her points with a chart entitled "Basic Data on Gender Equality in Japan."³ Japan ranked 11th out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) a composite index formulated by the United Nations Development Program in 2005 to measure the development of basic human abilities through an assessment of the level of achievement in three areas: "the abilities to live long and healthy [lives]"; "Knowledge"; and, "living standards worthy of humans."⁴ While this figure suggests Japanese people experience a high quality of life compared to the citizens of other nations, another figure, the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), the measure determining whether women participate in "economic and political life, and in decision-making," ranks Japan 43rd out of 80 countries. So, quality of life is good in Japan, provided Japanese women do not possess aspirations to develop careers. Other figures support this assertion. For example, in September 2005, women comprised 9.0% of the 480 members of Japan's House of Representatives.⁵ 11.9% women passed the national examination for medical practitioners the same year.⁶ The high percentage of women who quit their jobs after giving birth to their first baby – 67.4%

³ Chart on "Basic Data on Gender Equality in Japan" presented by Inoguchi Kuniko.

⁴ This index is provided by the United Nations Development Program, "Human Development Report 2005"

⁵ This statistic is attributed to the Ministry of Internal affairs and communications.

⁶ This information is provided by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, "First Longitudinal Survey of Babies in 21st centuries." [sic]

in 2001⁷ – reinforces Minister Inoguchi’s concern that developing a career and raising a family is an either/or proposition for Japanese women.⁸

Minister Inoguchi also planned to change the “mindset” – the minister’s exact term – towards Japanese women of childbearing years. The mindset she has in mind is actually a composite of attitudes, gender expectations, and treatment of women prevalent in all areas of Japanese life including politics, industry, and other public institutions. Masako Itoh, an essayist who compiled a book based on interviews she conducted with housewives at a Tokyo community center titled *I’m Married to your Company: Everyday Voices of Japanese Women* lists numerous examples of how this “mindset” affects the daily lives of housewives. For example, in a section concerning the topic of official ID, it turns out that housewives generally do not carry such documents.⁹ Historically, women’s identities were based on their relationships with husbands or brothers. Itoh’s interviewees maintained this was still the case and explained that in situations where they had to produce ID, they offered their husbands’ health insurance cards or business cards. In contemporary Japan, their identities were based on their husbands’ occupations or their children.

While Minister Inoguchi used diplomatic language appropriate to her position to characterize these attitudes and expectations, it is safe to say they can range from mildly insensitive to blatantly misogynistic. A recent example occurred during the mid-April Gubernatorial campaign in 2006 when Yanagisawa Hakuo, the Minister of

⁷ This information is provided by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, "First Longitudinal Survey of Babies in 21st centuries." [sic]

⁸ A recent on-line article from the BBC international news entitled "Gender Issues Key to Low Birthrate" quotes Inoguchi noting that in 2007, 70% women in small to mid-size firms left their jobs to raise their children. The article was accessed on 28 November 2007 and is available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7096092.stm>

⁹ Masako Itoh, *I'm Married to Your Company!: Everyday Voices of Japanese Women*, ed. Mark Selden, trans. Nobuko Adachi and James Stanlaw, *Asian Voices* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 44-45.

Health, Labor and Welfare in the cabinet of Abe Shinzo, Koizumi's successor, referred to Japanese women as "birth-giving machines."¹⁰ Members of the opposition highlighted this "gaffe" – the English-language media characterized the statement in this manner – and called for the resignation of the Minister, using the incident to attract women voters away from the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) (*Jimintô*), a right of center political party that has maintained control over Japanese parliament since its formation in the mid-1950's. The full text of Yanagisawa's statement suggests he did not make a verbal blunder at all; rather, it appears he seriously reflected on the problem of Japan's low birthrate and suggested how to reverse the trend: "The number of women aged between 15 and 50 is fixed. Because the number of birth-giving machines and devices is fixed, all we can do is ask them to do their best per head ... although it may not be so appropriate to call them machines." Minister Inoguchi clearly had her work cut out for her!

Shortly after Minister Inoguchi's talk, railway officials in Tokyo began handing out "maternity badges" to pregnant women. August 1, 2006 marked the inauguration of this campaign, one of the "official" attempts to change attitudes in the public (and private) transportation system. The cloth badge has a logo of a woman holding a baby, accompanied with the text "I have a baby in my womb" (*onaka ni akachan ga imasu.*)

¹⁰ This comment received much attention by media platforms. Reference available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/asia-pacific/6306685.stm>
Published: 2007/01/27 22:48:39 GMT; accessed on October 6, 2007.
In Japanese, reference to this comment is available at
<http://www.asahi.com/politics/update/0128/002.html>; accessed on 28 November, 2007. and at <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/editorial/20070206TDY04005.htm>;
accessed on October 6, 2007.



Figure 2-1 Pregnancy badge issued by Kyoto City. Women receive the badge when they register their pregnancies at Kyoto’s Public Health Centers.

The purpose behind this campaign, spearheaded by Upper House member Arimura Haruko, a colleague of Minister Inoguchi,¹¹ involved raising awareness to the plight of commuting pregnant women, with the underlying concern that seated commuters have difficulty determining if indeed the woman standing in front of them is pregnant, therefore the badge, either dangling from her bag or affixed to her lapel, will remove any doubt as to the reproductive status of the upright woman. Clearly, I was in Japan at a time when women’s reproductive concerns had reached a high level of attention in public discourse. Reflecting on Minister Inoguchi’s talk and the issues of gender inequality in Japan she discussed, I thought it necessary to dig deeper into the problems of gender inequality in Japan and to uncover how the state involved itself in the reproductive issues of the Japanese.

In the discussion that follows, I first explore the interrelated concerns of ideology, policy, women’s bodies, and reproduction and fertility, from a historical

¹¹ I am indebted to Dr. Axel P. Klein of the German Institute for Japanese Studies who clarified the genesis of the maternity badge campaign in his paper "Politicians as Fathers and Husbands: How Individual Social Values Shape Fertility Policy" presented at the Association of Asian Studies annual meeting held in Atlanta, Georgia on April 3, 2008.

perspective, beginning in the Tokugawa period, to show how all these issues have calcified and coalesced to create the conditions Minister Inoguchi was appointed to confront. While a substantive historical discussion falls outside the scope of this paper, I identify themes that emerge in these periods that contribute to the current predicament of low birthrate faced by Japan. We will also see that Yanagisawa Hakuo's reference to women as "birthing-machines" is grounded in a deep, historically-rooted attitude towards parturient women that spans cultures, eras, religions, and institutions. I then focus on contemporary issues related to pregnancy and childbirth in Japan that I encountered while pregnant. While pregnancy and childbirth are physiological events, they can also be considered cultural expressions of a society's "core value system,"¹² and "spaces" where a society's moral and existential concerns are worked out. In Japan, as I shall demonstrate, pregnancy and childbirth are "spaces" in which the state is involved. One such area that comes to mind is the "maternal child health handbook" (*boshi kenkô techô*), a medical record pregnant women are issued and which they must present at all prenatal appointments. The involvement of the state institution of the public health office (*hokenjo*) in maternity and pregnancy is another area, as is the "maternity badge" campaign. In this section, I am particularly interested in how Minister Inoguchi's "talk of gender equality" is translated into practice. And finally, I conclude this chapter by exploring a rhetoric of reproduction singling out women who chose career over family and women who are unable to have children.

My decision to explore themes of gender, sexuality, and reproduction throughout Japan's history was spurred on after I presented my research on rituals of safe childbirth to the Kyoto's Lion's Club in June of 2007. In a questionnaire I

¹² Robbie E. Davis-Floyd, "The Technocratic Body: American Childbirth as Cultural Expression," *Social Science and Medicine* 38, no. 8 (1994): 3.

distributed to members of the audience, I solicited their thoughts about the declining birthrate faced by Japan. The comment of one respondent, a female principal of a nursery school, caught my attention: “*I think the low fertility rate is a reflection of national policy. Taking into account the steps taken by Japan after the Second World War, it is no surprise at all this has unfolded.*”¹³ In this chapter, I ask: Have attitudes towards the female body and reproduction throughout Japan’s history influenced national policy? What are the cultural patterns out of which discourses of sexuality, reproduction, and gender have fermented? Is state policy in Japan effectively addressing issues of gender inequality? What aspects of the rhetoric of equality are inserted into practices related to pregnancy and childbirth in Japan and how effective are they?

Before I begin this historical survey, I must address the issue of dividing Japan’s historical development into convenient temporal segments such as the Tokugawa period or pre-War Japan. As William LaFleur suggests, a change in political leadership did not necessarily bring about a change in cultural practices.¹⁴ Similarly, rhetoric, ideology, and attitudes do not simply disappear or emerge as one historical period overtakes a preceding epoch. On the other hand, the alternative to abandon any attempt at periodization is unsatisfactory as “ideas do not float freely through history,”¹⁵ and values and mores, out of which rhetoric and ideology are produced, reflect political orders and social realities of the time. In the following section, I adhere to the artificial temporal borders that delineate periods of Japanese history primarily for the sake of convenience, acknowledging that the processes occurring within those borders were not as neat and tidy as the borders themselves.

¹³ English translations of this survey are available in Appendix 1 of this dissertation.

¹⁴ William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Literary Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 10.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Discourses of Sexuality and Self-regulating Fertility in the Tokugawa Period

In the Tokugawa period (1600-1867) we find a “highly schematized and unitized society” where identity was constructed through adherence to value systems set out by institutions.¹⁶ A process of self-definition guided the nation’s political agenda during this period. The country isolated itself from the rest of the world in order to build an indigenous foundation on which to govern; although, Japan maintained diplomatic relations with foreign countries, participated in cultural exchanges, and developed programs in science and technology drawing on Western resources.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the Tokugawa shogunate (*bakufu*) enforced the notion of “Japaneseness” through decidedly violent means. In the effort to stabilize the country, the *bakufu* tolerated no dissent and regulated the behavior, activities, and attitudes of its constituents. During this period of pacification and unification— Tokugawa-era Japan is considered the first “totalitarian state” – a program of social engineering took place where the nation’s inhabitants and its institutions proved their worth by contributing to the nation’s goals.¹⁸

Buddhism was one institution that altered its doctrine, practice, and theology to survive during this period. William LaFleur in his study of memorial rites for aborted fetuses (*mizuko kuyō*) investigates the changing face of Buddhism during the Tokugawa period to understand how contemporary Japanese society links abortion and religion, a topic I will discuss in detail in my chapter on women’s issues and religious devotion.¹⁹ During the Edo period, Japanese Buddhism had to transform itself in order to “save...its institutional skin,” by, first and foremost, parcelling itself

¹⁶ William R. Lindsey, *Fertility and Pleasure: Ritual and Sexual Values in Tokugawa Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), 55.

¹⁷ William R. LaFleur, *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 69.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

into parishes into which all families in the entire nation had to register (*danka seido*).²⁰ Not only did this system root out Christians, the scourge of the Tokugawa regime, it increased the number of Buddhist temples throughout the country. Buddhist priests became more like civil servants as their parish tasks included maintaining residency records and conducting censuses.

Priests, who for the most part experienced a higher quality of life due to their increased presence in state affairs, frequented the pleasure quarters set up by the Tokugawa regime, developing often long-term, intimate relationships with prostitutes and courtesans.²¹ Conflicted attitudes towards sexuality and reproduction found their root in this curious social admixture, as the priests came from a tradition of celibacy and no doubt encouraged their paramours to terminate the pregnancies that resulted from their relations. Buddhism decries the taking of life and doctrinally does not support abortion.

William R. Lindsey picks up the theme of conflicted attitudes towards sexuality and reproduction in his study of women's issues and sexuality in the Tokugawa period entitled *Fertility and Pleasure: Ritual and Sexual Values in Tokugawa Japan*. Whereas LaFleur focuses solely on the development of Edo Buddhism with its "playboy monks" and expansion of activities into funerary Buddhism, Lindsey takes the exploration one step further by wading into the discourse of sexuality in feudal Japan as it affected the lives of women of the urban centers of Osaka, Kyoto, and Tokyo who found themselves cast into the intensely opposing roles of either courtesan or housewife. His concern is how, in this "highly schematized and unitized society" women "ma[d]e meaningful space"²² for themselves in the institutions to which they were sent or sold. Lindsey focuses on the rituals and

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 73.

²² Lindsey, *Fertility and Pleasure*, 16.

symbols associated with the life cycle stages of “marriage, first meeting, pregnancy, betrothal, and retirement,”²³ as women either married into virilocal households or entered into the bordellos of the pleasure quarters institutionalized by the *bakufu*.

Pregnancy – something profligate priests could ignore –challenged the tidiness of the models of fertility and pleasure. While the fertility model encouraged a bride’s sexuality, infanticide and abortion occurred in Tokugawa society; as for the courtesan, the values of the pleasure model encouraged her to be bride to many, wife of none, but pregnancy was common in the pleasure quarters. Lindsey tells us that retreats for courtesans to give birth and raise their children existed, but the majority did not have that option.²⁴ The feudal government considered the practices of infanticide (*mabiki*) and abortion as threatening to the stability of the nation, as these practices cut into the land-tax-paying population; nonetheless, these practices continued.

Mabiki is translated as “thinning of rice seedlings” and its practice during the Tokugawa period is highly contentious due to the numerous issues at stake concerning the topic. To what extent did Japanese engage in infanticidal practices? Can this question ever be definitively answered? How does this legacy – real or manufactured – haunt the Japanese collective conscious and what are the implications of that from the perspective of ritual?

²³ *Ibid.*, 157.

²⁴ Lindsey includes in his work a reproduction of Utagawa Kunisada's illustration depicting a bound and gagged woman lying on her back. Her kimono is spread open to reveal naked breasts and pregnant belly - by its swollenness, she appears to be in the final stages of a pregnancy - and exposed nether regions. At her side, a bordello wife holds one of her legs, in the wife's other hand, a pen-like sharp instrument is poised. Standing over the prostate woman, a bordello manager, bearing a much longer, sharp-pointed implement. "Insertional instruments ranged from chopsticks to barley stalks. A common element in most compounds was mercury, and the remaining elements were made up mainly of plant materials such as roots, leaves, and seeds." Further on he explains what will happen: "A technician dips a penetrating instrument into the concoction and then inserts it into the woman's uterus, piercing and killing the fetus to induce bodily breakdown." Please see *Fertility and Pleasure*, 99-100.

The Tokugawa period saw its population growth stabilize in the first quarter of the eighteenth century and remain stable for the next one hundred and twenty-five years.²⁵ Demographic studies of agricultural communities in the late Tokugawa period reveal that a relatively slow population growth occurred during this time, especially in contrast to China, the population of which doubled over the same time frame, and other European nations at the same stage of economic development. This stabilization of population was largely achieved by various forms of “family strategy,”²⁶ including adoption, restrictions upon who could marry and marriageable age (especially for women), abortion, and infanticide.²⁷ Nevertheless, the reasons for employing “family strategies” to control family size were not related to famine and starvation and the practice of *mabiki* was not as widespread as is commonly thought.

Studies indicate that Japanese limited family size so they could enjoy a higher standard of living, contradicting research that suggests peasants reduced their families because of their inability to feed another mouth during periods of famine, starvation, and harsh living conditions.²⁸ Large families did not necessarily mean farming households produced more wealth; rather, limiting family size yielded a favorable economic outcome.²⁹ The reasons families regulated their growth concerned not only their households’ financial situations and goals, but also the broader economic

²⁵ LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, 90-91.

²⁶ Dana and Thomas C. Smith Morris, "Fertility and Mortality in an Outcaste Village in Japan, 1750-1869," in *Family and Population in East Asian History*, ed. Susan B. Hanley and Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 246.

²⁷ Susan B. Hanley, "Family and Fertility in Four Tokugawa Villages," in *Family and Population in East Asian History*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf and Susan B. Hanley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), 226-27. Shinmura Taku cites studies indicating in agricultural communities in the early modern period males generally married between the ages of 25 years and 28 years, and women between 18 years and 24 years. Please see *Shussan to seishokukan no rekishi*, 202. .

²⁸ Laurel L Cornell, "Infanticide in Early Modern Japan? Demography, Culture, and Population Growth," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55, no. 1 (1996).

²⁹ Morris, "Fertility and Mortality in an Outcaste Village in Japan, 1750-1869," 246.

conditions experienced in the community.³⁰ Ultimately this reflected an awareness of the need to encourage economic development on the part of the individual as well as recognition of Japan's reliance on foreign trade due to its limited natural resources.³¹ Incidentally, in wealthy urban centers, families also took measures to limit their expansion. However, the notion that self-regulating reproduction influenced demographic shifts is not necessarily accurate as Laura Cornell demonstrates in her study *Infanticide in Early Modern Japan: Demography, Culture, and Population Growth*.

Cornell suggests that infanticide was not the primary method of controlling fertility; rather, practices such as intense breastfeeding and *dekasegi*, a form of internal migration where husband and wife worked in separate locations, contributed to the slow population growth.³² These "stopping and spacing" behaviors, though, cannot be considered as regulatory; rather, they reflect cultural practices and migratory pattern shifts.³³ Furthermore, from Japan's early modern period up until the early Shōwa period (1926-1989) mortality rates of children under one year of age were high, as they are in all pre-industrial societies, and most households lost one child in three or one child in four.³⁴ More children were lost to illness than to homicide.

To give some perspective, a study on infant mortality rate in England in the eighteenth century based on parish registers, Bills of Mortality, and Quaker records indicate the mortality rate of infants in London peaked at 450 deaths for 1,000 live

³⁰ Hanley, "Family and Fertility in Four Tokugawa Villages," 227.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

³² Cornell, "Infanticide in Early Modern Japan? Demography, Culture, and Population Growth."

³³ *Ibid.*: 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 30.

births in the 1740's.³⁵ Epidemic due to crowding and immigration is the main reason for the high rate. The rates were lower outside the metropolis, in one region 90 babies out of 1,000 died. The metropolitan rates fell to 250 per 1,000 live births by the 1770's and by the end of the century dropped further to 200 per 1,000.

Cornell categorizes infanticide under "infant homicide" to facilitate the analytical thrust of her argument, but her reframing of the practice also brings into focus the idea that *mabiki* concerned more issues of mortality than it did fertility.³⁶ She turns to records of live births from the village of Yokouchi collected between 1671 and 1871 and performs an analysis extrapolating data from other studies to develop a ratio that reflects the number of children who died from other causes and the number who died from infant homicide. The figure her number crunching produces is "135 homicides occurred over a period of 200 years."³⁷ This figure – and it is safe to say it reflects the picture throughout the nation – signals that infant homicide was not as widespread as earlier studies indicate.

Cornell concludes that reproductive activities in the later Tokugawa period were not necessarily based on family planning strategies to deal with long-term concerns; rather, "stopping and spacing" activities reflected, for example, a family's decision to increase its income in the short term as a work opportunity presented itself. LaFleur, however, sees that this population stagnation as the result of Japanese people making family-planning decisions "within the "bedroom.""³⁸ Furthermore, relying on studies published in the 1970's and 1980's, LaFleur asserts Japanese chose abortion and infanticide as the primary methods of birth control, conceding that those bedroom

³⁵ Alysa Levene, "The Estimation of Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-99," *Population Studies* 59, no. 1: 87.

³⁶ Cornell, "Infanticide in Early Modern Japan? Demography, Culture, and Population Growth," 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, 92.

decisions really occurred some months after bedroom encounters.³⁹ Cornell's article – published in 1996 – disputes the previous claims of demographers and historians of the Edo period: she simply could not buy into the arguments that infanticide and sophisticated family-planning decisions contributed to the period's population stagnation.



Figure 2-2 Kokeshi figurines

This corrective is no doubt startling: for the longest time *mabiki* has been considered a defining feature of Japan's early modern period. It has been suggested that the *kokeshi*, the ubiquitous painted wooden cylinder resembling a doll or baby sold in souvenir shops throughout the country, is actually a reconstituted folk craft that served as a ritual reminder of the babies families culled to reduce family size in times of famine.⁴⁰ It is also the impetus for the highly contentious ritual *mizuko kuyô*, a memorial service for aborted fetuses that I discuss in detail in the fifth chapter of

³⁹ Ibid., 94. The studies upon which LaFleur bases his conclusions are Eng and Smith, "Peasant Families"; Hanley and Yamamura, *Economic and Demographic Change*; and Thomas C. Smith, *Nakahara: Family Farming and Population in Japanese Village, 1717-1820* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977); and, from Takahashi Bonsen, *Nohon jinkô-shi no kenkyû*.

⁴⁰ Law, *Puppets of Nostalgia: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of the Japanese Awaji Ningyô Tradition*, 36-37. Jane Marie Law also holds the position that *mabiki* was widespread during the Tokugawa period.

this dissertation. A rich ritual universe has been created out of this historic moment, but it is highly unlikely that historiography will validate it.⁴¹

Another remarkable finding from demographic studies on population during the Tokugawa period reveals that practice and policy did not necessarily go hand in hand. The state, at many levels, was intensely involved in regulating sexuality and reproduction. For example, the Nativist movement, a neo-Shintô group of scholars also referred to as the School of National Learning (Kokugaku), attempted to create a system of values congruent with “Japaneseness,” echoing the concerns of the state. Simply, the overall project of the movement involved removing traces of foreign elements from religion and culture, focussing on Japan’s early myths and poetry that they considered the basis of Japan’s native culture. A rhetoric of reproduction disseminated by members of Kokugaku cast reproduction as a national duty. H.D. Harootunian demonstrates how Nativist scholars, particularly Miyahiro Sadao, fused the reproductive activities of peasants (including their labor in rice fields) with the generative act of Izanami and Izanagi creating the nation of Japan in the *Kojiki*. Sadao attempted to elevate reproduction as a religious act “that unified all life.”⁴² LaFleur stresses that Kokugaku scholars emphasized “the importance of sexuality as linked to *quantitative production and reproduction*.”⁴³ We see that Kokugaku scholarship did not seem to influence reproductive activities of the Japanese and to what extent the

⁴¹ Meredith Small, invoking the same argument of LaFleur and Law, refers to regulations forbidding co-sleeping in all European countries between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries because of concerns that parents and caregivers were deliberately suffocating babies during the night to reduce family size. Please see *Our Babies, Ourselves: How Biology and Culture Shape the Way We Parent* (New York: Anchor, 1998), 122).

⁴² H.D. Harootunian, *Things Seen and Unseen: Discourse and Ideology in Tokugawa Nativism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 298.

⁴³ LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, 88. Author’s italics.

movement influenced policy is unclear; however, women were caught in the crosshairs.

This period was, without a doubt, a dark age for women. Female inheritance had declined throughout Kamakura period (1185-1333).⁴⁴ Women exiting marriages could take their dowries but had to leave behind their children; and, pregnant women had little choice in deciding if their pregnancies would be terminated or their babies murdered. A combination of state policy and values and morals that found their basis in the Kokugaku movement charted the life trajectories of women largely in urban centers in this period by not only controlling their sexuality and reproduction but by disseminating a rhetoric of sexuality and reproduction.

For Sawayama Mikako in her book *Sei to Seishoku no Kinsei*, the degree to which infanticide occurred in the Tokugawa period is not important.⁴⁵ The issue at stake concerns how government exerted control over the populace vis-à-vis abortion and infanticide. In treating abortion and *mabiki* as a discursive space – the practices really speak to women’s decisions to not give birth – Sawayama Mikako demonstrates how the *bakufu* exercised its power and authority in the reproductive lives of the populace.

Drawing on court records of Tsuyama fiefdom declaring punishments for abortion and *mabiki*, Sawayama notes the changes in mindset that occurred as authorities weighed in on instances of abortion, stillbirth, and *mabiki*. Notably,

⁴⁴ Glassman, "The Religious Construction of Motherhood in Medieval Japan", 55.

⁴⁵ Mikako Sawayama, *Sei to seishoku no kinsei* (Tokyo: Keishoshobo, 2005), 83-119. There was indeed a customary way of abandoning infants practiced throughout the archipelago. The categories of “*sutego*” and “*kariya*,” respectively translated to “foundling” and “adoptive or temporarily assumed parents,” and the designated places where parents abandoned children suggest regions developed methods to handle cases of parental negligence and had in place a system of sanctuary. For further information on this topic please see Ôtô Yuki, *Ko yarai* (Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsu, 1968), 193-205.

authorities required women to register their pregnancies as soon as they discovered they had conceived. Failure to do so resulted in admonitions to headmen of village collectives. This gave authorities not only more control to track pregnancies and births, but the power to reframe the practices. Where once *mabiki* was considered a responsibility of society, it became the responsibility of the family, particularly the husband and wife. The burden of criminality shifted from the head of the family to the wife. *Mabiki* performed by widows and unmarried women were treated harshly under the eyes of the law. Ultimately, the *bakufu* used its system of punishment to enforce the moral position that women's main responsibility lay in giving birth.

Demographic Shifts, Declining Death Rates, and the Medicalization of Childbirth in the Meiji Period

The development of a modern nation state in the Meiji Period (1868-1912) was achieved through the enforcement of ideologies and institutions and enactments of laws, the most important being the Meiji Constitution promulgated in 1899. The significant contribution to the study of fertility rates and demographics occurs with the Population Regulation Act (*kosekihô*), enacted in 1871 and put into operation the following year. The government required every household to register all "vital events," including birth, marriage, and divorce. The lag between event and registration affected an accurate gathering of nation-wide statistics, but these issues were resolved by around 1920.⁴⁶ In spite of discrepancies between reported and actual rates, a rise in population growth occurred in the Meiji period. Morita Yuzo attributes this growth to

⁴⁶ Carl Mosk, "Nuptiality in Meiji Japan," *Journal of Social History* 13, no. 3 (1980): 477.

a decrease in the nation's mortality rate as opposed to an increase in the number of births due to economic development, a commonly held theory.⁴⁷

During this period, infant deaths were reported and in addition to economic growth, advances in medicine and technology resulted in more live births and healthier babies. But, the medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth that occurred during in Meiji brought about the erosion of the birthing woman's power, argues Yoshimura Noriko. In particular, as Western medicine practices supplanted Japan's medical system, a process propelled along with the enactment of sets of laws, women became alienated from the birth process: this cultural alienation opened up a space for the state to involve itself deeper and deeper into the reproductive lives of women.

A law enforced in 1874 (Meiji 7) imposed licensing restrictions on doctors, requiring them to be trained under systems of western medicine. For midwives, this same law enforced a minimum age requirement of forty years old.⁴⁸ The rationale behind this held that women who had experienced childbirth were more capable of assisting women in labor. In 1899, the *Regulations for Midwives (Sanba Kisoku)* lowered the minimum age limit to twenty years of age. Yoshimura asserts that the midwife's relationship to the birthing woman was altered when the experience of childbirth was no longer a prerequisite of the profession.

In the agricultural communities of Ehime Prefecture Yoshimura investigated, giving birth involved collective, shared experience spread across a network of women; as a result of modern systems of medicine, knowledge and authority was transferred to

⁴⁷ Yuzo Morita, "Estimated Birth and Death Rates in the Early Meiji Period of Japan," *Population Studies* 17, no. 1 (1963).

⁴⁸ Noriko Yoshimura, "Ôtô Yuki San ni tsuetaekatta shussan shûzoku no shiza: kômi, kosodate shûzoku ni miru tashikana ningenkan to chiiki sodatte," in *Kômi, kosodate, koyarai: Ôtô Yuki suitôgô*, ed. Josei minzokugaku kenkyûkai (Tokyo: Josei minzokugaku kenkyûkai, 2003), 49, Noriko Yoshimura, ed., *Shussan zengo no kankyô* (Kyoto: Showado, 1999), 98.

the professionalized midwife.⁴⁹ Yoshimura reinforces her argument with illustrations of traditional birthing positions depicting women squatting, supported by their husbands or other women.⁵⁰ The manual used to train midwives emphasized the supine position as the proper position for giving birth and considered any other position dangerous.⁵¹ This change in posture reflects the change in power of the pregnant woman, as she was no longer the subject of the process; her midwife or obstetrician usurped her centrality to the birth experience. She was reduced to passivity, much like the ritual process occurring in temples and shrines for safe childbirth that I discuss in my chapter on the changing material culture of the *hara-obi*, where women receive prayers at major Buddhist temples and Shintô shrines from persons holding much spiritual authority.⁵²

⁴⁹ Noriko Yoshimura, *Osan to deau* (Tokyo: Keisô shobô, 1997; reprint, Eighth printing), 4-10. It should be noted that Yoshimura's interest in childbirth in Japan was inspired by her traumatic experience of the birth of her first child (*shosan/hatsuzan*) in 1969 (Shôwa 44). After three nights of mild contractions, labor stopped progressing, and she required medical intervention. This experience made her realize how alienated she was from the birth process because of her blind faith of modern science and the skills of medical practitioners. For her subsequent pregnancies, she chose to give birth in maternity centers run by midwives and her experiences there were much better. She went on to research traditional methods of childbirth drawing on her experience as someone who has given birth. She became an assistant professor of anthropology at Kure Women's Junior College in Hiroshima. Yoshimura authored two highly popular books, *Osan to deau* and *Kodomo wo umu* (Kyoto: Iwanami Shoten, 1992), numerous scholarly essays and is editor of *Shussan zengo no kankyô* (Kyoto: Showado, 1999).

⁵⁰ Lee Jen-der contends that women throughout traditional societies give birth in the vertical position. Please see "Gender and Medicine in Tang China." *Asia Major* 16, no. 2, 1-32 (2003), 5fn 10.

⁵¹ Yoshimura, ed., *Shussan zengo no kankyô*, 98.

⁵² Yoshimura writes extensively about the medicalization and institutionalization of childbirth and how the pregnant body has been perceived throughout Japanese history, topics I will deal with in future writings. Please see, Yoshimura Noriko, *Shussan zengo no kankyô* (Kyoto: Sowado, 1999), pp. 81-98.

Rage Against the Medical Model of the Birth Machine

Let me return to the work of Barbara Duden I discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. Duden identifies a similar process of alienation in the birthing room occurring in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. The subjects of Barbara Duden's study perceived their reproductive experiences in the following ways: they bore children; they were "fruitful;"⁵³ they created life; other women assisted them. The medicalization of pregnancy that would occur in the following 100 years would have them seeing their wombs as "part of a reproductive apparatus," and medical technology solely responsible for the "protection" of their babies, creatures who would be delivered by professionals.⁵⁴ This shift in perception of the experience of pregnancy signals a "cultural disembodiment" to women's role in childbirth that went hand in hand with economic expansion due to the need for things that drove economic growth in Europe. "Production" the activity that drove economic and political activities, became fused with "reproduction," and the 19th century birthing body became hinged to that cultural construction.

This cultural construction of birthing body as producer and reproducer radiated to Japan as the nation in the Meiji period followed patterns of politics, medicine, and economics based on German models. In particular, the curriculum of obstetrics and gynecology taught at Tokyo's Imperial University drew primarily from medical research and methodologies translated from German.⁵⁵ Certainly attitudes towards the birthing body were transmitted through the translations.

⁵³ Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin*, 28.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ryūichi Narita, "Mobilized from Within: Women and Hygiene in Modern Japan," in *Women and Class in Japanese History*, ed. Hitomi Tonomura, Anne Walthall, and Wakita Haruko, *Michigan Monograph Series in Japanese Studies* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1999), 259.

Narita Ryûichi, in his article “Women and Hygiene in Modern Japan,” considers the *Sanka Fujin Kagakukai* (Association of Japanese Obstetrics and Gynecology), a body formed in the 1890s, the beginning of Japanese obstetrics and gynecology. With the formation of the discipline, the woman’s body was dealt with in two manners: first, it was set against the male body, deemed by the organization as normal or “universal”; and, it became defined by its reproductive organs.⁵⁶ Notions of normalcy – from the body, to menstruation, to parturition – were set in motion by the medicalization of childbirth in the Meiji period. Even more insidious, however, the idea of the Japanese woman as a “machine for childbirth” began here. Furthermore, just as the Japanese woman found herself to be merely the product of her uterus and ovaries, she also found that her true vocation lay inside the four walls of the household, at least in discourse. In the following section, I illustrate how the lived reality of Japanese women was far different from the rhetoric of motherhood set up in the Meiji period.

Constructing Motherhood and Childhood in the Taishô Period

The Taishô period (1912-1926) saw rapid population expansion that kept pace with the nationalistic movement overtaking the nation in the period building up to World War II. For the Japanese woman, she became construed as a figure of the household, the parameters of her existence defined by her nurturing and nursing capabilities. In Narita Ryûichi’s exploration of discourses of hygiene in modern Japan, spurred on by national attention to chronic contagious diseases like tuberculosis and trachoma that replaced acute contagious diseases like cholera, and the lives of women implicated by this discourse, he demonstrates how the home became the stage where discourses of women’s bodies and sexuality were played out.⁵⁷ Attitudes towards

⁵⁶ Ibid., 260.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 266.

hygiene focused on the home, where women were mobilized to care for the health of husbands and children. Media platforms such as *Katei eisei kun* (Home Hygiene Instructions), *Housewife's Companion*, *Woman's World*, and *Kaji kyôkasho* (Domestic Science Textbook) delineated women's primary function, that of keeping her home healthy and sanitary and nursing her family back from illness.

One would think that such a pervasive discourse of motherhood, anchored in almost a hysterical fear of disease and contagion, would define women's life trajectories; however, it was also during this period that Japan's current public daycare system found its roots, suggesting that women held lives outside the home.

Kathleen Uno's study on the development of institutionalized daycare in the first three decades of the twentieth century focuses on modern constructions of motherhood and childhood in the Taishô period. The study reveals the idealized portrayal of devoted mother whose field of activities is restricted to the household was limited to discourse. Curious how the figure of the "Education Mama" (*kyôiku mama*) of the 1990's— a stereotyped image of Japanese womanhood characterized as a devoted mother the existence of whom is based on her children's achievements in school – came into existence, Uno focuses on pre-War society and the first daycare center established in the twentieth century. Tokyo's Futaba Yôchien (renamed later to Futaba Hoikuen (Futaba Daycare Center) was a private facility run by two Christian teachers who wanted to help impoverished families by giving them access to quality daycare and affordable education. Uno also investigated the Kobe Wartime Service Memorial Daycare Association, which at its inception, provided daycare for impoverished widows who had lost their husbands in the Russo Japanese War (1904-1905). After the war, the catchment group widened to include children of laborers.

The Taishô period saw an increased number of Japanese, both male and female, employed outside the home and the continued rise of the nuclear family as

sons and daughters sought employment in urban centers, a result of the nation's efforts to recover from the economic crisis brought on by the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).⁵⁸ Under the auspices of the Home Ministry, daycare centers spread throughout the nation. Uno highlights the 1918 Rice Riots, when the Home Ministry focused intense relief efforts for adults, and discovers that many programs for children received finances from the same Ministry. Funds (*shôreikin*) were directed towards orphanages (35.4%), clinics (15.2%), daycare centers (12.9%), schools for destitute children (7.8%), reformatories (4.6%) and projects towards child welfare issues received the majority of funding (60.7%) of the total projects receiving funds.⁵⁹ In this period, as in the late nineteenth century, her research reveals numerous sources provided childcare and mothers were not expected to be sole caretakers of their children, challenging the rhetoric of “good wife, wise mother” (*ryôsei kenbo*) that began circulating in the late nineteenth century and continued into the Taishô period.

Uno contends that part of Japan's development as a modern nation involved the “nation-state's challenge to important aspects of reproduction in private households.”⁶⁰ Primarily, the state involved itself in the affairs of raising children, whom it saw as a rich resource for labor and a repository for the nation's values that would be activated when children achieved adulthood. Uno also demonstrates that although the state actively attempted to circumscribe women's lives through discourses of motherhood and domesticity, economic conditions forced women to earn incomes working outside the home.

⁵⁸ Kathleen S. Uno, *Passages to Modernity: Motherhood, Childhood, and Social Reform in Early Twentieth Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 17.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

The state gained more access into homes and households as we enter the post-War period, policy the main intermediary between political agenda and the Japanese body politic.

Post-War Japan: Family Planning to Make a “Happy Home”

Takeda Hiroko, in her work *The Political Economy of Reproduction in Japan: Between Nation-State and Everyday Life* expands reproduction to include three types: socio-political, biological, and economic, to show how the government has used policy to integrate women and their reproductive capacities into the political economy. One such policy supported the activities of the New Life Movement, a joint project of corporations and various Ministries to enhance “nation-wide life-improvement” during the 1950’s.⁶¹ The coordinators of this social program sought to build a “new Japan” – defined as “*a democratic welfare state with an autonomous economy*”⁶² – while simultaneously addressing the “population problems” hindering post-war recovery efforts. The mandate of the Movement focused on strengthening the family in order to build a strong nation-state. In the initial stages, the Movement’s primary concern involved family planning, as it was thought that reducing family size would enable housewives to devote more time and energy to their smaller households. Ultimately, the proponents of the Movement believed “ ‘children of good quality’ brought about by ‘high quality’ genetic reproduction, good childcare and sensible household management” constituted “a happy home.”⁶³

The Movement could be considered a response to policies encouraging people to increase the population during wartime, but policy makers took care to separate their agenda and methods from those employed during the war years; furthermore,

⁶¹ Hiroko Takeda, *The Political Economy of Reproduction in Japan: Between Nation-State and Everyday Life* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 132.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 132, author’s italics.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 134.

they hinged the notion of a happy home onto economic prosperity at the levels of the household, corporation, and country, shifting the focus away from the nation's bedroom and onto its wallets.⁶⁴ At least, it appeared this way on paper – the means by which it achieved its goals involved climbing into bed with Japanese citizens. Takeda draws on data from the activities of the New Life Movement at a steel company, Nihon Kôkan, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 1954 and 1955.

concerns about unwanted pregnancies and too many children. The actions that resulted from this survey included a newsletter distributed to housewives and training sessions about contraceptive use conducted by midwives. And while the invasive techniques are questionable, their efficacy is undeniable: a decrease in the number of abortions was recorded two years after the commencement of these activities.⁶⁵ This is just one example of government influencing attitudes towards reproduction noted by the Daycare Principal whose observations I mentioned previously in this chapter. With activities such as these and the division of labor imposed in the household by the post-War administration, it is hardly surprising that women in Japan today who aspire to maintain careers and raise families face insurmountable obstacles.

In addition to the tactics employed and the coordination of government and industry in influencing Japanese citizen's reproductive activities, issues that lie at the heart of this study, we see how the Movement deploys a Western notion of family, where the father is absented by work duties and a mother, "the housewife," has sole responsibility raising children.

The happy home of the post-War period, while a place for family (that is to say, a busy mother nurturing 'high quality' offspring and an absent father), was no longer a

⁶⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 145-46.

place for reproducing family. During this period, we witness the transition from home birth to hospital birth, which can be considered another step towards the cultural alienation of women and birth and leaving a wider gap through which the government could gain more access into the reproductive lives of women.

A survey produced by the company and delivered to 800 families living in the company's residences elicited responses about birth control practices and housewives' concerns about unwanted pregnancies and too many children. The actions that resulted from this survey included a newsletter distributed to housewives and training sessions about contraceptive use conducted by midwives. And while the invasive techniques are questionable, their efficacy is undeniable: a decrease in the number of abortions was recorded two years after the commencement of these activities.⁶⁶ This is just one example of government influencing attitudes towards reproduction noted by the Daycare Principal whose observations I mentioned previously in this chapter. With activities such as these and the division of labor imposed in the household by the post-War administration, it is hardly surprising that women in Japan today who aspire to maintain careers and raise families face insurmountable obstacles.

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⁶⁶ Ibid., 145-46.

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Figure 2-3 A young Japanese housewife cooks using a new gas range in the kitchen of her Tokyo home. December 27, 1951 © Bettmann/CORBIS

From Homebirth to Hospital

In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I present an overview of traditional places of parturition in Japan. Very briefly, prior to the war, women gave birth in places like dark, poorly ventilated closets; rooms for sleeping; parturition huts, and other spaces inside the home. I visited Ôbara shrine's parturition hut around six weeks after giving birth in a fancy, private obstetrical clinic in downtown Kyoto supported by three midwives, my husband, a nurse, and a nationally renowned obstetrician – a complication arose in the last days of my pregnancy requiring a large team of medical professionals. On that blustery, cold February day, as I peered into the dark, musty hut, I imagined giving birth to our daughter on a futon spread over the damp, earthen floor. In that small, cramped space perhaps only one person could assist the birthing mother. The priest of the shrine and a colleague who introduced me to the site attempted to assure me that the thatched walls provided ample protection from the bitter wind slicing through the weak afternoon sun. On that day, I discovered a renewed respect for progress, technology, and hospital beds.

With technology, however, a price must be paid. I demonstrate throughout this dissertation how advancements in medicine, while necessary in saving lives of women and babies, have, at times, produced alienation. Medical advancement in the field of obstetrics in Japan rapidly brought about a sea change in the way birth took place. This marked transformation can be seen in some ways as contributing to the social crisis Japan now finds itself and the unfavourable conditions Japanese women face in society.

Yoshimura Noriko traces the institutionalization of childbirth in Japan to the post-War reconstruction period – the time of the great “economic miracle” (*kôdoseichô*) – commencing in 1945, when the U.S. occupying forces instituted the

nation's medical system.⁶⁷ Immediately following that, a dramatic shift took place from birth at home with the assistance of a midwife, to birth at a medical clinic or hospital facilitated by an obstetrician. Data from the Ministry of Health and Welfare shows that in 1950, 95.4% of births took place at home, assisted by midwives; by 1965 the number dropped to 16%.⁶⁸ By 1991, only 0.01% of births took place at home.

Given the trends I have pointed out in the previous sections of this chapter, such as the tendency among peasants to self-regulate fertility in order to increase their standard of living; ideologies of reproduction, sexuality, and womanhood that determined the life trajectories of women; the close relationship of industry and government to cultivate ideologies and influence behaviors, this institutionalization of childbirth was an important cog in the machinery that brought about the current crisis Japan now finds itself in the following two ways: 1) it encouraged families to produce fewer children, and 2) it cultivated medical attitudes towards women in their childbearing years that would spread across institutions. Ultimately, these medical attitudes contributed to the discourses of fertility and reproduction that would characterize women as "birthing machines," whose sole purpose involved reproducing and raising children.

To begin, Yoshimura argues that along with the trend towards the institutionalization of childbirth, the nation's economic situation advanced, bringing about the breakdown of farming families, as second and third sons moved to urban centers as laborers. This, she says, is the genesis of the nuclear family;⁶⁹ although, we have seen that Kathleen Uno attributes the beginning of the nuclear family to the

⁶⁷ Yoshimura, ed., *Shussan zengo no kankyô*, 82.

⁶⁸ Deborah Cordeira Fiedler, "Authoritative Knowledge and Birth Territories in Contemporary Japan," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1996): 197.

⁶⁹ Yoshimura, ed., *Shussan zengo no kankyô*, 83.

economic conditions brought about by the Russo-Japanese War at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yoshimura then shows that the problem of the lack of farm wives, combined with the increased wealth of farming households, brought about a change in attitudes towards how pregnancy and childbirth was managed. New brides to farming households could be enticed with luxurious medical treatment at well-appointed maternity clinics staffed by highly qualified midwives and obstetricians. This was the era that the notion of “expensive birth” took hold. For the households who could choose such maternity services for their young brides, the symbol of a high-maintenance young bride became a new social form. This of course led to smaller families as fewer pregnancies and childbirths could be financed: the “expensive birth” became a type of prophylactic.

To fully appreciate the implication of such a development, one only has to imagine giving birth and raising children in agricultural communities prior to the Second World War. This is another topic I deal with in my chapter on the customs of parturition in Japan. I introduce the work of Robert J. Smith and Ella Lury Wiswell and their ethnography of women’s life in an agricultural village immediate before the War. They describe the hard work performed by women in the village of Suye, who chopped wood and carried heavy loads of lumber from the surrounding mountains and worked in the fields, even into the late stages of pregnancy and while nursing.⁷⁰ I also discuss the case of the parturition hut of Ôbara shrine in a community just outside the city of Kyoto. Women gave birth in this hut, oftentimes alone, up until the beginning of Taishô and the tradition of spending a night with a newborn baby continued up until the World War II. Scholars and members of the community assert that Ôbara’s custom of parturition were not in place to separate women from society because of

⁷⁰ Robert John and Ella Lury Wiswell Smith, *The Women of Suye Mura* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 293.

taboos of impurity and blood pollution due to childbirth; rather, the hut was a tranquil, quiet place where women could recuperate from the trauma of childbirth and bond with their babies. I wonder how difficult it was to convince women to forego traditional birth and deliver their babies in the maternity clinic that was established in the district after the War!

Second, Yoshimura argues that this dramatic movement from home to institution planted the image into the Japanese mind that birth was a phenomena requiring medical treatment, doing nothing more than bolstering the importance of medical professionals. Yoshimura stresses: “While the mother’s body is recognized as playing a major part in childbirth, it is generally considered that a well-equipped medical facility and a skilful medical team are the most important elements in childbirth.”⁷¹ It is here that the wheels of rhetoric of reproduction are set in motion pertaining to the treatment of birthing women by the medical establishment called the “technocratic model of birth,” a model developed by Robbie E. Davis-Floyd Birthing Machines and the “Technocratic Model of Birth”

Robbie Davis-Floyd, in an article in 1986, developed the “technocratic model of birth,” to explain how American society’s “mythology of the technocracy” is played out through the event of childbirth.⁷² She developed the idea further a few years later to illustrate how childbirth, as seen from the lens of ritual, presents an opportune moment to activate this mythology, as the product of childbirth, the neonate, represents the future of society, and its values and aspirations. This model

⁷¹ Yoshimura, ed., *Shussan zengo no kankyô*, 7.

⁷² Robbie E. Davis-Floyd, "The Technological Model of Birth," *The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 398 (1987).

“functions as a powerful agent of social control, shaping and channelling individual values, beliefs, and behaviors.”⁷³

Davis-Floyd invokes Peter C. Reynold’s structuralist approach, where he first recasts “technological progress” as a “folk term” and then demonstrates how progress is achieved through ritual processes that replace natural bodies, characterized as “primitive,” “feminine,” “polluted,” and “terrestrial,” with “man-made” bodies, defined as civilized, “masculine,” pure, and “celestial.” A postmodern paradox, technocratic societies prey on naturally occurring events, dismantle them, and then replace them with technological models, or, “cultural process[es].” The example of a salmon hatchery illustrates this process: upstream swimming salmon are removed from a river, their spawn hatched in trays, and then released at the mouth of the river. A more sinister application of this model is evoked with the example of Dupont, a major supplier of weapons and ammunition in the Viet Nam war, marketing its prosthetic legs through advertisements featuring Viet Nam veterans wearing the devices. Ultimately, science and technology are held up as superior to the natural and all for the purpose of profit and gain in a market driven society. We previously encountered the rhetoric of reproduction hinging upon a culture of production depicted in Barbara Duden’s analysis.

This model also allows us to see better how inequalities of gender are reflected and acted upon. The male body – that is to say, the male-body-machine – is construed of as a better machine than the female-body-machine because it functions more consistently and predictably and its parts are less prone to break down.⁷⁴ It is abundantly clear that the medical community considers the female body-machine deficient in many respects, evidenced by the large number of unnecessarily performed

⁷³ Davis-Floyd, "The Technocratic Body: American Childbirth as Cultural Expression," 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

hysterectomies and radical mastectomies. The female-body-machine as birth-machine is even more defective, the proliferation of numerous medical interventions that have been employed to assist childbirth. Caesarean section is a perfect analogy to the salmon hatchery method of extracting spawn. In North America today, obstetricians perform caesarean sections at an alarming rate with 1 in 3 pregnancies resulting in the surgical procedure.⁷⁵ The surgical procedure has, without a doubt, saved countless mothers and infants. The concern now involves the increase in elective c-sections performed on women who are diagnosed with low-risk pregnancies. Surprisingly, women are opting for the procedure – often as early as 37 weeks gestation – as they

⁷⁵ In a letter to the editor of the "Australian & New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology," Dr. Inoue Takami, of Nagoya Medical Center's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, raises his concern over "[t]he dramatic rise of Caesarean (CS) sections over the last 20 years," an increase of which he considers "an international concern" and the reasons for which are "miscellaneous and unclear." He refers to the announcement of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists in 2001 that vaginal delivery of a breech, full-term baby "might no longer be appropriate," based on a study indicating that "significant" lower morbidity rates of the breached babies were attained when elective caesarean sections were performed, compared to the sample of vaginally delivered babies in the same position. He wonders, however, what results would emerge if a randomized trial were to be performed in the same manner on normally presented term babies, a study that cannot be undertaken due to ethical considerations. If the results were the same regarding the risks to babies of each group - vaginally delivered or delivered by caesarean section - women then could be counselled that they could freely choose between either method of delivery.

He maintains the vagina is best suited as the delivery channel for babies, provided no medical issues necessitate caesarean section and suggests that "the concept that vaginal delivery is a physiological mode for delivery but CS delivery is a forced and pathological one should be borne in mind not only to all the obstetricians but also to all the pregnant women." He implies that "informed patient choice," is not possible as obstetricians do not apprise patients of the risks associated with CS delivery. For this reason caesarean section rates have increased over the years. Please see Inoue, Takami, "Re: Is Caesarean Section Equal to Vaginal Birth as a Mode of Delivery?" *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology* 45, no. 4 (2005): 338-39.

see it as a quick, painless way to deliver their babies and many do not want to wait out the last few weeks of pregnancy.

Even women whose pregnancies and labor follow a natural course face varying degrees of intervention, including monitors measuring fetal heart rates, episiotomies, and medication. The length of a woman's labor is continuously under scrutiny by the medical team monitoring her and speaks directly to the body-as-machine/birth-machine metaphor, where mechanisms are designed to operate predictably. Davis-Floyd documents many examples of women who postpone admitting themselves into hospital when their labor begins, so as to avoid the scrutiny of their cervix's rates of dilation, trusting their bodies' abilities to labor at their own natural rhythms.⁷⁶ Wendy Simonds, drawing on data from *Williams Obstetrics*, reveals that the length of labor in the United States has decreased. In 1948, the length of first stage of labor in first births measured 12.5 hours. By 1980, it had accelerated to 10.5 hours.⁷⁷ As Simonds points out, "Length of labor is not a basic, unchanging biological fact but is subject to social and medical control."⁷⁸ Simonds restrains herself from defining the term "social," but I think the presence of medical insurance companies in the birthing room has contributed to this acceleration of the length of labor.⁷⁹

Davis-Floyd argues that childbirth in America can be considered "a complete cultural expression of our technocratic core value system," in the way it is culturally

⁷⁶ Robbie Davis-Floyd, *Birth as an American Rite of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁷⁷ Wendy Simonds, Barbara Katz Rothman, Bari Meltzer Norman, *Laboring On*, 166.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Simonds refers to a recent study of 37,000 live births at Philadelphia hospitals where more women receive "obstetric intervention" in the form of forceps, vacuum extraction, drug administered labor, and episiotomy during the day, as opposed to women giving birth between 2 am and 8 am, "off peak" hours. She concludes: "The institutional tempo slows down at night, and staff allow birth to take longer," *Laboring On*, 67.

managed.⁸⁰ “Machinery,” “production and reproduction,” “cultural processes versus naturally occurring events,” – the integration of language and process into the medicalized and institutionalized birthing room not only contributed to the alienation of women from the processes of giving birth, but also from the institutional frameworks of broader society. At the same time, what occurred in the birthing room reflected the value systems of the culture in which the birthing room was located.

I would like to stop here to briefly discuss what I see as a parallel discourse of reproduction concerning romanticized notions of traditional birth generated by scholars occurring here. The concerns about how rhetoric of reproduction and ideologies are implicated in contemporary birthing rooms, whether they are located in Japan, or Canada, or New Zealand, for that matter, evoke a “confrontation of values” and also bespeak a reflexive response “opposing the masculinism of the medicalization of birth.”⁸¹ The dangers faced by women giving birth in “traditional” settings are great; maternal health and infant mortality are issues private and public health organizations are desperately addressing and the statistics in many countries are heartbreaking. For example, the rate of maternal death in the developing world is one woman every minute according to the WHO’s report in 2004.⁸² To look at this statistic in another light, a woman from Niger has a one in seven chance of dying in childbirth.⁸³ Recent reports by WHO show no improvements in these rates are

⁸⁰ Davis-Floyd, "The Technocratic Body: American Childbirth as Cultural Expression," 3.

⁸¹ Margaret Jolly, "Colonial and Postcolonial Plots in Histories of Maternities and Modernities," in *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. Kalpana and Margaret Jolly Ram (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.

⁸² "WHO bid to reduce maternal deaths," BBC on-line news service, World Edition, Wednesday, 29 September, 2004. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3700348.stm>.

⁸³ "Africa childbirth deaths too high," BBC on-line news service, World Edition, Monday, 20 October, 2003, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3206960.stm> In the US, women have a 1 in 2,500 chance of dying in childbirth. The safest country to have a

imminent. While this study is indebted to the groundbreaking work of Robbie Davis-Floyd, Brigitte Jordan, Yoshimura Noriko, and more recently Wendy Simonds, these researchers do not include women who have experienced late-stage pregnancy and infant loss or even severe pregnancy complications in their pool of subjects. Stories of pregnancy gone wrong – not just stories of poor treatment, inefficiency, and excessive intervention – would force conclusions to be rethought. There is also the issue of neglecting “the diversity of birthing experiences at both ends”⁸⁴ of the “traditional” and “modern” spectrum. Further, as any woman who has given birth more than once can attest: every pregnancy and every birth is different. In short, pregnancy and childbirth experience cannot be easily categorized, nor can the medical treatment of pregnancy and childbirth be evaluated by dualisms and dogma.⁸⁵

This interruption frames the next part of my discussion, because here we enter into the area of childbirth in contemporary Japan, and from what I experienced and observed, the medical system in Japan, unlike that in the United States and Canada, has gone to great lengths to “humanize” the process of giving birth. Most importantly, Japan is ranked as one of the best countries in the world to give birth due to its high quality prenatal care. Also, caesarean sections are not routinely performed and, in general, epidurals and other such interventions are not foisted upon women; although,

baby is Sweden, where the rate is 1 in 29, 800, followed by Japan, boasting a rate of 1 in 6,000. Death due to complications from abortion are also included in these figures.

⁸⁴ Jolly, "Colonial and Postcolonial Plots in Histories of Maternities and Modernities," 14.

⁸⁵ Brigitte Jordan attributes this romanticization of birth as a bi-product of the natural childbirth movement that proliferated in the United States following Grantley Dick-Read's *Natural Childbirth*, a British publication that made its way to the United States in 1944. For an analysis of the ways in which Dick-Read influenced attitudes towards childbirth in the United States, please see Wendy Simonds, *Laboring On*, 21-24. For Jordan's warning about the tendency to romanticize birth, please see Brigitte Jordan, *Birth in Four Cultures*, 74.

this is changing. Furthermore, when it comes to prenatal care provided by the state – Japan’s national medical system is highly involved – the issues of gender inequality in Japanese society that Minister Inoguchi confronted and that I have discussed so far have been addressed to some extent. Pregnancy and childbirth in Japan tests the theory that “core value systems” are enforced and reinforced during the space of pregnancy and childbirth.

The Maternity Handbook
and Premama/Papa Cooking at the Public Health Office

Medical records. Who owns them? Why, in North American society, are they considered confidential documents – it has been suggested by a highly qualified source embedded in the medical profession that they are confidential to only patients – and what information is withheld? What does this say about the relationship between patients and the medical establishment?

In Japan, women are empowered and involved in their prenatal care as they have in their possession a document called the *bosshi kenkô techô*. The document in English is “the mother child health notebook,” but I translate it as “maternity handbook.” Once pregnancy has been confirmed, women register at the public health center (*kenkôjo*) of their neighbourhood ward office and are issued the book.

Information recorded in the book includes the woman’s weight, the developing fetus’ dimensions, indications of swelling, the results of blood and urine tests, and any abnormalities. There is space for the patient to write her questions for her specialists. After the baby is born, all information concerning the growth of the child, vaccines, and other such data is recorded. This book travels with the woman throughout her pregnancy. The type of care women in Japan receive encourages them to be part of the process, unlike in North America, where pregnant women do not

view their records and receive all information about their bodies and the development of the fetuses from medical professionals.

This system also accommodates a custom where first-time mothers return to their natal home (*jikka*) to give birth, as it is thought that mothers are the best resource to help women through this experience. This custom is sometimes called *satogaeri* and is practiced even today. Prenatal care, then, is handled by two different specialists and it is important for the specialists who deliver the babies to have detailed records of their patients' prenatal history.

According to a list of "Maternity Care Indicators"⁸⁶ recommended by a United Nations funded project called the Safe Motherhood Initiative, Japan's maternity care ranks very high among developed nations because of its state regulated and monitored prenatal care coverage, skilled health personnel attending deliveries, and access to health facilities. The pregnancy handbook, instituted in 1937 in the Maternity and Child Health Act (*boshi kenkôho*) accounts for Japan's high-quality maternity care.

Narita Ryûichi sees the institutionalization of the maternity handbook as a way through which the state could "watch" all pregnancies and births and part of a system that "eliminated birth based on free will and instilled in women the notion of obligatory pregnancy and birth."⁸⁷ This system, he argues, turned pregnancy from a private affair into a public concern. First, I wonder if Narita Ryûichi would feel more comfortable if women went back to giving birth in huts. His argument contains the hysterical tremor of someone possessed by a conspiracy theory. Second, as I demonstrate throughout this dissertation, pregnancy in Japan has never really been a private concern, deep-rooted customs and traditions make pregnancy a community concern: in the small communities throughout the archipelago, very few private issues

⁸⁶ Francesca Perucci, "The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics," in *Social Statistics and Indicators* (New York: United Nations, 2000), 61.

⁸⁷ Narita, "Mobilized from Within: Women and Hygiene in Modern Japan," 270.

remain inside the household. Furthermore, as we have seen in this chapter, the Tokugawa regime stamped out the notion of free will, and women, especially those living in urban centers, had very little choice regarding their reproductive desires.

Deborah Cordeira Fiedler, in her study of authoritative knowledge and how it is negotiated by the obstetrician, midwife, and parturient woman, the primary actors in the Japanese birthing room, sees this system contributing to the “standardization of the experience of pregnancy,”⁸⁸ which can be construed ambivalently. At the same time, this system in Japan allows much latitude in the patients’ experience of their pregnancies by not only embracing traditional attitudes towards childbirth by honouring the custom of *satogaeri*, but also by engaging them in their prenatal experience. And the most important issue: infant and maternal health standards are unquestionably high.

Women are also expected to bring their handbooks to the public health center, a place here they can receive such services as dental treatment, and advice from midwives. The center also offers prenatal workshops such as workshops dealing with nutrition, breastfeeding, newborn care, and labor preparation. When I attended these workshops, I was eager to uncover ideologies of reproduction and sexuality that reinforced the equation of womanhood and “birthing machines” and rhetoric encouraging women to follow cultural patterning. What stood out the most, however, besides the emphasis of birth as a natural, non-pathological event, was the eagerness to include fathers’ participation in the process of pregnancy and childbirth. Reflecting on Minister Inoguchi’s concern about gender inequality in the nation, one could see obvious attempts at bridging the gender gap in these workshops.

⁸⁸ Fiedler, "Authoritative Knowledge and Birth Territories in Contemporary Japan," 201.

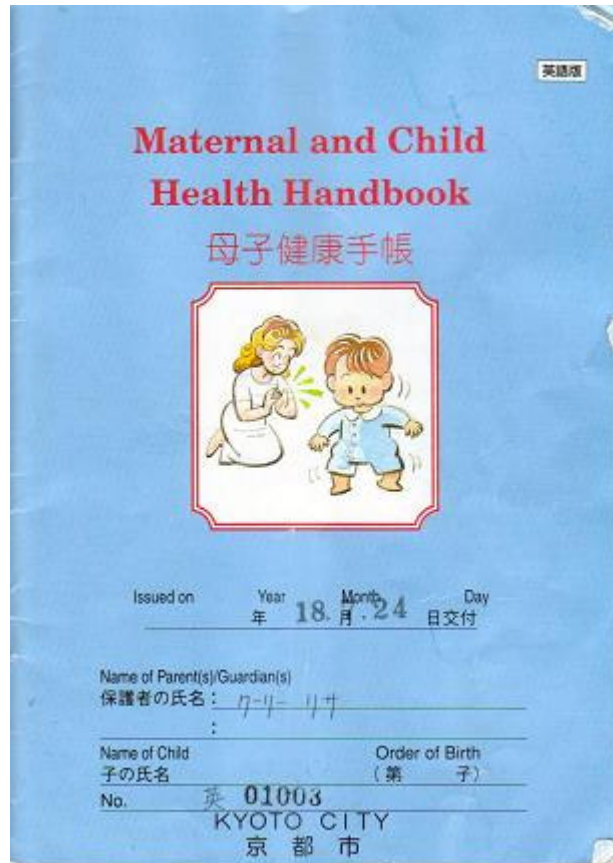


Figure 2-4 The author's pregnancy handbook.

In the supplementary reader to the handbook, a section for fathers encourages men to help with household chores and provide mental support to their pregnant wives; explains to them about appropriate sexual behaviour during pregnancy; and reinforces the indispensability of fathers in the rearing of children. This is reinforced in prenatal workshops held at the public health center. The facilitators of a workshop on relaxation and breathing techniques I attended with my husband showed a film depicting both the mother and father equally involved in the pregnancy and birth of their infant. And, a cast of a pregnancy belly was passed around for the fathers-to-be to try on, so they too could share their wives' physical discomfort. There was just one problem: the rhetoric of equality reached only women – all of the fathers-to-be, except for three (one was my husband), were at work because the public health center held its

workshops during the office hours of 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and evening sessions to accommodate working parents-to-be were not offered.

Bring this handbook along to all medical examinations. If you change doctors, you will have it as a medical history record.
この冊子には、胎前産後検査や分娩時の経過を記入するほか、産後や育児に関する記録も記入してください。

Course of Pregnancy (I)
妊娠中の経過

| Exam Date | Week of Pregnancy | Height of Uterus (Fundus) | Circumference of Abdomen | Blood Pressure | Edema (Swelling) | Protein in Urine | Sugar in Urine |
|-----------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 検査日 | 妊娠週数 | 子宮高 | 腹囲 | 血圧 | 浮腫 | 尿蛋白 | 尿糖 |
| 産前 11月20日 | 36w 2d | 児推定体重 3478g | 110cm | 110/64 | 0+ | 0++ | 0++ |
| 産前 11月27日 | 37w 2d | 児推定体重 3699g | 115cm | 95/62 | 0+ | 0++ | 0++ |
| 産前 12月4日 | 38w 2d | 児推定体重 3299g | 107cm | 107/67 | 0++ | 0++ | 0++ |
| 産前 12月11日 | 39w 2d | 児推定体重 3094g | 105cm | 105/64 | 0++ | 0++ | 0++ |
| | | | | | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| | | | | | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| | | | | | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| | | | | | +++ | +++ | +++ |
| | | | | | +++ | +++ | +++ |

Relevant Personal Data
妊婦自身の記録

| | |
|--|---|
| Home Address Before or After Delivery 住居住所 | Tel. No. 電話 |
| Name and Address of Emergency Contact 緊急連絡先 | Tel. No. 電話 |
| Means of Transport to Hospital 来院手段 | Own Car / Taxi / On Foot / Other (Transportation Time in hours/minutes) 自家用車 / タクシー / 徒歩 / その他 |

Pregnancy (II)
経過 (2)

| Other Examinations (incl. Herceptin) | Weight | Instructions (i.e., next issue of Mother's Health Maintenance Instruction Card) | Name of Medical Institution or Doctor |
|--------------------------------------|--------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 間接クームス (-) | 24.4kg | NST reactive | 佐伯クリニック |
| 間接クームス (-) | 23.5 | NST reactive | 佐伯クリニック |
| 間接クームス (-) | 24.2 | NST reactive | 佐伯クリニック |
| 間接クームス | 24.3 | NST reactive | 佐伯クリニック |

* Use the space below to write down the prospective parent or parents' feelings about welcoming a new baby into the world. Also write down any concerns or questions you would like to discuss with your doctor.
この冊子の下部に、これから生まれてくる赤ちゃんを迎えることに対する気持ちや、医師と話し合いたいことなどを記入してください。

Sophology
Tea

* See your physician immediately if you have vaginal bleeding, any abnormal or unusual pain, or if your water breaks.

Figure 2-5 A page from the author's pregnancy handbook.

An important issue at stake here is the conflict between meta-discourses and local praxis and knowledge, an issue that can only be discovered by the researcher working at ground level. Just as one of the main functions of this dissertation involves illuminating the plurality of practices and ideas concerning systems of ritual purity and the gendered body, the other purpose is to show – using my body as a device – how practice and ideology are often at odds with each other.



Figure 2-6 “Pregnant Mama and Papa Cooking.” The brochure for cooking and nutrition classes offered by Kyoto’s Public Health Centre.

The high standard of prenatal and childbirth health that I have just discussed however, is also on the verge of collapse as Japan experiences a shortage of obstetricians and midwives, something felt particularly strongly in rural areas.⁸⁹ As of 2004, 26,000 registered midwives were practicing in Japan, in contrast to 55,000 in 1955.⁹⁰ And the Japan Society of Obstetrics and Gynecology found in a survey in June 2006 that 3,000 obstetrics facilities were operating, which is roughly 2,000 fewer than it originally estimated.⁹¹ It is also reported that in 2004, the nation saw a loss of 10 percent of its maternity wards – 163 hospital maternity wards ceased operations – more, possibly in the hundreds, are closing down.⁹² Largely this is a result of the

⁸⁹ Ayako Karino, "'Celeb' or Natural: It's Your Choice," *The Asahi Shinbun*, Saturday-Sunday, September 16-17, 2006 2006, 36.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Anthony Faiola, "In Japan, New Pains Suffered at Childbirth," *Washington Post*, Monday, May 1, 2006 2006.

nation's low birthrate – reflected in so many other institutions like the available seats in universities, school closures, and daycare openings, but it also indicates a transforming health profession, with fewer doctors entering into obstetrics. Malpractice suits are increasing and the long hours obstetricians log are not matched with corresponding salaries under the National Public Health system.⁹³ Also, many medical resources are directed towards geriatric care, taking away resources for maternity care. While only one of the women I interviewed encountered this problem – she planned to return to her hometown in Kichijoji, a suburb of Tokyo, to give birth and found only one hospital that accepted new patients – the full effect has not yet been felt by the general population, but many obstetricians and midwives see a decline in the system. Minister Inoguchi did not mention this aspect of the crisis in her presentation.

While gender equality is promoted in Japan's ward offices and public health centers, and pregnant women receive top quality care that honors the dignity of pregnancy, pregnant women endure surprisingly inconsiderate behavior in their daily lives. For the most part, people use public transportation to perform their daily activities and commute to work. Trains and subways in urban centers, while convenient, safe, and reliable, tend to run over capacity during peak travel times. All train cars make available to the pregnant, the elderly, and the infirm priority seating sections (*yûsenseki*); however, able-bodied passengers tend to seat themselves in these sections, oblivious to the needs of their less hardy fellow commuters. In the summer of 2006 a campaign targeting commuters was launched: the Maternity Badge Campaign.

⁹³ Ibid. Karino, "'Celeb' or Natural: It's Your Choice," 36.

Changing Mindset on the Yamanote Line: *Premama* on the Train

This campaign, hinged to the public and private railway companies, is one of the more prominent crusades evolving out of the government's recognition of a social crisis in that it received a lot of media attention and public exposure. Other institutions also latched on to the campaign. Suiten-gu, a famous shrine for rituals of safe childbirth in Tokyo, distributed the badge, and women received badges when they registered their pregnancies at their ward offices. The badge issued by Kyoto city in the Fall of 2006 came with the words: "This badge is to let the people around who are not concerned about your state that you are pregnant" and it is a reminder: "Pregnancy is an important time for the mother as well as the baby." The logo was prominently displayed over the priority seating section of trains and buses throughout the country.

The hardship of travelling on the train while pregnant is related in a story written by Gotô Yûko, a 37 year-old pregnant woman from Chiba Prefecture, who commuted to work well into her eighth month of pregnancy. Benesse Corporation, a company that publishes pregnancy magazines and instructional materials for pregnant women and mothers, highlighted her travails in an instructional pamphlet for pregnant women.⁹⁴ Gotô describes in her round-trip commute, an hour each way, she would take the slow local train rather than ride express routes to increase her chances of acquiring a seat; although, the able-bodied occupants seated in the priority section (*yûsenseki*) reserved for the elderly, infirm, or pregnant women seldom offered her a seat. When she attempted to find a seat, people either pretended not to notice her or pretended they were asleep. Throughout the eight months she rode the train, she was offered a seat only six times, a number consider high by other mothers with whom she discussed this issue. On those few occasions, she was deeply grateful: "therefore, the

⁹⁴ Fûsansha, ed., *Ninpu Shussan ni jishin wo tsukeru hon* (No Place: Benesse Ko-pore-shon, No date), 31.

times when somebody offered his or her seat to me, my heart was filled with deep gratitude.” We can see though how a situation like this strikes deeply into the core value of gratitude often associated with Japanese society.



Figure 2-7 The Maternity Badge. The caption reads: “I have a baby in my belly.”

Goto then goes on to tell of her experience riding a jam-packed train during an earthquake and how people grabbed available seats even though they saw a pregnant woman standing. Finally, an exhausted-looking man offered her a seat and her eyes filled with tears with gratitude. She did not thank him before she disembarked as he was fast asleep in a seat that had become available to him, but she always holds in her heart the words she wants to relay to him if a meeting does occur: “Thank you very much for rescuing me.” As a woman who has travelled extensively throughout Japan while pregnant, I can verify that relying on public transportation is extremely unpleasant and I happily commuted by bicycle into the final stages of my pregnancy.



Figure 2-8 An image from Benesse Corporation’s instructional pamphlet for pregnant women.

With this campaign, the hope is twofold: women who are in their early stages of pregnancy can demonstrate they need to sit down and able-bodied commuters will vacate their seats when pregnant women enter a train. One woman I interviewed in the fall of 2006 resorted to using the badge to acquire a seat only once. Another woman indicated she had no need for the badge; she commuted daily from Kyoto to Osaka and she always managed to find a seat or someone offered her one. Another woman found the badge embarrassing. Like the shame surrounding pregnancy codified in Japan’s earliest oral literature, feelings of embarrassment discourage women from simply requesting a seat as women feel uncomfortable drawing attention to their pregnant bodies. In the larger sphere of public deportment, Japanese social forms of appropriate interactions do not include such requests. Other women did not want to inconvenience other passengers, who also might be tired and in need of a seat. And as anyone who has taken the bus in Kyoto knows, the priority seats are almost always

occupied by cane-wielding women in their seventies and eighties, turning the issue of who qualifies for the priority seat into an ethical dilemma.



Figure 2-9 Young people sitting in Priority Seating Section (*Yûsenseki*) of a Kyoto subway.

The principal of the nursery school whose comment on state policy I referred to at the beginning of this paper, also commented that the problem of Japan's low birthrate could be reversed: "*if we are able to restore a society that respects the mothering capabilities of the female population.*" Unfortunately, the maternity badge campaign is only a band-aid solution to the crisis.

Conclusion: Hell for Barren Women and Birthing Machines

Inoguchi Kuniko, the former Minister of Gender Equality and Social Affairs whom I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, successfully established the issue of gender equality as an “institutional framework” in Japan’s political system.⁹⁵ And while the rapid-fire turnover of Prime Ministers and the cabinet shuffles that follow along leadership transitions undermined her efforts to “restart Japan’s baby-making machine,” the fact that a person with her talent has a presence in politics in Japan suggests the pressures of modernity are forcing the system to change. But, the average Japanese woman still has little presence in decision-making at the political level and must choose between career and family. A brighter more inclusive future does not lie in view.

It must be noted that the government has been grappling with the nation’s population decline for quite some time. The post-war period, from the 1950’s to the mid-1970’s saw a stable rate of 2.08, but by the mid-1960’s, people began to take notice of a trend towards a declining birthrate, and the Population Problem Advisory Council alerted the government in 1969 that it must take action to reverse the trend.⁹⁶ The first awakening to Japan’s declining birthrate came in 1989, when the birthrate was measured at 1.57, prompting the “1.57 shock.”⁹⁷ In 1996, newly elected Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryûtarô warned that Japan was on the verge of a ‘national crisis.’ Also, he formed Advisory Council for a Gender Equal Society (*Danjo Kyôdo Sankaku Shakaku Shingikai*). This issue has been a concern of all cabinets since Hashimoto’s time, with the emphasis on gender equality and the underlying premise that women

⁹⁵ Takeda, *The Political Economy of Reproduction in Japan: Between Nation-State and Everyday Life*, 177.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 177. Muriel Jolivet extracts the portion of Hashimoto’s speech that attributes higher education as responsible for directing women’s attention away from motherhood, see *Japan: The Childless Society?*.

should have the choice to pursue “work opportunities.”⁹⁸ Yet, surprisingly little has been accomplished in the last forty years.

One reason for this paralysis is that the agents involved in the resolution of Japan’s demographic crisis are in many respects talking at cross-purposes. On the one hand, the Ministry of Gender Equality encourages families to produce children, but the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (*Kôseirôdôshô*) does not provide the necessary means to support families with children. The Ministry recently increased monthly support payments from 5,000 to 10,000 for every family’s first and second child under three years of age. This sum of money is a pittance. In Canada, families receive a universal benefit of one hundred dollars per month for every child under six – a rough equivalent to the payment families in Japan receive – a sum of money that contributes little to budgets covering food, clothes, day care, and extra-curricular activities. If these governments seriously considered the needs of working families, they would institute universal daycare programs.

Problems in Japan’s maternity system also need immediate attention. As I have discussed, the already existing system of combined obstetrics and midwifery and excellent prenatal support is a medical ideal that medical workers in North America can only dream about. Childbirth can be a profound transformative event; hence the rich ritual life and material culture supporting it, and medical practitioners in Japan do understand this and implement this in their delivery rooms. The combination of high-quality care, with emphasis on labor support rather than medicinal pain management and ample time and care for mothers to recover from birth and bond with their babies, reveals a respect for mothering. With the deteriorating conditions of the maternity medical industry, these standards cannot be maintained and The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is slow in its response to this issue.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 175-77.

Finally, while the mandate of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Social Affairs rests on a platform of gender equality, in this current crisis, a rhetoric of reproduction is in full swing, censuring women who choose careers over children and women who cannot have children. The infertility problems faced by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo and his wife – the couple had no children – was highly publicized, but the public face attached to their childlessness was that of Mrs. Abe.⁹⁹ Japanese society characterizes the women who choose not to have children as selfish, career-minded individuals who care only about expensive wardrobes and luxurious trips abroad. They are demonized for their aspirations of ambition and achievements in education. All this is set against demographic divinations portending the collapse of the nation.

The situation in Japan reminds Shinmura Taku of the feudal government's admonitions against abortion and infanticide in Tokugawa-era Japan as these practices cut into the land-tax-paying population, threatening the very existence of the nation.¹⁰⁰ Shinmura notes that today a technologically advanced society like Japan no longer requires a large pool of laborers to sustain the nation; furthermore, "leisure" is a value that is not out of place in a society that emphasizes economic prosperity.¹⁰¹ Children can be seen as cutting into precious leisure time. From the studies on attitudes towards family in Tokugawa agrarian communities I have discussed in this chapter, these notions and values were acted upon then, too.

While Shinmura overlooks demands on the economy and labor force made by a demographic bulge of senior citizens, the notion of wealthy nations, with their tendencies towards excessive consumption and depletion of global resources, limiting

⁹⁹ "Japan PM's Wife in Rare Interview," BBC News, International Version 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6044608.stm> (accessed 10 March, 2008).

¹⁰⁰ Taku Shinmura, *Shussan to seishokukan no rekishi*, 2 ed. (Tokyo: Hôsei Daigaku Shuppanyoku, 1997), 206.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

their growth could be considered desirable. The one problem he notes, however, is a revival of a rhetoric of reproduction childless households faced throughout Japan's history.¹⁰² Society targeted women because only they can bear children and the event of birth is highly important in securing a place in the other world (*ano yo*). Depictions of childless women toiling away in hell; petitions of women asking for help and forgiveness in the other world; treatises on the unhappiness childless women experienced are abundantly available in literature and in the archives of Japan's shrines and temples. In fact, in the "hymn for the Salvation of Barren Women" (*Umazume jigoku wasan*), childless women are sent to Blood Pool Hell.¹⁰³ The cultural patterning towards women and reproduction and the ideologies of gender that I did not notice in maternity clinics and the workshops held at public health centers are very much present in this revival, where it would seem that the society's core values are located in the absence of childbirth.

Next, I will discuss the *hara-obi*, a band women wrap around their bellies from the fifth month of pregnancy. Where once it was associated with tradition and custom, passed down from mother to daughter – the socially established structure of meaning – women and their families now purchase the *hara-obi* at temples and shrines. Just as I have demonstrated in this section of this chapter, consumers can buy spirituality, Japanese women can participate in a uniquely Japanese way of giving birth, and Japanese pilgrims can purchase medical succour, the *hara-obi* offers Japanese women and their families an even more intensified Japanese experience of childbirth.

¹⁰² Ibid., 209-16.

¹⁰³ Takemi, "'Menstruation Sutra' Belief in Japan," 236. Takano Tatsuyuki, *Nihon kayo shûsei*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Shunjûsha, 1928), 382.

CHAPTER 3

BODY, COMMODITY, AND CUSTOM IN THE MULTIPLEX UNIVERSE OF THE *HARA-Obi*

The Temple of the Untied *Obi*

Obitoke-dera, a Buddhist temple two stops outside the city of Nara on the express JR Sakurai line, occupies a fairly small plot of land. As a temple of the former capital city Nara, the seat of Japanese Buddhism, it is part of rich sacred landscape. The former Shingon temple – it recently joined the Kegon school, the main temple of which is the illustrious Todai-ji – metaphorically sits atop Koyasuizan, or “Easy Childbirth Mountain.” Buddhist temples in Japan are associated with mountains, even if they are built onto flat landscapes, like Obitoke-dera. I brought my pregnant body and my family to the temple in September 2006 to receive a service for safe childbirth.

The temple’s main image of worship is *Koyasui Jizô* – the Jizô of easy childbirth – designated as an Important Cultural Treasure (*Juyôbunkazai*) and considered – by the temple – to be one of Japan’s most efficacious images associated with childbirth. The temple maintains that Kôbô Daishi, the founder of Japanese Buddhism’s Shingon sect, created the image; furthermore, the image is renowned throughout the country for performing miracles since safe childbirth belief and practices became popular in the latter half of the Muromachi period.¹⁰⁴ However, the main visual focal point in the temple complex is a girdle. As one enters the compound, two mannequin torsos sheathed in pregnancy girdles capture the pilgrim’s attention.

¹⁰⁴ This information comes from Japanese and English-language pamphlets distributed by the temple, that I received in 2004 and again in 2006.



Figure 3-1 A priest performing duties at Obitoke-dera.

The pink, polyester pregnancy girdle is a contemporary model of the traditional *hara-obi*, long sashes pregnant women wrap around their midsections at the beginning of their fifth month of pregnancy. In Japan, gestational age of the fetus is measured over a ten-month period. From a Western medical perspective, this represents the shift from the first trimester to the second trimester, the time of quickening, when a woman begins to feel the life inside her move. The *hara-obi* is also called *iwata obi*, and *sarashi no obi*, referring to the material of the *obi*, which is usually white, bleached cotton. The Chinese characters are sometimes read as *fukutai*.

On this small plot of land, dominated by girdles and a parking lot, sacred landscape is implied, assumed, and imagined; it is also embodied. The pregnant body is prominent in the temple's origin myth: Empress Somedono, the wife of Montoku, Japan's 55th emperor and the daughter of the Premier Fujiwara no Yoshifusa, a powerful man in his capacity as advisor to the emperor, was distressed because she could not conceive a child. In a dream she was told "One *ri* (2.44 miles) south of

Nara, an exalted Jizô-son has been dedicated. Place your faith in this Jizô-son.”¹⁰⁵ The Empress traveled to this temple and prayed to the image. Soon after her pilgrimage, she became pregnant. She prayed to the image again, petitioning for an easy delivery and after a quick and painless labor, she bore a healthy child. In the spring of 858, Empress Somedono renamed the temple Obitoke-dera – The Temple of the Untied Obi –because her *hara-obi* had loosened easily to allow the peaceful birth of Imperial Prince Korehito – the future Emperor Seiwa.



Figure 3-2 Display models of Obitoke-dera's *hara-obi*.

The health of the pregnant body and fetus is a major concern for Obitoke-dera. The temple distributes a pamphlet instructing proper behavior necessary during

¹⁰⁵ This quotation is taken from the first page of the temple's English-language pamphlet, published by the Japan National Tourist Organization. I received copies in June 2004 and again in September 2006.

pregnancy to bring about a safe birth.¹⁰⁶ These types of instruction are called *taikyô* (teachings of the womb) and temples and shrines dedicated to safe childbirth consider these teachings as part of their purview.¹⁰⁷ To prevent premature labor and pregnancy-related illnesses, the expectant mother should keep her daily activities down to a minimum, avoid late nights, and get plenty of rest. When she performs housework – the only type of labor recommended – she must avoid putting pressure on her stomach and exposing it to cold. She should refrain from angry outbursts and avoid feeling strong emotions. The experience of shock is harmful for the fetus. She should be careful when climbing or descending stairs and always wear sensible shoes. The temple recommends outdoor walks so the expectant mother can exercise her body and receive the healthful benefits of sunlight. Her clothes should be clean and loose fitting and she must take care to keep her abdomen and nether regions warm. Her underwear should be clean. Because a woman's circulatory system is more active than usual during pregnancy, even though the number of baths she takes will increase, she should avoid long soaks in the tub, bathing immediately before and after meals, and bathing at times when she is susceptible to colds. Hot baths are not advisable. These guidelines for maintaining a healthy pregnancy are concluded with the *caveat* that the recommendations are only general instructions, and that the pregnant woman should consult a physician if she experiences complications.

The efficacy of the temple's services for safe childbirth is known far and wide throughout the country. Pregnant women and their families from around the

¹⁰⁶ These instructions come from a pamphlet entitled "Anzan no tameni" ("For the sake of a safe birth") distributed by Obitoke-dera. I received a copy in June, 2004. A list of foods recommended to consume during pregnancy is also included in the brochure.

¹⁰⁷ According to Ôto Yuki, *taikyô* customarily begins around the fifth month of pregnancy and is associated with sets of restrictions and taboos. The instructions are generally meant to stabilize the pregnant woman's mental state. Please refer to *Kodomo no minzokugaku*, 48-49.

Kansai region visit the temple to receive services for safe childbirth. While they wait for their service in a room adjacent to the main shrine (*honden*), visitors can peruse hand-written notes from grateful parents collected in a binder. Letters of gratitude from the imperial family are displayed prominently in the *honden* as the temple dispatched offerings of *obi* and amulets to Empress Michiko, Princess Masako, and Princess Kiko after the Imperial House announced their pregnancies. An unofficial imperial seal of approval in the form of a photograph of four members of the current imperial family, the Emperor and Empress, Naruhito, the Crown Prince of Japan, and his wife Masako, stands in the *tokonoma*, an alcove for displaying decorative picture scrolls.

Belly and *Obi* as Commodity in Japan's Maternity Industry

This mundane strip of cloth, hardly the stuff of museum displays and temple treasure houses, inhabits numerous worlds of meaning: the mythic and historical; the ritual; the traditional; the medical; and, the commercial. Moreover, as mainly temples and shrines distribute the *hara-obi*, a religious interpretation has also been imposed on it. These organizations invoke a broader set of references engaging the nation's history, myths, and customs to reclaim pregnancy and childbirth as Japanese events, similar to the strategies employed by Matsunaga Akira in his technique of Sophrology where evocations of Zen and Yoga root the technique in a decidedly "Oriental" ground, a topic I discuss in the first chapter of this dissertation. The *obi*, deeply rooted in the nation's bedrock of customs and folkways, is a powerful object that helps fuel Japan's maternity industry.

These various bodies within Japan's maternity industry have applied pressure to culturally shape the *obi*, as such, the *obi* can be viewed as metonymic with the pregnant body – one comes to represent the other in Japan's maternity industry. The significance of this is that various universes orbit around the pregnant body, an

organism that is defined by its physiological and homeostatic processes and marked by its vulnerability. This surfeit of cultural activity is striking because pregnancy is a self-limited condition: once the baby within is expelled, it reverts back to its initial state. What makes this even more significant is the fact that in Japan, there are fewer and fewer pregnant bodies, precipitating the current social crisis. Basically, the pregnant body is a valuable commodity.

How does the maternity industry in Japan capitalize on the commodified pregnant body? How is the ritual dilemma of the transitory pregnant body solved? What aspects of the *hara-obi*, and its relationship to the pregnant body, do organizations – both religious and secular – emphasize? How do these organizations reconstitute the item to make it appealing to the modern consumer and what are the implications of this? How do Japanese women derive meaning from the *hara-obi*?

To answer these questions, I will first explore a discourse of commodity in cultural context voiced by Igor Kopytoff. To understand the cultural shaping of the *hara-obi* – its social biography in the parlance of Kopytoff – it is helpful to first explore the notion of “commoditization” in relation to the object and to the pregnant body. I also include in the discussion Richard H. Davis’ exploration of the social life of images that have left their natal homes of India’s religious sites to travel the world, not only because the *hara-obi* possesses a rich biography, but also the peregrinations it has made echo some of the themes Davis’ work evokes. I will then unpack the various worlds of meaning in which the *hara-obi* resides, focusing on 1), regional ethnographies of the *obi*; 2), the religious life of the *hara-obi*, 3), safe childbirth rituals 4), the mythic and historical connections of the object; and 5), applications of the *obi* in the worlds of medicine and commerce.

Constructing the Body, Constructing the Object

Kopytoff's processual model of the commoditization of objects that he lays out in his essay "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process" is a useful conceptual tool for analyzing the cultural construction of the *hara-obi* and the pregnant body. While I take care in how I interpret the commoditization of the pregnant body – Kopytoff draws on the institution of slavery to explore the shifts in status a trafficked human experiences and there is no comparison in this regard – the parallels are striking between Kopytoff's commodity situation of the object and the pregnant body.¹⁰⁸

The important items I extract from Kopytoff's analysis include the spectrum of commoditization travelled by things and people; the way body and object are culturally shaped; the notion of exchange that determines an object's usefulness; and, the concept of terminal commoditization where every object eventually transcends its exchange value.

The processual perspective Kopytoff develops from observing a slave's shifts in social status helps us understand the phases through which an object cycles and the extent of culture's role in shaping perceptions of objects. Between the brackets of possession of a specific "social identity" and immersion into a "host society," slaves

¹⁰⁸ Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 64-65. Arjun Appadurai characterizes the processual nature of the commodity as "the commodity situation," which he divides into three categories. The first, "the commodity phase," allows for a permeability between the commodity and non-commodity states; the second, "the commodity candidacy," is, simply put, the criterion for determining whether or not an object is in fact a commodity; and, the third, "the commodity context," refers to the social groups involved in the transaction or exchange. Please see Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value." In *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai, 3-63 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13-16.

become objects as negotiations over their usefulness take place and transactions mark the exchange. Eventually, their new social identities crystallize. Kopytoff sees this as a “cultural shaping,” – I think of an extreme form – and applies this framework to objects. To wit, an object becomes singularized when it is removed from the commercial sphere, either having been marked as sacred or commercial transactions relating to it having been restricted. Sequestering an object into a museum or private home or limiting its use to an individual, particularly a person in a position of power, are examples of how an object is singularized.

Layered on top of this, qualities Kopytoff identifies in an object’s life, such as potentialities, origins, life cycles, “cultural markers,” transformations and transitions, and obsolescence, are the very same issues that emerge in biographies of people.¹⁰⁹ Kopytoff considers this type of biography “culturally informed,” where the object takes on a life of its own, particularly as cultural forces infuse it with meaning and shape how it is perceived.

A distinction Kopytoff brings to our attention is the Western proclivity for separating people and objects and how issues of labor, human organs, and all things concerning human reproduction irritate this morality. This is brought into perspective with the issue of abortion, where in the West pro-life and pro-choice groups still battle over the exact point of personhood and in Japan (Kopytoff incorrectly refers to aborted fetuses (*mizuko*) as “*misogo*”) this is not a concern. Nevertheless, the backlash over Yanagisawa Hakuo, the Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare and his reference to women of childbearing age as “birth machines” that I discussed in Chapter Two, suggests that Japanese are not comfortable with collapsing body and object, at least on the surface.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 67-68.

While Kopytoff singles out surrogacy and the sale of ovum as contentious issues in the reproductive technologies industry, he overlooks how the pregnant body itself perforates the boundaries separating person and object. A parturient woman is on the one hand a human incubating another life and on the other, an incredibly valuable commodity prospect for a nation that desperately needs children. A woman's social identity immediately shifts when she discovers she is pregnant. The numbers on the scale and the readings of her blood pressure become her biographical markers. Measurements of the image of the fetus captured by ultra sound, the results of blood tests, and the protein levels in her urine samples determine her medical value. Her age, reproductive history, health issues, and the number of fetuses she carries determine the medical category into which she is placed. Moreover, with the current population replacement rate of 1.32%, the exchange value of the pregnant body in Japan is enormous: a preschooler to justify a better daycare system, a student to fill an empty desk at a high school, a worker to support the ever-increasing aging society: a pregnant woman to keep a maternity clinic operating; a consumer to keep a department store afloat.

At the same time, the pregnant woman becomes singularized – coinciding with the time the *hara-obi* is wrapped around her – as her status shifts to a private, contained individual that also contains an important thing. The range of her activities diminishes as she is urged to move out of the public sphere and into the privacy of her home. Pregnant public figures are seldom displayed in the media in Japan. The one exception comes with the cover of Harper's Bazaar showcasing Britney Spears, her nude body decorated with only an ostentatious necklace and strategically placed hands, in her fifth month of pregnancy. Tokyo Metro officials initially refused to hang the advertisement because they considered it inappropriate; however, they later relented when they realized the image – highly sexualized, objectified, and foreign –

might be a stimulus for restarting the Japanese birth machine. Tokyo Metro demanded that the ad agency conceal the celebrity's pregnant belly – her naked breasts were fine for public consumption but the belly was simply too offensive. The agency at first refused but then yielded to the authority, slapping on a black box containing white text explaining the reason for the censorship. Finally, Tokyo Metro backed down and allowed the advertisement – with no censorship – to be displayed in its station in Tokyo's fashionable Omotessando district.



Figure 3-3 The image of Britney Spears Tokyo Metro initially considered offensive but eventually allowed to grace the walls of Omotessando Station.

The average pregnant Japanese woman; however, does not receive such a public airing. Maternity wear, for the most part, is sensible and covers her entire body. She is not allowed to exercise at most athletic clubs throughout the nation because

physical exertion is considered contraindicative to pregnancy. Railways and bus companies set aside special seats for her, although, as I discuss in the previous chapter, young, able-bodied commuters tend to sit in those seats. In essence she becomes rarified (provided she is not commuting during rush hour) and must wait out the days of her pregnancy attending maternity yoga classes, enduring maternity concerts, and preparing healthy food.

While the Japanese pregnant woman may not be in the public eye, she is public property and undergoes intense scrutiny from all sectors of society. From the maternity clinic, to the ward office and public health center, to the maternity apparel industry and all its spin-offs, not to mention the shrines and temples that dispense *hara-obi* and amulets, all these organizations have high stakes in the progress of the pregnancy. I consider this a point where the singularized and the commoditized converge, a common occurrence in complex societies where financial players move around money and things with ease, blurring the boundaries around the notion of “transaction.”¹¹⁰ What she consumes and imbibes, how she clothes herself, the temperature of her baths, how she travels from point A to point B become regulated by her condition and the subject of interest of those around her. Along the same line, she becomes a file at the public health center where she registers her pregnancy. After the life she has been supporting has vacated her body, her social identity shifts again, and she is removed from the public domain and re-immersed into everyday society, where her actions, habits, and deportment are no longer scrutinized, a point of terminal commoditization.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 77.



Figure 3-4 A pregnant woman wrapped in a traditional *hara-obi* to celebrate the beginning of the fifth month of pregnancy. An interviewee gave this image to the author, explaining she only wore the garment once, for this photograph.

Globe-trotting Images and Untraveled Undergarments

Richard H. Davis draws on Kopytoff's biographical approach in his project to animate objects by tracing the travels of a series of Indian images, shifting the focus away from their origins and highlighting the issues raised as the image encounters different settings and changing "communities of response." He traces the paths carved out as "idols" are uprooted from their religious settings in their native India and relocated to private museums in English estates, and then again to public museums, the journey transforming them from cultic objects into specimens of "oriental sculpture. In his examination of the "life histories" of a variety of Indian images and icons, he casts them as "social beings" that have continuously undergone processes of reinvention through their encounters with humans.¹¹¹ Davis constructs the social

¹¹¹ Richard H. Davis, *Lives of Indian Images* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8-9.

biographies of a variety of Indian religious statues illustrating how their cultural values change with their “interactions” with humans.

While the *hara-obi* and a religious artifact have very little in common – Davis’ images are objects of devotion and part of a complex world of art and religious aesthetic; the *hara-obi*, on the other hand, is little more than a long band of white cotton. Davis’ work facilitates an understanding of how we respond to objects. The objects of Davis’ study possess aesthetic and religious functions; however, the *hara-obi* is not an object whose primary purpose was to be displayed in an altar, as an object of devotion, or tucked away in a museum: it is an undergarment. What is more, it is a item taken from the everyday world of childbirth, albeit an everyday that is set aside during the liminal period of pregnancy. Moreover, while the peregrinations of Davis’ images activate the issues of colonial contact; Orientalism; and, deracination, the *hara-obi*, in stark contrast, is an untraveled, utterly mundane strip of cloth. Kopytoff too focuses on transplanted people and objects in his study. What does it mean to use the same approach on an object that is rooted in autochthony?

While Kopytoff’s objects and Davis’ artifacts interact with global “communities of response”¹¹² – the differing audiences who interact with the objects and artifacts, fuelling the interaction with their own interpretative strategies and infusing the objects with new meanings – the *hara-obi*’s journey is streamlined through Japan’s channels of myth, history, folkways, medicine, and commerce. The

¹¹² Ibid., 9. This phrase comes from Stanley Fish’s very simple and elegant notion of “interpretive communities,” developed out of reader-response theory, where Fish grapples with the issue of the many ways a text can be interpreted by the different readers who bring their own “interpretive strategies” to their reading. Fish, in dealing with the question of whether or not the notion of a general reading of a text is possible, proposes the idea that communities operating from similar cultural assumptions also bring a shared strategy for interpreting the text and in so doing, “rewrite” the text. Please see Stanley Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

many interpretations imposed on the item culturally mould it to represent an ideal, ultimately stifling any exchange or interaction occurring between object and audience. The interpretation of the *hara-obi* is forced on the audience, namely, pregnant women and their families, the interpretive strategies of which are limited to what Japan's maternity industry has fed them, and to local systems of knowledge.

Now, I will travel to these various worlds of meaning of the *hara-obi* to show how the processes of commoditization has shaped the social biography of the object and made it a player in so many different worlds of meaning. I will begin with the *hara-obi's* existence in the world of custom and folk practice. In this section I focus on the *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei*, a reference that catalogues the customs and ritual procedures associated with all issues concerning pregnancy, childbirth, and the baby's first year of life gathered by researchers who were locally based in each of Japan's prefectures. I include ethnographical observations from other sources. The main point I wish to draw readers' attention to in this section is the *hara-obi's* rich cultural biography that is flavored by distinct regional practices and a plurality of meaning and significance.

The Ethnographic World of the *Hara-obi*

Considered the pre-eminent reference by scholars investigating contemporary life cycle rituals, the *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei*¹¹³ is the result of a project that began in 1935 (Shôwa 10), undertaken at the urging of Yanagida Kunio. Abundant funding provided by the imperial family as a commemorative gift for the Emperor Shôwa financed this project. Ôtô Yuki (1910-2002),¹¹⁴ ethnographer of

¹¹³ Onshi zaidan boshi aiiku kai, *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei* (Tôkyo: Daiichi hôki shuppan, 1975), 67-89.

¹¹⁴ Ôtô Yuki wrote prolifically about customs and practices related to childbirth and child rearing from the time she graduated from Kyoto Jyoshi Daigaku at 21 years of age up until her death at 92 years of age. Her most influential book, *Ko yarai*, first published in 1968 (Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsu) has set the tone for studies of female life-

rituals of childbirth, and three other scholars, including her husband, comprised the editorial team. Comparative examples culled from Taiwan, the islands of the South Seas, and Karafuto, the disputed territory known also as the Sakhalin Islands, are also included.

In the section on the *hara-obi*, entitled “Celebrations of the *obi*” (*obi-iwai*), an entry for Hokkaido outlines the customs occurring in the region. For example, in the town of Bibai, when a woman reaches her fifth month of pregnancy, a *sanba*, or midwife, is summoned to tie an *obi* around the woman’s abdomen. The *hara-obi* is usually red and white, but occasionally just white, and on it is printed the character for long-life and celebration (*kotobuki*).¹¹⁵ In wealthy households a banquet is held for immediate family and close friends to celebrate a woman’s first pregnancy (*shosan*). Then, the reference systematically travels through every prefecture, listing a variety of local practices. In a village in Aomori, for example, the *hara-obi* is wrapped in the third month.¹¹⁶ The character printed on the *hara-obi* in the locality of Agatsumagun of Gunma Prefecture is the character for dog (*inu*).¹¹⁷ I will discuss the symbolic value of dogs and pregnancy in Japan in more detail shortly. The advance comes to a halt at Nagano and neighboring Gifu prefectures, where the former prefecture is allotted a page, and the latter three, of the variations of the custom practiced in localities throughout the prefectures. Kyôto, incidentally, is not represented in the section on *obi-iwai*.

Although the *Nihon Saniku* presents a wealth of regional variations, the basic framework of celebrations of the *hara-obi* follow a similar pattern. A day was set

cycle customs and rituals. Her other influential work is *Hahatachi no minzokushi* (Tokyo: Iwata Shoin, 1999).

¹¹⁵ Onshi zaidan boshi aiiku kai, *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei*, 67.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 68.

aside to mark the wrapping of the *obi*, one of many special occasions in the circuit of celebrations of life cycle events. The day chosen usually fell at the beginning of the fifth month of pregnancy on *Inu no hi*, the “day of the dog” of the lunar calendar. The dog is associated with birth because of its ability to bear large litters of puppies with ease. Incidentally the Chinese character for the dog represented in the lunar calendar is different than the character for the animal. The character printed on the *obi* of a pregnant woman in Agatsumagun is the character for the animal. The celebrations involved offerings to the *ubugami*, the god of birth. The notion of this *kami* is transformative in itself as often the tutelary *kami* (*ujigami*) or the mountain *kami* (*yama no kami*) was invoked, and in the context of the *hara-obi* celebration, it took on (or was endowed) with the characteristics of *kami* that oversaw aspects of childbirth. A woman of the community who assisted in the birth performed this offering. There are two types of attendants who assist pregnant and birthing women, a *sanba* and a *toriagebasan*. A *sanba* is generally considered a midwife and a *toriagebasan* has a more ritualized function which I discuss in detail in the following chapter.

Ôtô maintains celebrations surrounding the *hara-obi* were, for the most part, performed throughout the entire country, although there are examples of communities that did not observe the custom.¹¹⁸ For Ôtô, the wrapping of the *hara-obi* represented the formal recognition of pregnancy and marked the beginning of the activation of a series of rituals related to pregnancy, including mechanisms of taboo. Ôbayashi Michiko, in her essay entitled *Osan Konjaku* where she lays out a diachronic analysis of birth practices beginning with records of births in Japan’s earliest oral literature, also notes the variety of regional practices associated with the *hara-obi*, yet indicates they were unified by a set of common functions associated with the item: it recognized the pregnancy; it marked the appropriate time for prayers for the safe birth

¹¹⁸ Yuki Ôtô, *Ko yarai* (Tokyo: Iwasaki Bijutsu, 1968), 21-23.

of the child; and, on a practical level, it stabilized the woman's expanding stomach.¹¹⁹ The time of wrapping it, often performed by a *sanba*, marked an important milestone in the pregnancy, and was an occasion for celebration for family and members of a close social network to welcome the new addition. It was a time associated with eating. Often a banquet was set up, offering guests festive dishes like *sekihan*, a dish composed of rice and adzuki beans, and served on formal tables (*zen*). Or, food would be sent from the pregnant woman's hometown. As Ôtô stresses, children are of this world; they bring the social world of the family closer together.

Ôtô reports on the variations of the ritual, such as in one region the *obi* is passed down from the bridegroom's side, and in another region, on the island of Mikura of the Izu islands, the woman wrapped the *obi* around herself in a private observation, in the third month of pregnancy, not the fifth. In a region in Tôhoku, the *hara-obi* was donned in the fifth month, not as an aid for the pregnancy, but in order to build up the expectant mother's milk supply, and in a region of Gumma prefecture, it was thought that bears have easy labors, so a bear's intestines were inserted in the *obi*. Also, Ôtô suggests the custom of wearing the husband's used loincloth (*fundoshi*) to bring on an easy birth was prevalent throughout the country. Incidentally, there are cases where the husband wore a *hara-obi* brought from his wife's village as a *fundoshi*.

Now, major temples and shrines are primarily associated with the custom of the *hara-obi*. Through the Internet, other forms of mass media, such as *Tamago Kurabu – Egg Club* – a popular maternity magazine published by Benesse, and word of mouth, these institutions attract women and their families from all over the country. In this next section concerning the religious world of the *hara-obi*, my major query

¹¹⁹ Michiko Ôbayashi, "Osan Konjaku," in *Hahatachi no minzoku shi*, ed. Ôtô Yuki (Tokyo: Iwata shoin, 1999), 27.

involves the processes through which the *hara-obi* came to be in the world of religious organizations. Processes of syncretism are almost always evoked to explain religious development in Japanese religions and I question whether syncretism is the best conceptual tool for exploring the case of the *hara-obi*.

The *Hara-obi* in Shrines and Temples

Inu no Hi: The Dog's Day of Pregnancy

The rituals for safe childbirth performed by Shintô shrines and Buddhist temples share similar structures; although, each temple or shrine I visited offers a service or promotes a feature that distinguishes the site from its competition. Tokyo's Suiten-gu includes a charm in its package with instructions for the pregnant woman to imbibe the contents according to a ritual prescription; Waraten-jin's package includes a piece of straw from which the expectant family portends the gender of its baby; Ôbara shrine on the outskirts of Kyoto markets the *ubuya* a few hundred meters from its compound to attract visitors. They all share, though, *Inu no hi* (Day of the Dog), a day in the lunar calendar that falls about twice a month.

In Japanese folkways, the dog is associated with safe childbirth because the animal is noted for its ability to give birth to large litters of puppies with ease. This is why families visit shrines and temples to purchase their *hara-obi* on *Inu no Hi*.¹²⁰ I was curious to find out when temples and shrines incorporated *Inu no Hi* into their calendars thinking that tracking the progress of a custom (*fûshû*) as it made its way into a religious setting would shed new light on the ongoing debate about syncretism in Japan. The most compelling explanation came from Imai Jôen of Nakayama-dera.

¹²⁰ Many families visit temples and shrines on auspicious days in the Buddhist calendar called *taian*, as well as a day called *chakutai kichinichi*, a felicitous day to tie an obi. Nakayama-dera lists these days on the sign advertising the temple's daily and monthly activities; Obitoke-dera signboard lists only *Inu no hi*, although its head priest acknowledges *chakutai kichinichi* as a popular day for families to visit his temple.

The priest stressed that elements of folk religion (*shûzoku*) were not at all out of place in this Buddhist setting as a multiplicity of beliefs and practices constituted religious activity in Japan throughout its history and Japanese did not make distinctions based on sectarian differences.¹²¹ Jôen, whom I introduced in the first chapter of this dissertation, also gave the reason of the nation's declining birthrate for the inclusion of *Shichi-go-san* festivities into Nakayama-dera's calendar of events.

There are two competing issues at stake in Joen's characterization of Japanese religions and the changes that have taken place at Nakayama-dera: one involves an interactive process where customs, practices, and doctrine melt and merge into larger systems or create new forms altogether and another involves an intentional appropriation for a specific purpose. There is a fluidity and spontaneity in the first example that comes with the mingling of new traditions with already existing traditions. In the second, an ideological force applies pressure on an existing tradition, forcing an inclusion or making an alteration for some sort of gain. The theories of syncretism circulating in Japanese studies overlook this distinction and require some correction

¹²¹ Hayashi Shûjûn, the head priest of Ôbara Shrine in the village of Fukuchiyama, about an hour from Kyoto, offered an explanation that revolved around the issue of transnationalism. While he could not provide dates, or even eras, when the shrine began to observe *Inu no hi*, he suggested Shintô traditionally embraced ideas developed in foreign cultures, therefore *Inu no hi* was not at all out of place in the ritual calendar of the shrine. Earlier, when I inquired where visitors to Ôbara shrine came from, expecting to hear they made trips from Kyoto, Osaka, and perhaps Nara, he emphasized the shrine's *hara-obi* traveled to distant lands, places like my North America, as parents of pregnant daughters living abroad visited the shrine to purchase its amulets and *hara-obi* for their daughters overseas. Hasui Ikuji, the head priest of Waraten-jin, acknowledged that although China and Japan shared a similar calendar, the custom of the dog as a symbol for easy childbirth was strictly a Japanese interpretation.

Combinatory Cult or Layers or Fusion?

In Alan Grapard's study of the "shrine-temple multiplex" of Kasuga Shrine, located in the city of Nara next to Kôfukuji, the Buddhist temple with which it has been closely associated since the eighth century, he posits Kasuga *shinkô* (belief and practice) is an amalgamation of elements of Shintô and Buddhist doctrine blended into a "combinative cult."¹²² In fact, for Grapard, Japanese religiosity is "combinative" in that all systems contain traces of Shintô, Buddhism, and sectarian practices. What is consistent throughout religious practice in Japan is the fact that cultic practices are all rooted in specific sites. Grapard's work in general sensitizes the reader to issues of space and Japanese religiosity, where territory and landscape are the basis for the genesis of entire "cultural systems." Rituals and institutions, Grapard argues, articulate the ideologies of the social and economic forces and assertions of legitimacy and power that are associated with the "combinative systems" harnessed to the sites.¹²³

This characterization of syncretism in Japanese religions meshes with Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's model of an over-arching system in which all differentiated practices that have appeared in Japanese religions throughout history – Shintô, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shamanism, Folk Religion – are fused together.¹²⁴ Ohnuki-Tierney tends to play down the importance of space and ideology in religious practice; instead, treating the issue from an anthropological perspective, she emphasizes that the orthodoxy verses orthopraxy divide must be addressed when we evaluate how religious systems in Japan operate. What occurs at the institutional level of doctrine

¹²² Allan G. Grapard, *The Protocol of the Gods: A Study of the Kasuga Cult in Japanese History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 1.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ohnuki-Tierney, *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan*, 145-49.

and bureaucratic organization varies considerably to what occurs on the ground by laypersons.

Ohnuki-Tierney acknowledges that there are numerous instances where Shintô and Buddhism share similar symbolic worlds, and oftentimes the same space; however, organizational frameworks and theological principles supporting the institutions remain relatively distinct. At the level of practice, however, there is a decidedly clear “division of labor” where Buddhism handles issues of death and Shintô treats concerns of birth and life. This division ensures that Japanese people do not confuse their *kami* with their Buddhas.

In this regard, Ohnuki-Tierney evokes the model of a “fused” system, drawing on examples of devotion to deities that oversee health issues. To the layperson the deities’ association with sectarian systems is irrelevant; what is important are the boons received from a deity. For the scholar, the importance lies in the fundamental symbolic structure on which the deities are patterned, a structure of dualisms that involves including foreign deities into the Japanese pantheon (inside versus margin) and negotiations of ritual purity (purity versus impurity). The formula Ohnuki-Tierney develops in expressing the symbolic structure is the same equation that figures in daily hygiene practices that I discuss in the first chapter of this dissertation. Ultimately, the process of syncretism involves an interface between two decidedly different themes in Japanese religions: ritual purity and assignments of meaning given to deities.

It must be noted, Ohnuki-Tierney herself admits she falls into the “fused” camp of the ongoing debate about syncretic processes in Japan. The other camp led by Robert Smith sees multiple layers of traditions operating simultaneously.¹²⁵ In this

¹²⁵ Ohnuki-Tierney refers to Robert J. Smith, *Ancestor Worship in Contemporary Japan* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1974), 214-215; Itoh Mikiharu, "Shinkô seikatsu" in *Nihonjin no seikatsu* (Kôza Hikaku Bunka, Vol. 4), ed. By T. Umesao

practitioner-focused interpretation, the strands of traditions are not blended together, but operate on discrete levels simultaneously. Much has to do with how the insiders view their gods and their wholehearted embracing of different types of practices.

In contrast to Ohnuki-Tierney, whose research highlights the broad structural framework of symbol under which many aspects of Japanese daily life operates, Grapard focuses on the exercises of power and hegemony between influential institutions. While their approaches differ, both scholars agree on the primacy of systems of ritual purity in supporting cultural systems.



Figure 3-5 Lateral view of Obitoke-dera's contemporary *hara-obi*.

Another side of this issue is illuminated, however, in a special exhibition, “Shinto Gods and Buddhist Deities: Syncretic Faith in Japanese Art” (*Shinbutsu shûgô*) at the Nara National Museum in the spring of 2007. In this exhibition, the curators trace back the material evidence of the process of syncretism to the sixth

(Tokyo: Kenkyûsha, 1976), 215; and, Tsurumi Kazuko, *Kôkishin to nihonjin* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1972).

century with the construction of Tōdai-ji in 749, around the middle of the Nara period (710 – 84) when efforts to make Buddhism a state religion reached a peak. The deity Hachiman, tutelary *kami* of Buzen no kuni (now Ōita Prefecture), was called upon to assist in the building of the temple's great Buddha, and the image came to be known as "Hachiman Daibosatsu," the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman. The architects behind Nara Buddhism forced this fusion through architecture, image, and ritual. Other examples abound, such as *kami*, originally imagined as spirits that animated rivers, rocks, mountains, and trees, were assigned human attributes due to the influence of Buddhist statuary of famous figures and representations of bodhisattvas. The processes this exhibition so clearly illustrate reveal a self-conscious fusion of the traditions, and refute the notion that the *kami* and the buddhas are clearly distinguished in Japanese religiosity. This is reflected by the attitude that the Japanese do not differentiate between Buddhism and Shintō, a refrain I heard constantly from laity and ritual specialists alike during my fieldwork in Japan.

In an interview with one woman at Nakayama-dera, she referred to the power of the "*kami sama*" that she drew on throughout her pregnancy, although she did not wear the *hara-obi* daily. The bodhisattva Kannon is the main image of worship at Nakayama-dera. I did not encounter any other mix up of this degree and upon reflection, I suspect the term "*kami*" is the most convenient way for this individual to identify with and to personalize the spiritual force from which she gathers her strength and confidence to carry on with the pregnancy and meet the demands of labor and delivery. It speaks more to a personal system of meaning and religiosity, a system built on existing spiritual resources.

That same day, I spoke with another woman - a pregnant mother of one child - who also wore Nakayama-dera's *hara-obi* because it gave her a sense of security (*anshin*). I pressed her on her understanding of the divinity enshrined at the temple,

hoping to hear how she relied on its power during labor, and perhaps even elicit another reference to the "kami sama," but she politely overlooked the absurdity of my questions. This instance reveals how *kamis* and Buddhas did not even figure into this individual's experience.

The processes occurring in Nakayama-dera and Obitoke-dera, with the inclusion of *Shichi-go-san* festivals and other ceremonies generally considered to be covered by Shintô doctrinal principles, combined with the marketing strategies, medical advice, and maternity concerts have nothing to do with combinatory, or layered, or fused religious systems. Symbolic structures of inside and margins and purity and impurity are not present in these cases. What occurs in these instances is similar to the efforts of Matsunaga Akira to reclaim childbirth as a uniquely Japanese event and speak to Carette and King's concerns about the "spiritual takeover" of religion by corporations. Here, though, the takeover involves folkloric elements and speaks more to a cultural trend rather than a religious process.

The relationship between dogs and childbirth is expressed in another manner by the administrators of Obitoke-dera sheds more light on the issue of syncretism. In Japanese folkways the dog is also considered to possess powers to ward off evil, powers called *mayoke*. Kuramoto Gyôkei, the head priest of Obitoke-dera, propounded these canine supernatural abilities in an interview, perhaps as an advertisement of the popular item with the cute nickname *omamori wanchan*, "doggy amulet."¹²⁶ *Omamori wanchan* is based on *hariko inu*, the *papier mache* figure of a

¹²⁶ The powers associated with amulets and other material items is a topic present in many studies of Buddhism in Asia. For example, Geoffrey Samuel points to pre-colonial Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand, countries, Theravadin in orientation, where practice of Buddhism tends to be scholarly in orientation, with an emphasis on monasticism. In these locations, magical and shamanistic practices are considered inferior and potentially subversive. Samuels observes the distinction between "clerical Buddhism" and magic clearly at play in these countries. In Tibet, however, the relationship between the two modalities is reversed: clerical Buddhism is considered

dog placed near a sleeping baby to protect the child.¹²⁷ Obitoke-dera's hand-made, purse-sized dog gives us an insight into the way magic and miracle constitute a part of Obitoke-dera's symbolic world. It also mirrors the marketing of religious strategies present in Japan's maternity industry that I have discussed throughout this dissertation.

Obitoke-dera although currently a member of the Kegon sect with Tōdai-ji as its head temple (*daihonzan*), was a Shingon temple from some point in the Edo period until Shōwa 27, explaining why its head priest comfortably discussed matters dealing with the supernatural. Shingon Buddhism under Kūkai (or Kōbō Daishi as the leader is known posthumously) originally provided a spiritual means to cultivate practitioners' ability to attain enlightenment in their bodies (*sokushin jōbutsu*).¹²⁸ The theory of *sokushin jōbutsu* distinguishes itself from practices and doctrine of other Buddhist sects. Joseph Kitagawa argues Kūkai's formulation of *sokushin jōbutsu* was influenced by shamanistic Buddhist practices popular at the time, where practitioners developed superhuman powers through reciting magic formulas (*dhāraṇī*). Kūkai, himself, underwent several years of austerities to acquire these powers so he could

subordinate to the prevailing type of practice that Samuel calls "shamanic Buddhism," Please see Geoffrey Samuel, *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993). Stanley Tambiah also explores this distinction in *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) as does Michael M. Ames in his essay "Magical-animism and Buddhism: A Structural Analysis of the Sinhalese Religious System," in *Journal of Asian Studies* 23 (June 1964): 21-52.

¹²⁷ Families traditionally placed a *hariko inu* at the lowest level of the *Hina Matsuri* display of dolls set up on "Girl's Day" celebration held on 3 March, though modern day doll sets do not usually include the figure of a dog.

¹²⁸ Kūkai and Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works, Unesco Collection of Representative Works: Japanese Series* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 6.

perform miracles.¹²⁹ Kitagawa further characterizes the type of Buddhism Kūkai learned in China as a “magico-soteriological aspect of Esoteric Buddhism.”¹³⁰

Kuramoto has also undergone initiation sessions where he practiced austerities so it is not surprising he sees the potential of magic and miracle. What stands out in this example is the idea that an aspect of the religious tradition is manipulated into a clever marketing gimmick very similar to the yogic and Zen-like postures in Sophrology. Reader and Tanabe, whose work on popular religious practices and practical benefits (*genze riyaku*) I introduced in Chapter One would consider *omamori wanchan* a clever entrepreneurial exercise to appeal to young Japanese women, but a deeper process of deracination is at work, where a symbol is ripped out of its cultural context and showcased as a cute (*kawaii*) trinket. Nam-Lin Hur’s concern that the “cultural ghetto of spiritual communitas” fueled by cheap displays of commodities peddled around the temple complex of Sensō-ji bespeaks a condition of alienation deserves consideration in this example.

To conclude this discussion: an entry in the *Nihon saniku* sheds light how one community adopted *Inu no hi* as the day for pregnant women to tie their *hara-obi*. In the community of Kitaamabegun, Ōita Prefecture, families originally selected an auspicious day (*kichinichi*) that fell during the fifth month of pregnancy to celebrate the wrapping of the *hara-obi*; however, in the twentieth year of Meiji (1888), a doctor by the name of Sōda introduced *Inu no hi* to the community, after he discovered the

¹²⁹ Hori Ichirō discusses rigorous forms of asceticism including abstinence from grains, subsistence on diets of bark and chestnuts, and being buried alive in a quest to realize *sokushin jōbutsu*, performed by *gyō-nin*, religious practitioners considered Japan's prototype shamans. Please see "Self-Mummified Buddhas of Japan: An Aspect of Shugen-Dō (Mountain Ascetic) Sect." *History of Religions* 1, no. 2 (1962): 222-42.

¹³⁰ Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa, *On Understanding Japanese Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 195.

practice during a trip to Tôkyô.¹³¹ From that point on, the people of the community wrapped the *hara-obi* on *Inu no hi*. While the artificiality of this is striking, there probably is no cleaner, clearer example of processes of syncretism than this example and I do not think it is unreasonable to assume that this is one way by which *Inu no hi* came to be included in ritual cycles of temples and shrines.



Figure 3-6 *Hariko inu*, the *papier mache* figure of a dog, customarily associated with protection of babies.

In the following section, I focus in on the ritual world of the *hara-obi* as it is expressed in the safe childbirth services conducted by Obitoke-dera and Nakayama-dera and Suiten-gu.

The Ritual World of the *Hara-obi*

On that bright, warm early autumn day in September 2006, my family and I milled about in Obitoke-dera's waiting room. The service began with a rushed priest ushering us into the *honden*. First he offered an incense pot from which we extracted a pinch and rubbed the substance between our hands to purify ourselves; then, he told us to sit in the front row of a block of chairs arranged in a rectangular pattern before the altar. The priest instructed me to press my hands together, a gesture called *gasshō*, and bow to the altar every time I heard him recite my name.

¹³¹ Onshi zaidan boshi aiiku kai, *Nihon saniku shūzoku shiryō shūsei*, 89.

He first spent considerable time mixing what appeared to be ink with a calligraphy brush. When he carved out symbols in the air above his head, after he had tapped the inkpot three times, I noticed water dripping from the bristles. He performed this series of actions three times, reciting an invocatory prayer all the while. At the section of the prayer that identified the petitioners, he stumbled over my husband's multi-syllabic name, but quickly recovered with clear readings of my name, our Kyoto address, the date of my birth, and my age. I heard my age recited frequently throughout the service. While he was preparing the "ink," a priest and another couple at the back of the room distracted me. The priest was leading them through the same service for safe childbirth.

My attention was brought back to our service as the priest then intoned a sūtra, the *Rishukyô*, and accompanied the sonorous chanting with periodic strikes to a gong and clashes of hand cymbals. This recitation continued for quite some time, the vibrations emanating from his chanting and clashing travelled through my body. The noise reached a crescendo and then abruptly ended, with the priest ringing a set of bells.

We were then led behind the altar to the image of Jizô, in front of which I sat in *seiza* position, my legs tucked under my body. My husband and daughter sat behind me. The priest handed me a bell and commanded me to strike it twice. He continued intoning prayers, punctuating them with readings of my name. Then he had me stand to the left of the statue facing him and in this position he lectured me on the attributes of the image.

The image, explained the priest, anchored Obitoke-dera to Kôyasan, the headquarters of the sect, and reflected Kôbô Daishi's concern about women's issues, especially matters pertaining to childbirth. That seemed like an odd assertion, considering Shingon doctrine did not permit women to visit Kôyasan up until well

into the Meiji period (1868-1912). Furthermore, the temple was affiliated with the Kegon school. At any rate, my family and I circumambulated the image of Jizô, our hands in *gasshô*.

As the couple behind us took their places at the foot of the image of Jizô, the priest led us out of the inner sanctuary and back into the altar room where he seated us at a small table. An older, retirement-aged couple waited inside the *honden* for what I assumed to be a memorial service (*mizuko kuyô*) – another of Obitoke-dera’s specialties – for a child they had lost, either through abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirth. From under the table, the priest produced a sample of the package I had purchased and barrelled into a monologue explaining how to handle each of the items.

He began with the two rectangular paper *ofuda*. The temple would later mail me the larger, 3 inch by 8-inch amulet displaying the characters “Jizô hôgyoku toku,” which can be roughly translated as “the *fuda* manifesting the belief of the bodhisattva Jizô.” These words appear in no Buddhist dictionary, suggesting the temple has taken liberties with this terminology. I was to place this *ofuda* in a high place in my room, facing the sunlight. The information handout instructed women to stand the *ofuda* on a Buddhist household altar (*butsudan*) or a household shrine (*kamidana*) and to make offerings of pure water. In brackets though, the words “but any high place will do” were added, indicating the temple’s awareness that many households no longer possessed these items. I was to insert the smaller divinatory *ofuda* into my *hara-obi* and wear it close to my skin. This amulet, a strip of white paper folded into six sections, had been carefully folded inside an envelope. The characters “*eki san obi*”, literally translated as “divination birth belt,” were printed on it and an image printed on each section. A flat box contained two pastel-colored offertory sweets (*gosaemon*) which were to be consumed by my family and I when I donned the

hara-obi. I was to carry the colourful embroidered amulet (*omamori*) in my wallet or purse.

The priest appeared to warm up when I explained I had received the same service two years ago, holding up my daughter as proof. He welcomed me to bring her back to the temple to perform *Omiyamairi*, an invitation that surprised me, as this is considered a Shintô celebration for families to visit a shrine to present the newest addition to their household to the *kami*. It usually occurs about thirty days after birth for boys and thirty-one days for girls. He concluded the service with another invitation, this one for a piano and opera concert on October 15th to be held in the annex of the temple. I noticed on the announcement that the concert, intended for pregnant women and their families, was co-sponsored by Benesse Corporation, the publishing house of a popular maternity magazine and series of children's books. And that concluded the service.

Patterns and Themes in Rituals of Safe Childbirth

Revolving Door Ritual and "Patterns Danced on the Ground"

The ritual I describe is one example of a service for safe childbirth; Nakayama-dera and Suiten-gu share similar patterns, structures, and paraphernalia. Also, a similar framework guides the steps of all the services. This is the general structure of the ritual.

First, the secular, material, and mundane actions of filling out application forms followed by handing over fees open the gateway to the religious world of safe childbirth services. Also, as I have previously discussed, the space surrounding the inner precincts of the temple or shrine is a commercially charged maternity marketplace.

The next phase involves the creation of a bridge by the ritual specialist which petitioners cross in order to traverse the boundary between the secular world of cash

payments, application forms, and brand names and the pure and sacred space where the bodhisattva or deity's power is accessed. At Obitoke-dera, incense provided the purifying medium. The Shintô priests at Suiten-gu waved a *gohei*, a baton with white paper streamers, above the bowed heads of the supplicants. At Nakayama-dera, however, the priest purified his own hands with incense, then waved a *gohei* over the supplicants' heads, in a complex gesture incorporating purifying strategies from two religious worlds. These actions cleanse the stains left by bureaucracy and money.

Recitation provides the aural backdrop of all the services. At Nakayama-dera, the priest recited the *Kannon-gyô*, the twenty-fifth chapter from *The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law (Hokke-kyo)* in which the qualities of the bodhisattva Kannon, characterized here with the synesthetic appellation "Regarder of Cries of the World," are expounded. Suiten-gu's service included recitation of a Shintô prayer (*norito*), announcing the tutelary *kami*'s grace and power. At Obitoke-dera, as I mentioned previously, a recitation of the *Rishukyô* comprised a major portion of the service.¹³² The sūtra evokes acts and states of touching, loving, bodily bliss, and rapture – physical acts and states for the sentient being but higher states and acts for the bodhisattva.

And finally, a sacred swag bag, the items and objects of which are to be worn, inserted, wrapped, ingested, carried, read, or displayed, is handed over, a gesture that lets supplicants know the service is over. Priests spend considerable time explaining the praxis behind the items as these safe childbirth rituals have much to do with doing. The proper handling of things, as seen by Barbara Bolt, suggests a "productive materiality" that effects change and brings about results. On one level, the ritual I

¹³² Miyasaka Yûshô and Fukuda Ryôsei, eds. *Rishukyô* (Tokyo: Daizô Shuppan, 1990). An English translation of the sūtra can be found in Ian Astley-Kristensen, trans. *The Rishukyô: the Sino-Japanese tantric Prajñāpāramitā in 150 verses* (Tring, U.K. : Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1991).

participated in at Obitoke-dera is about mapping the celestial world of divinity and miracle onto the material world; on another level, the ritual is all about productivity.

Bolt, in her book *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, resurrects the term *methexis* to understand the relationship between the artist and the 'logic of practice' in the visual arts.¹³³ Representation suggests a one-to-one correlation of image and objectified based on an assumption that works of art are products of a system of signification. *Methexis*, on the other hand, suggests a performativity of process, or, "a pattern danced on the ground,"¹³⁴ in the creation of a work of art where actual production takes place.

This idea comes from Bolt's observations of artistic production in her native Australia. Ritual performed by indigenous Australians, Bolt argues, involves the anchoring of image and reality, to the extent that "ritual activities produce reality."¹³⁵ At an earlier time in Aboriginal history, before artists worked in acrylic and canvas, a concrete connection with the ground guided artistic expressiveness. Artists, following ritual prescripts, created paintings by spreading colored sand onto the ground. Rituals acted out through multi-media (dance, song, and painting) did not represent abstract ideas; they produced results.¹³⁶

Ritual efficacy is not an issue here. As I have discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation, Japan is one of the safest nations in the world to give birth and Japanese women are aware of this fact. What is the issue is the idea that the act of

¹³³ Originally, Pythagoras used the term *methexis* to characterize the relationship between the celestial and the terrestrial, a relationship he imagined was built on mutual participation and passage. With this idea, there is permeability between the two planes, and an active crossing between the two realms, where the ultimate goal is union with the divine.

¹³⁴ Bolt takes this phrase from Paul Carter, *The Lie of the Land* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), 84.

¹³⁵ Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

childbirth is a performativity of process. Bolt is fascinated by Vicki Kirby's discussion of dermagraphism – the body's ability to inscribe itself demonstrated by Charcot's theatrical experiments at Salpêtrière where the neurologist hypnotized a patient, then signed his name on the patient's arm with a rubber probe, commanding that the patient bleed through the signature.¹³⁷ At the appointed time, drops of blood indeed began to appear along the traces of the signature. Bolt sees this as the “monstrous performativity” of the body, where “the body simultaneously writes and is written in a transformative and material productivity.”¹³⁸ Childbirth is an act that produces and is produced. The gradual transmogrification a woman undergoes over a nine or ten-month period that climaxes with the shuddering out of another being is as monstrous as blood involuntarily appearing on an autographed forearm. In the work of art of a human life, nothing is representational, and the ultimate goal is production, as is the goal of rituals of safe childbirth.

Watery Worlds and Performative Bodies

For the services held in Buddhist temples, the medium of water is present as a substitute for ink. At Obitoke-dera, the priest drew characters in front of us as we watched but the gesture performed by the priest at Nakayama-dera was considerably more inclusive: he drew characters in the air above petitioners' bowed heads. Water is a cross-cultural symbol that incorporates ideas of bountifulness and creation, as expressed in the work of Mircea Eliade.¹³⁹ Notions of rebirth are also read into water. William LaFleur, whose work on *mizuku kuyô* rites investigates the seemingly conflicted relationship between Japanese Buddhism and abortion whom I discuss in

¹³⁷ Ibid., 172. This analysis is available in Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 61.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 172.

¹³⁹ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt, Inc., 1987).

detail in the fifth chapter of this dissertation,¹⁴⁰ brings to our attention the fact that water symbolism was not present in early Buddhist praxis and doctrine; the substance represented the concerns of this world interests (rain, crops, fertility), antagonistic to the “higher” concerns of asceticism and soteriology that shaped Buddhist orthodoxy. In order to attract and maintain a large flock of parishioners, whose donations at the very least supported temple complexes, priests inserted this powerful symbol and its matrix of rituals into their practices.

Shifting to present-day Japan, LaFleur points out how bodies of water are conceived of as maternal and womb-like, and also places where the dead can come back to life, hence the term *mizuko*, or child of the waters, given to aborted fetuses and stillborn infants. The *mizuko*, a human life that has never become solidified, travels from one state of liquidity to another, with the understanding that that life will be reborn at a later time. This spliced symbol of water and infant, on the one hand, resolves the moral crisis of terminating pregnancy; and, on the other hand, helps resolve a family’s guilt and grief.

While LaFleur manipulates water symbolism to foreground ritual services of *mizuko kuyô*, with a focus on pregnancy terminated or pregnancy gone wrong, how it figures in the world of rituals for safe childbirth, with the intention that the fetus will make a safe entry into this world, deserves some thought. First, the ephemerality of symbols etched in the air with water, as opposed to composed on paper in ink, bespeak one of the core ritual dilemmas of these services: the pregnant body too is fluid and once it has fulfilled its function, its relationship with these temples is over. It also evokes the watery world in which the fetus prepares to make its entrance into life.

Another theme that emerges in these rituals concerns the body. The most obvious body that comes to mind is the pregnant body, but another body, the body of

¹⁴⁰ LaFleur, *Liquid Life*.

the ritual specialist, is also an important feature. I have already discussed the pregnant body and its importance as an axis around which numerous worlds of meaning revolve. Now I will focus on the priestly body to shed light on the ritual processes of safe childbirth services.

Practice, performativity, authority, and efficacy are essential ingredients constituting the ritual world of the *hara-obi*. In the three services that I participated in, I noticed how the ritual specialists conducting the services continuously reinforced power relations between their organizations and supplicants. Priests decorously garbed in the religious uniform representing their sect impressed upon us their secret knowledge, training, and pedigree: they were intermediaries between us supplicants and the world of miracle and divinity and they represented institutions whose roots extend deep in Japan's history.

At Suiten-gu, my entire family watched in awe as the priest, resplendently clad in brilliant purple *hakama* (wide split trousers), theatrically donned a tall black hat before our eyes in a choreographed gesture similar to the costume change that occurs on the Nô stage. In both the religious and theatrical arenas, these costume changes cue the audience that it is about to make a passage to a world where reality is produced, a *methektic* passage.

Passages are a key element in *methexis*. Aesthetic principles governing the art world translate the movement from the human to the divine and back again as the transfer from matter to form. In the religious world of Buddhist temples and Shintô shrines that the *hara-obi* now finds itself, the passage, mediated by a ritual specialist and activated by a ritual of wrapping, returns to a journey between the celestial and the terrestrial.¹⁴¹ In this case, this strip of cloth is the material recognition, a receipt if

¹⁴¹ William R. Lindsey addresses this activation when he views the *hara-obi* from the perspective of the action of wrapping, where wrapping increases the "spiritual value"

you will, of a pregnant woman's petition to a bodhisattva or *kami*, to protect her and her fetus, as they both navigate the channels and passages of the journey towards birth.

Mythic and Royal births comprise the next section. In this section, I demonstrate how religious organizations incorporated *obi-iwai* rituals into their purview by drawing on the nation's earliest oral literature and history and what is the cultural process occurring with this appropriation.

The Mythic and Historical Worlds of the *Hara-obi*

A device used to protect a pregnant women's expanding belly can be traced to Japan's earliest oral literature, but whether or not it is the *hara-obi*, is debatable.

Kuramoto Gyôkei, the head priest of Obitoke-dera, addresses the issues of the origins of the *hara-obi* in a pamphlet his temple distributes:

in 320 CE, Emperess Jingû (Okinagatarashi hime) departed for Shiragi no Kuni under the divine protection of Sumiyoshi Shrine where she received an oracle from Amaterasu Ômikami, whom she consulted as she was saddened by the sudden death of her husband, the Emperor Chûai at Chikumurasaki no kashihenomiya. Her husband had traveled to Kyûshû to quell the Kumaso tribe. According to the oracle, the Emperor's life could be retrieved if a campaign against the Korean kingdom was undertaken.

As she was pregnant, she wrapped a *sarashi no obi* around her stomach to protect the fetus. The campaign was effective, but on the trip back, it appeared as if the Empress was going to give birth, so she tied a stone to both ends of the *obi* to stop the progression of labor. She safely returned to Chikumurasaki and gave a felicitous birth to a prince at the place called Umi. When the imperial prince turned three-years-old, he was crowned the Emperor Ôjin. After his death, he became the *kami* of good fortunes at war, Hachiman. This is how Hachiman belief began.¹⁴²

In this pamphlet, Kuramoto links the tradition to Japan's mythic origins firmly rooted in the nation's Shintô tradition. During an interview, he repeated this story which he based on the *Kojiki* and emphasized the *hara-obi* was a purely Japanese invention and

of the thing wrapped by imparting "human values and concern." Please see *Fertility and Pleasure: Ritual and Sexual Values in Tokugawa Japan*, 124.

¹⁴² Gyôkei Kuramoto, "Iwata Obi Belief and Obitoke Jizô," (Obitoke-dera: undated).

a product of Shintô. The pamphlet outlines the shared Shintô-Buddhist history of the *hara-obi* with a table showing *Iwata obi* belief supervised by Sumiyoshi Shrine in Japan's antiquity and taken over by Obitoke-dera in the Heian period. What is more, Kuramoto paints a very clear picture of the form and function of the device Empress Jingû used to halt her labor.

Ôbayashi Michiko refers to the same passage in the *Kojiki* but stresses the origin of the pregnancy belt cannot be determined because the shape and function of the item as we know it today differs greatly from the description of it in the myth.¹⁴³ In fact, the main focus in *The Kojiki* rests on the stones that Empress Jingû attaches to her skirt at the waistband, which, as Donald Philippi, one translator of the text, suggests, is most likely an ancient method to postpone birth based on principles of magic.¹⁴⁴

In this example of the head priest of a temple rooting an item his temple purveys deep into the nation's earliest oral literature, it suggests the strategy of Akira Matsunaga rooting his method of natural labor and delivery to the Zen tradition. It also parallels with Nakayama-dera and the department store model on which its head priest developed the temple. In this instance, however, Kuramoto Gyôkei etches the temple's template on the mythic/historical points readily identifiable by the Japanese.

On the twenty fourth day of April, the temple holds a Buddhist memorial service for Ono no Komachi, the Heian period *waka* poet considered the most beautiful woman in Japan, who enlivens the nation's canonical literature, Nô drama, and poetry. It turns out that a source dating from 1675, *The Collection of Famous Places of the Southern Capital*, contains an image of a shrine erected to Ono no Komachi on land now owned by Obitoke-dera. The service is conducted next to a

¹⁴³ Ôbayashi, "Osan konjaku."

¹⁴⁴ Philippi, *Kojiki*.

parking lot where the shrine is housed. A line of priests recite a sūtra (again the *Rishukyō*). A touching part of the ceremony occurs when the priests let paper leaf-shaped cutouts with Sanskrit characters float from their hands. And finally, a dancer costumed like Ono no Komachi at various intervals in her long life performs a few numbers on the wooden walkway surrounding the temple. While the service is not hugely popular, it attracts media attention; more importantly, however, it anchors the temple deep in Japan's "illustrious" past, giving it "classical" credibility.

Obitoke-dera dates itself back to the mid ninth century with the unravelling of the *hara-obi* of Empress Somedono. The next historical figure to appear in the temple's illustrious lineage occurs in the Edo period, where Oraku no Kata, concubine of Hidetada, the second Tokugawa *shōgun*, after praying at Obitoke-dera, had an easy delivery. Her son would later become the third *shōgun*. Throughout the Edo period, high-ranking women experienced easy deliveries after praying at the temple, as depicted in the temple's origin story (*engi*).



Figure 3-7 The shrine to Ono no Komachi. It is only open to reveal the image of the poet on April 24, the day of her memorial service.

This is verified by documents the temple displays in glass cases in its *honden*. An article from 1707 records the prayer for safe childbirth recited for the concubine of the sixth shogun Ienobu. Two other prayers, one dated in the year 1770 for the wife or concubine of Karasuma Dainagon no Kita no Kata no Yasuhime Sama and the other from 1851 for the wife or concubine of Fushimi no Miya Sundokoro are also displayed. The identities of these women are not clear as they could be wives or concubines.¹⁴⁵ With these documents and records, the legends of the temple are transformed into fact, adding to its appeal. Also, the paper trail begins when the custom of the *hara-obi* filtered into the pool of commoners in the Edo period, suggesting that marketing techniques we notice today were well in place.¹⁴⁶

The *hara-obi* is originally identified with the nobility and the elite. Literary evidence from mainly diaries from after the Heian period contains accounts of the *obi*, but Ôbayashi Michiko stresses that the items mentioned bear no resemblance to the *hara-obi* used today. One entry in the diary of a woman of the Fujiwara family refers to the donning of the *obi* in the seventh month of pregnancy. And, in a record from 1,230, a consultation with a fortune-teller to determine the best day to don the *obi* is documented. There is also evidence that women of the high-class warrior society continued the custom of wrapping the *obi* during pregnancy. The material used by the nobility was silk and it was red and white. At some point, commoners adopted the practice; however, Ôbayashi asserts it cannot be determined through literature when this occurred. By the time the custom reached the common people, it was a common cloth wrap.

Shifting to the present, Obitoke-dera displays letters from the Imperial family acknowledging they received the *Iwata obi* and *omamori* the temple offered during

¹⁴⁵ Kawahara Yoshiô, Sekine Shunichi and Inabata Rumiko, "Obitoke-Dera," (Nara: Kyôdô Seihan Insatsu Kabushiki Gaisha, 1997).

¹⁴⁶ Ôbayashi, "Osan konjaku," 28-29.

the pregnancies of Empress Michiko in 1959, Mikasa no Miya Tomohito Royal Highness in 1981, Princess Kiko, in 1991, and Princess Masako in 2001. During Princess Kiko's pregnancy that produced a son in the fall of 2006, the temple again sent an offering off a *hara-obi* and an amulet. Offerings such as these require in response an obligatory letter of thanks.

Nakayama-dera, the origin myth of which claims that Shōtoku Taishi constructed the temple, is considered to be the first site for Kannon worship in the county. Originally, designated as the first temple along the Saikoku pilgrimage route, the Emperor Kazan assigned the temple to the twenty-fourth place when he reconstructed the circuit in the tenth century. This temple has also received visits from members of the Imperial family and members of the Shogunate, in particular Minamoto Yoritomo (1147-1199). Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536-1598) prayed there and his son, Hideyori was safely born. And finally, the mother of the baby who would assume the title of Emperor Meiji received a service from the temple when she was pregnant. Based on these connections with the imperial family and the Shogunate, the temple claims it is the renowned temple for safe childbirth in the nation. And, the final seal of approval is its designation as a site of religious worship by imperial decree of the Emperor.

Hara-obi as Booty?

Japan is a county that has few natural resources to boast of. Aside from natural hot springs punctuating the country's landscape that local tourist boards milk for all their worth (it should be noted that owners of hot spring resorts have been known to exaggerate the mineral composition of very hot water) and a few herds of beer-fed cattle, the nation relies on the resources of others. This is ingrained in the Japanese. Considering this tiny, island nation boasts the world's more powerful economy after the United States, the ability of the country to generate a globally competitive GNP

and function with so few resources is quite remarkable. What is even more remarkable is how the resourceful nation plunders its myth and history, its traditions, customs, and folkways and transforms them into commodities. This is precisely what has been done to the *hara-obi*.

When we think of why cultures appropriate other culture's resources or treasures, or people, one of the main reasons involves subjugation by bringing the peripheral culture into the ruling culture's center of authority. Seized objects that are repositioned in the victor's capital, Richard H. Davis argues, "can serve as a figurative incorporation of that opponent's polity."¹⁴⁷ The bestowing of plunder also feeds into subjugation, as "worthy recipients" of looted objects become incorporated into a regime's power structure as they willingly accept the booty, gestures that acknowledge their benefactor's superiority. In contemporary times, the incorporation of non-Western objects into a Western system of aesthetic valuation by curating the objects into museum displays and hanging them on the walls of the wealthy, are, as Davis suggests, not the stuff of conquest, but the stuff of "Western economic dominance."¹⁴⁸ But what are we to think about the concept of a nation looting its own resources and redistributing them? What happens to an item like the *hara-obi* as it is culturally trafficked from a nation's earliest oral literature to the midsection of a contemporary Japanese woman? What does this mean for the pregnant woman who visits these sites to purchase the band?

History, tradition, and culture are grafted onto the *obi* transforming it into an indispensable item during pregnancy. The Japanese woman's pregnancy is transported to the worlds of the nation's myth, history, classical literature, and religious traditions. For the most part, a healthy pregnancy is a relatively mundane process, and the

¹⁴⁷ Davis, *Lives of Indian Images*, 68.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

discomfort and inconvenience – numerous trips to the washroom and doctor’s appointments – makes it a slightly tedious condition one has to put up with for nine or ten months. The history and tradition these temples sell along with the *obi* conveys her pregnancy to an entirely different plane of meaning. A woman is not just producing a baby, an addition to her family; she is producing a member of the nation.

The *hara-obi* also collapses two very distinct worlds: on the one hand it represents custom and popular wisdom – local knowledge passed down by midwives and mothers – and on the other hand, it is a romanticized item associated with miracle, magic, Japan’s elite and “illustrious” past and imperial present. It not only signifies the overlay of culture over a physiological process, it represents the cultivation of a new member of the nation and the continuation of the nation’s customs and traditions.

A final note: many of Japan’s resources exist in the nation’s imagination – they are often invented. Such is the case of the *hara-obi*, where the maternity industry has created multiple legends over a strip of white cloth that may or may not have been used in antiquity and may or may not have a medical function, the topic of the next section.

Incidentally, Umi in Fukuoka prefecture, the place where Empress Jingû gave birth, boasts a famous shrine for safe childbirth. At this shrine, though, the popular item to purchase is not the *hara-obi*, but a pair of stones that women place in a large pile collected on the beach after they give birth.

The *Hara-obi* in the Hospital and Department Store

When I visited the public health office (*hokenjo*) of my neighborhood ward office (*kuyakusho*) in Kyoto to inquire about the *hara-obi*, the consultant handed me a photocopied sheet of paper that gave instructions and diagrams on how to wrap the *obi*. The introduction of the instructions explained how the custom of the *hara-obi* has existed in Japan since antiquity and associates it with prayers for safe childbirth

performed at temples and shrines.¹⁴⁹ In this pamphlet, the point is raised that spiritual and ceremonial meanings are attached to the *obi*, referred to as *iwata obi*, but there is an explanation that suggests the item is useless from a medical perspective. The midwife who assisted my obstetrician recommended I wear a *hara-obi* because she was concerned that my midsection required support as my pregnancy advanced.

While the *hara-obi* is an item not out of place in a medical setting, there is the underlying notion that the item has little effect from the perspective of medicine. In fact, as early as the Edo period, the custom of wrapping the *hara-obi* was considered as having no medical value.¹⁵⁰ Some of the reasons why women have worn the *hara-obi* can be placed at the level of pseudo-medicine and superstition, such as tightly wrapping the *hara-obi* around the women's midsection stops the fetus from growing too big. Ôbayashi recounts an interview with a midwife who admitted she was instructed during her training that the *hara-obi* had no medical value, but she followed the local customs and views of the community where she worked, one of which that held that the shape of the womb resembled the shape of an egg. When women wrapped *obi* around their bellies, they reduced the size of the top part and enlarged the bottom part enlarged, which encouraged the fetus to rotate into the head down position, the proper presentation for travelling through the birth canal.¹⁵¹

The practical reasons for wrapping the midsection in an *obi*, however, had much to do with keeping the midsection warm, protecting the stomach, and providing support. In a booklet Nakayama-dera distributes to pregnant women, the section covering the *hara-obi* emphasizes it is an item meant, first and foremost, to preserve

¹⁴⁹ One page leaflet received in December 2006 from a consultant at a weekly drop-in clinic for pregnant women offered by the Public Health Office of the ward office for Kita district in Kyoto.

¹⁵⁰ Ôbayashi, "Osan konjaku," 29.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 28.

warmth.¹⁵² The text, which appears to be based on medical and scientific research, explains that a pregnant womb is highly “sensitive,” therefore the danger of miscarriage or premature labor is imminent. The *hara-obi* is a necessary prophylactic for this type of trauma. Furthermore, the *obi* helps women maintain their mobility, and effectively holds the fetus in a proper position. For second and third-time mothers, it proves support for the weakened abdominal wall. There is, however, an explanation emphasizing it is wrong to assume that it will prevent a fetus from growing too big, and warns women to avoid wrapping the band too tight, an action that could potentially harm the fetus because of reduced blood flow. No medical references are provided with these instructions and warnings.



Figure 3-8 Lesson on how to wrap the *Iwata-obi* from the maternity apparel catalogue of Inujirushi.

¹⁵² Nakayama-dera, "Ohara-Obi No Shikata to Go Ninshinchû No Kokoroe," (Takarazuka shi: Nakayama-dera, No date), 15-16.

The world of retail has also caught on to the *hara-obi* and anchors the item into its secular world. Inujirushi sells women's under garments and has a niche in maternity items. While the *hara-obi* that women are drawn to is the girdle type, the company does have a traditional style and also anchors the item in history, tradition, medicine, and religion. A section explaining *Inu no Hi* describes how the day is designated as the eleventh in a twelve-day cycle. It reiterates the dog's ability to give birth easily, as well as the animal's talismanic function to keep evil at bay as it protects babies. Moreover, it produces the statistic that about 85% pregnant women participate in celebrations on the day of the dog. There is no mention, however, how the organization came up with the figure.

The mini-catalogue also offers an explanation on the difference between “*hara-obi*” and “pregnancy band” (*ninpu obi*), where the traditional *obi* was once a red and white band of cloth. Because the item was inconvenient and difficult to wear, a “pregnancy band” was modified by, none other than the president of the company, the late Minetake Sendai and the marketing of it began from around Shōwa 15. Now, the claim in the catalogue goes, the *hara-obi* and the “pregnancy band” are “completely familiar” (*sukkari onajimi des ne!*), with the implication that the company's first president not only revolutionized the *hara-obi*, but also transformed it into a common, every day item.

For the most part, women I interviewed did not wear the traditional *hara-obi*, although the occasional grandmother-to-be insisted that she had – *kurushii* (difficult) was a common adjective used to sum up her pregnancy experience. I interviewed a mother who had recently given birth and had come to Nakayama-dera to offer her thanks for the safe delivery of her child and return the *hara-obi*. I was surprised when



Figure 3-9 “The *Hara-obi*: A Celebratory Item Passed Down from Ancient Times.” A leaflet informing women about the *hara-obi* distributed by the Public Health Center of Kita-ku, Kyoto.

she told me she had worn the traditional *obi* every day starting from the fifth month of pregnancy and that her obstetrician had performed the initial wrapping. Many members of the woman’s family were present, including a pregnant mother of a young child whom I assumed was her sister-in-law (I did not inquire about their relationship.) The woman’s mother actively participated in the interview, in fact the

entire family responded to my questions and asked some of their own; they were interested if women in foreign countries wore the *hara-obi*.

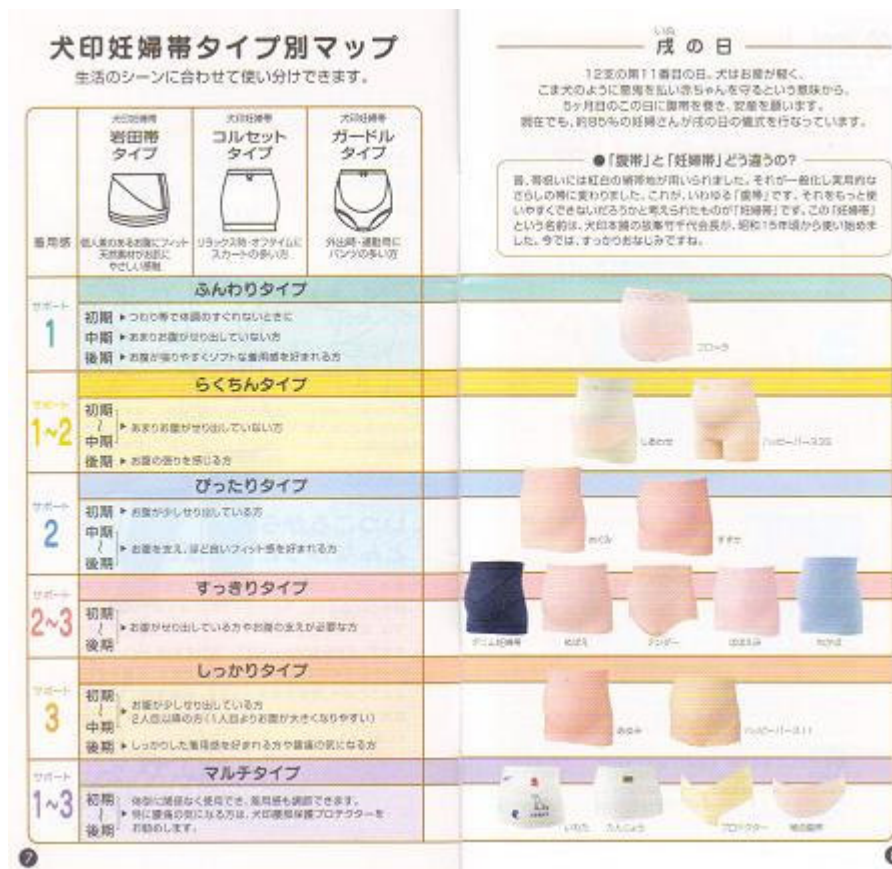


Figure 3-10 Inujirushi's typology of the "pregnancy band." This "map" also includes an explanation of *Inu no Hi* and the genealogy of the *Iwata-obi*.

This lively, engaged family made me reflect upon the *obi iwai* gatherings Ôtô discusses. They were occasions designed to coalesce a social network, to create a welcoming environment for the newest addition to the family and to the community. And as children were of this world, they were instrumental in bringing the existing members of this world closer together. This aspect of *obi iwai* did manage to seep its way into the ritual space provided by the major temples and shrines that have appropriated *obi-iwai*, at least with the families that were able to negotiate issues of scheduling and distance to gather together to make the visit.

Conclusion: Custom Becomes Cultural Trend?

The idea that history, tradition, custom, and medical theory have been galvanized to transform an object into a nationally recognized shorthand for pregnancy and childbirth demonstrates not only remarkable marketing skills on the part of the organizations that sell the item, but also speaks to the effectiveness of symbols. From the perspective of ritual, what has resulted from treating the pregnant woman like a commodity, her generative body has an exchange value?

Without falling too deeply into a rhetoric of decline, a few aspects of the pregnancy and childbirth experience that have vanished include the role women played in activating the ritual processes of the *hara-obi*; the close relationships that had to be forged in order to bring about new life into the community; and, the rich spiritual world women created to support pregnancy and childbirth. Ôtô Yuki describes a ritual described in the *Sanshûokugun saniku fûzoku zue* where the *sanba* cycles through a series of steps, including displaying the *obi* in the *tokonoma* or on a special seat to honor the *ubushi kami san*, the god of birth.¹⁵³ First, this type of ritual specialist no longer exists; and second, major temples and shrines have usurped this personal relationship between women and a private *kami*. Along with these losses, comes a flattening of a variegated religious world that addressed the concerns of local communities, a trend that began in the Tokugawa period discussed by Nam-lin Hur and that I shall go into more detail in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

In the same vein, as religious sites reinterpret the traditions and customs related to rituals of safe childbirth, they dilute the ritual function of the item, and in fact contribute to the alienation of Japanese society identified by Ama Toshimaru. Rituals of safe childbirth in Japan are now all about getting stuff. Women, in fact,

¹⁵³ Ôtô, *Ko Yarai*, 22.

need not even present their pregnant bodies to the sites to participate in the services. Advertisements placed by major religious organizations dispensing the item appear in pregnancy magazines inviting women to order amulets and sacralized *hara-obi* through the post.

本尊彫刻子安地蔵菩薩 (重要文化財)

日本最古安産・求子祈願霊場

安産のために

美智子皇后陛下
秋篠宮紀子さま
安産帯献納

子安山 帯解寺

安産祈願受付
午前8時半より午後4時半まで(毎日)
■安産祈願料 (出産月迄のご祈願料)
お守り・お札・腹帯を含む 12,000円
■郵送料(書留) 1,000円
※直接お参りになれない方は
下記の事柄を記したメモに
ご祈願料と郵送料を添え、
現金書留でお送りください。

・郵便番号・住所・電話番号
・妊婦及びご主人のお名前
・妊婦の年齢(生年月日)
・出産予定日

●くわしいお問い合わせ、お申し込みは下記へ
〒530-8444 豊後市今南町734
電話受付部 TEL. 0742-61-3661
FAX. 0742-63-0626
豊後寺管理 TEL. 03-3862-7715
[ホームページ] <http://www.obitokedera.or.jp>
[e-mail] info@obitokedera.or.jp

Figure 3-10 The advertisement for mail-in safe childbirth prayer service by Obitoke-dera in the magazine *Tamago kurabu*. The fee of 12,000 Yen includes *Omamori*, *Ofuda*, and a *hara-obi*. The postal fee is 1,000 Yen.

Are these visits to temples and shrines, then, just obligatory family outings to prestigious and historical sites, or, just a routine part of the activities associated with welcoming a baby into a family with a purchase of the latest stroller that hits the market, or a visit to Baby's 'R Us? Is a trip to a famous temple as spiritually meaningful as a splurge at an upscale maternity store? Basically, these famous temple and shrines cornered the maternity market by plundering the nation's wealthy resource of myth, literature, and folkways and forced their interpretation of pregnancy and childbirth on women.

The pregnant woman in Japan receives some benefits from rituals of safe childbirth and the fascinating material culture associated with them, the most important of which is an acknowledgment of the experience she is going through. These rituals affirm that she is in a special state, a "life transition," and they articulate in religious terms the importance of the event of her pregnancy. The price she pays, however, is great.

CHAPTER 4

THE CASE OF ÔBARA SHRINE'S PARTURITION HUT: INTERSECTION OF THE CROSSROADS OF THIS WORLD AND THE OTHER WORLD

Welcome to Ôbara's *Ubuya*

“Some families felt that childbirth should occur in some parts of the house but never in others. ‘The room next to the main one (*zashiki*) is called *arake*, and next to it is the kitchen (*daidokoro*). Any room off the *zashiki* or the *daidokoro* is called the sleeping-room (*nema*) and is used for sleeping and childbirth... In small two-room houses they said that delivery takes place in the *arake*, which in those houses actually serves as the main room, but never in the kitchen, where people eat. (Mori and Shimoda babies were born in the *nema*, Ochiai's in the *arake*. But I notice that the Moris are now eating in the *nema* where the baby was born, so the taboo cannot be very stringent. One may eat in the delivery room, I presume, but not deliver in the eating room.)”¹

In Miwa village, about an hour's drive from the city of Kyoto, a small, thatched hut with an earthen floor stands beside a medium-sized river. From its only entrance, one can see across the river the compound of Ôbara Jinja, the Shintô shrine that oversaw the religious needs of a small community, before it was absorbed into the larger administrative unit of Miwa. Up until early Taishô, the women of Ôbara gave birth in this hut, called an *ubuya*.²

Only the residents of the village organization called *machigaito*³—about a couple dozen households living near the shrine compound—used the *ubuya*. When the parturient woman felt the onset of labor, she made her way to the hut, accompanied by her husband. The husband erected a makeshift bridge by placing a ladder (*hashiko*) between the banks of the river that separated the residents of Ôbara from the *ubuya*.

¹ Smith, *The Women of Suye Mura*, 293.

² Keiko Morikawa, "Murabito no issei to girei," in *Minzoku no shison dai go go: Kyôtofu Amadegun Miwachô Ôbara Sôai Chôsa Sôgô Chôsa Hôkoku* (1994), 81.

³ Yagi, *Nihon no tsûka girei*, 271.

The community enjoyed a good pun, it seems, as the sound of the final Chinese character of *hashiko* – *ko* – is the same sound as the character for “child.” This crossing represented a desire for many healthy children. The couple scattered straw over the dirt floor of the hut and on top of the straw they spread a futon. After the baby was born, the mother buried the afterbirth (*ena*) in a corner and covered it with a rock so dogs could not get at it.



Figure 4-1 Ôbara shrine's *ubuya*. Photograph courtesy of Yagi Tôru.

The woman and her child remained in the *ubuya* for seven days and seven nights. The practice of giving birth in the parturition hut continued up until early Taishô. After that period, women gave birth at home, but they continued the custom of spending time with their neonates in the hut up until the Second World War. The community eventually reduced the period of confinement to three days and nights, and

then to only one night.⁴ The same custom of crossing the river on a ladder-bridge made especially for the purpose continued, with the woman carrying her baby in her arms the only modification.

Efforts to protect the site as a Tangible Folk Treasure (*Yûkei minzoku bunkazai*) have paid off as the confinement hut and its associated customs of parturition are under the radar of scholars in Japan. The community organized two symposia covering the customs and traditions supporting the *ubuya*, the proceedings of which were converted into publications. Panellists, ranging from scholars, to residents who used the *ubuya*, to health professionals, put forth the idea that the customs of parturition challenge conventional notions of pollution and impurity associated with childbirth. The *ubuya* is a sacred structure where parturient women of the community retreated to petition the *kami* of Ôbara shrine for a safe childbirth. Furthermore, they consider the period of confinement a time of recuperation for the post-parturient woman to heal from the trauma of birth and to bond with her child.

Throughout this dissertation, I have demonstrated how childbirth is a lens that focuses our attention on issues concerning gender, reproduction, and commoditization. Gender expectations and attitudes towards women are revealed during pregnancy and childbirth in the examples of government policy and medical practices I lay out in the second chapter of this dissertation. In the previous chapter, I show how major religious sites and commercial ventures harness history, tradition, custom, and medical theory to market their rituals and material culture of childbirth. Childbirth for these institutions is a moneymaking production and the pregnant woman a commodity. In this chapter, I focus on a specific site and its customs to reveal what childbirth means to the community of Ôbara. What does the ritual associated with the *ubuya* tell us about the community's understanding of itself and its

⁴ Morikawa, "Murabito no issei to girei," 79-89.

place in the larger scheme of things? Why are there customs of parturition surrounding childbirth and what claims does the community make to support these customs? What existential issues are worked out with the custom of parturition? A plurality of customs of parturition existed throughout the nation and women gave birth in *ubuya* in many localities. How has the community of Ôbara turned its *ubuya* into a museum? What processes are involved in transforming an *ubuya* into a cultural treasure and maintaining that designation?



Figure 4-2 An interior view of Ôbara Shrine's *ubuya*. The sickle hanging from the top of the entrance is a tool to drive away evil spirits and protect the birthing mother and newborn baby.

To answer these questions, I first draw on Jonathon Z. Smith's discussion of the locative versus utopian perspectives expressed in ritual and Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of a Berber house to show how space and cosmology are intertwined. I follow

this with a discussion of cosmology in Japanese religions and its relationship to childbirth. In this section, I introduce the figure of the *toriagebaasan*, a ritual specialist who assisted women in labor and offered spiritual assistance to the children she helped deliver. I argue her ritual function acts as a nexus between life and death. Then, drawing on material from the *Saniku*, I present an overview of parturition practices in Japan. Brigit Jordon's notion of "birth territory" is useful as a conceptual tool to understand why specific places are designated as appropriate for giving birth. Finally, I frame Ôbara's customs in the discourse of ritual purity I discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. The claims of the community and scholars that the customs of Ôbara's *ubuya* challenge conventional notions of ritual purity deserve consideration, considering they fly in the face of received scholarship about Japanese religions and its conflict with women and their fluids, a conflict couched supported by a "rhetoric of subordination."

Making Place: Ritual and the Space of the *Ubuya*

In his essay "The Wobbling Pivot,"⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith concludes his discussion of Mircea Eliade's structures of sacred time and space, focusing on problems of terminology and distinctions he himself has encountered. Smith has explored issues of ritual and sacred space using the dichotomies of centrifugal and centripetal, center and peripheral, closed/static society and open/dynamic society (Bergson) and has attempted to contextualize these issues through two modes of experiencing the world – the "compact" and the "differentiated" – introduced by Eric Voegelin.⁶ Smith is especially concerned about the tendency to fuse "centripetal-closed-locative view with the primitive, archaic society and the centrifugal-open-utopian with the modern." It goes without saying that societies that possess "a

⁵ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

centrifugal view of the world” emphasize the essentialness of "Center" whereas societies with an "open" view stimulate notions of liberty and potentiality, and hold periphery and transcendence as ideals. Smith finds, however, that forming a dichotomy “between a *locative* vision of the world (which emphasize[s] place) and a *utopian* vision of the world (using the term in its strict sense: the value of being in no place)”⁷ helps him resist categorizing societies as either “archaic” or “modern” based on dualistic attitudes, a flaw he identifies in Eliade’s organizing principle.

This becomes clearer when we look at the ideas presented in *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* where Smith emphasizes the necessity of place in the framework of ritual.⁸ Smith uses the example of the temple as a focusing device, a “marked-off space” where “nothing is accidental...[and] everything, at least potentially, demands attention.”⁹ At such a site, he argues, ritual objects and actions are sacralized because they become the focus of attention in such an intensified environment. Issues of the sacred and the profane are not activated; rather, “a category of emplacement” is invoked.¹⁰ Shifting the focus from the reified notion of the temple to the vernacular example of a dirt-floor parturition hut, this very same category is performed: it is all about locating a person’s being in space and a community’s position in the universe.

Of Passages and Journeys: The Production of Childbirth

Namihira Emiko echoes Smith’s assertion: The “space of the *ubuya*” itself is not particularly special or sacred; rather, the activity occurring around the space marks

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103.

⁹ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰ Ibid.

the site.¹¹ A family acts out a poignant ritual where a woman in labor, or as the tradition progressed, a woman carefully holding her newborn, is led across a temporary bridge constructed by her husband, the pair fully cognizant of the symbolism of their actions. The steps of the ladder over which they gingerly crossed represented the small community's ideal family, one consisting of many healthy children. The journey was an incredible passage between two worlds.



Figure 4-3 A votive placard (*emma*) of Ôbara shrine. It reads "Our wish is that this child is raised to be healthy."

There are two components to this space and the actions associated with it: 1) The *ubuya* can be seen from each household in the community; and 2) Every child of the community was either born in this space, or spent the first hours of its life in this space. Namihira emphasizes the implications of space, place, and ritual in the custom of Ôbara's *ubuya*: "surely, this is about "this world and the other world" (*kono yo to*

¹¹ Miwachô yakuba kikaku zaiseika, *Shinpojiumu Ubuya to-ku II*, ed. Kyoto-fu Amadagun Miwachô (Amadagun Miwachô: Miwachô yakuba kikaku zaiseika, 2000), 2-8.

ano yo). This incredibly important object turning up from the other world comes across a river on a ladder. Families continuously performed this process so as to make the journey visible for all to see.”¹²

In actuality, two performances were enacted with this custom: the performance of childbirth and the performance of cosmology, the journey a generative act on two levels. In the broader scheme, though, this journey also addressed the cosmological concerns of the community. More than just managing “existential anxieties” around birth, the community reaffirmed its association with the world of the *kami*, Buddhas, and ancestors, addressing the social need to manage the anxieties caused by the circle of life and death.

To return to Jonathan Z. Smith, in the ritual associated with Ôbara’s *ubuya*, the resolution of the dichotomy of the locative and the utopian is played out as the couple and the community establish the emerging life’s being-in-this-world. The journey across the ladder represents movement from the utopian to the locative.

Now, let us turn to an example where birth is considered an intensely private event and takes place inside a domestic dwelling in a culture that possesses similar cosmologic attitudes. We have seen how birth is implicated in a community’s concerns to organize its moral universe and confirm its relationship with the sacred world. What happens when the residential dwelling itself contributes to the organization of the social with the moral and the cosmic? How are attitudes towards childbirth shaped and what role does childbirth play in this type of setting?

Spinning the Cycle of Life And Death in a Stable

In Pierre Bourdieu’s structural analysis of the interior of the Kabyle house in his article “The Berber House,”¹³ he focuses on objects and activities and their distinct

¹² Ibid., 7.

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, “The Berber House,” in *Rules and Meanings*, ed. Mary Douglas (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973).

relationship to a symbolic system, which in turn guides the inhabitants' actions on one level, and provides the blueprint for consensual shaping and social patterning on a deeper level. The study illustrates how the interior of the Berber house parallels the world, or rather, inverts it, for the structure's threshold is the architectural pivot where the exterior becomes inverted. The cosmological and taxonomic classifications of the house hold the outside as the macrocosm and the inside, the microcosm, as the repository for the true set of values.

The split-level house is divided into two sections. The lower part is associated with that of living and life. Here the household's oxen, cows, donkeys, and mules are stabled; readily consumable food items and potable water for both humans and animals stored; and the "natural" and "biological" activities of sleep, sex, childbirth, carried out in the loft above the stable.¹⁴ Bourdieu associates the "light-filled, noble" upper level of the dwelling with humans, guests, male honor, fire, and culture. The symbolic items occupying this section are the rifle, the symbol of male honor and the protector of female honor, and the weaving loom, "the symbol of all protection."¹⁵ Here, the "cultural activities" of cooking and weaving take place. This house is a field of symbolic activity where "relationships of opposition are expressed through a whole set of convergent signs which establish the relationships at the same time as receiving their meaning from them."¹⁶

In this field of oppositions and homologies an even broader opposition is established between the inner world of the house and the outside world, with the house absorbing elements of the outside world into its system, and inverting them into the domestic objects they are meant to reflect. The fire in the household hearth built into the northern wall assumes the place of the sun; the wall of darkness, the place

¹⁴ Ibid., 99.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 99-100.

where invalids recover and the idle laze away a day, is located on the east side of the structure, the direction associated with goodness and light. Orientation and movement within the dwelling speak to larger concerns of proper orientation within the world and highly held values. The oppositions within also reflect oppositions without: the external world, associated with the masculine, is one of public life and agricultural work; whereas, the internal world is feminine, a world of intimacy and privacy. The mirror images of private and public and domestic and communal reach their fullest expression because the oppositions between the microcosm and macrocosm are reflected within the microcosm as well. Within this system of oppositions then, “it is therefore both true and false to say that the external world is opposed to the house as male is to female, or day to night, or fire to water, etc., since the second term of these oppositions divides up each time into itself and its opposite.”¹⁷ Almost like a prism within a prism, with each facet reflecting itself, the domestic and the exterior are “empires” where “[m]an is the lamp of the outside and woman the lamp of the inside.”¹⁸

There are a couple points worth mentioning about this analysis. The first has to do with Bourdieu’s taxonomy of nature and culture. When he wrote this study in the early 1970’s, he could blithely categorize sleep, sex, and childbirth – even death – as strictly natural events and not problematize why they occur in a loft over a dark stable housing beasts of burden. Childbirth, as I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, is a field of cultural activity and social embeddedness.¹⁹ On top of this,

¹⁷ Ibid., 104.

¹⁸ Ibid., 109.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault's study on sexuality reveals how sex is not an act but a discursive field through which power relations are enacted. Please see *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Vol. 1, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), pp. 136-140. Brigitte Steger focuses on cultural processes that occur in sleep in her articles ‘Getting Away with Sleep: Social and Cultural Aspects of Dozing in Parliament,’ *Social Science Japan Journal* Vol. 6 no. 2 (October 2003), 181-197;

fusing women with natural categories requires a more nuanced analysis than the simultaneous affirmation and negation Bourdieu obliquely sallies forth. Sherry B. Ortner addresses this issue in her essay “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” Here, she unpacks why women’s bodies, which “doom [them] to mere reproduction of life,” are seemingly closer to nature and demonstrates how their ability to reproduce coupled with their participation in cultural life gives them intermediary status between nature and culture.²⁰ This status, however, is still lower than that of men whom society generally considered as the more powerful sex capable of transcending natural modes of existence. One of the implications of this is a “feedback system” where the physiological and physical aspects that make women appear closer to nature (menstruation, childbirth, ability to lactate) become “embodied in institutional forms that reproduce her situation.”²¹ The weaving loom of the Berber house signifies this intermediary status: it is a creative tool which she operates to transform the raw material of wool into a wearable item but at the same times keeps her rooted in domesticity, removed from the political, religious, and economic worlds dominated by men.

The second issue concerns childbirth. Unlike the public production of life becoming presented by the parishioners of Ôbara shrine, birth in the Berber house takes place in the dark loft above the stable – the moist, feminine section of the house referred to by Bourdieu as “the house of animals.” While Bourdieu tells us very little

“Napping Through Class to Success: Japanese Notions of Time and Diligence”, in *Timing Daily Life in Contemporary Japan: special section of Time & Society* Vol. 15, nos. 2-3 (October 2006), 197-214 and in her edited book with Lodewijk Brunt. Please see *Night-time and Asleep in Asia and the West. Exploring the Dark Side of Life* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003).

²⁰ Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?," in *Women, Culture, and Society*, ed. M.Z. Rosando and L. Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 75-76.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

about childbirth in this article, the place of birth speaks volumes. It is the most private place in the community suggesting the woman of the household gives birth alone. However, a journey also occurs with birth in this community as it is thought that every third generation reproduces itself, “a proposition” Bourdieu cannot “demonstrate” in this study. Ancestors slowly make their way back to the homestead through the loft above the stable in this private performance of cosmology that borrows themes from Ôbara’s production of childbirth. In this article Bourdieu shies away from this idea because the circularity of the processes of life and death interferes with his arguments based on linear oppositions set inside a rectangular framework divided neatly in half into dark and light sections. In his more extensive ethnography of Kabyle society, he does broach the subject in more detail.²²

In the place of parturition of the Berber House, the circle of life and death “turns upon itself” in a private setting above a stable.²³ Ôbara’s *ubuya* has a public performance of cosmology undertaken by a family. In both these cultural contexts, the communities hold a locative view of the world. Childbirth – rooted to a specific place – roots a family in its place, as it expresses an ontological desire for emplacement.

People, Places, and Things: Expressing the Relationship Between Life and Death

With the example of the parturition hut at Ôbara, we see how a community performs its understanding of cosmology vis-à-vis childbirth. The public performance is like the Matryoshka doll of emplacement: a family brings back a child from the other world; the family asserts its standing in the community; and, the community re-establishes its position in the universe. Bourdieu’s research on the Kabyle illuminates how a community finds expression of its cosmological orientation in a dark, private place associated with nature. There, the world of the living and the world of the

²² Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

²³ Bourdieu, "The Berber House," 101.

ancestors converge. At the heart of both these cases, lies a concern for the maintenance of the relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead, which brings up a few points worth mentioning.

The first issue has to do with how communities envision the other world and the permeability between the two worlds. The second issue involves how communities utilize the physiological event of childbirth to reinforce their cosmologies. Third, what benefits, if any, do the people who subscribe to a community's cosmological leanings receive. Simply, why do communities continue to participate in enactments of cosmology?

To begin, let us look at how Japanese understand the other world. This topic is the site of some contention, with numerous theories circulating. Let us look at the scholarly debate regarding how the Japanese view their world in relation to the world of the ancestors and *kami*.

Multiple Cosmologies

Carmen Blacker, in *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan* problematizes the nature of the other world in relation to her research on shamanism. While her main concern lies in discerning the cosmology out of which shamans in Japan operate, she offers a useful insight into three distinct cosmologies laid out by the compilers of the *Kojiki*, Origuchi Shinobu, and Hori Ichirō.

Let us begin with the *Kojiki*. At the highest level of a three-tiered vertical cosmology there existed a “light, bright, central, pure, unpolluted” world located in the sky accessible only to the deities by way of a floating bridge.²⁴ The land of Yōmi, a tomb-like cavernous rocky world, comprised the lower world.²⁵ In this polluted

²⁴ Carmen Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study in Shamanistic Practices in Japan*, 3rd ed. (Richmond, Surrey: Japan Library, 1999), 70-71.

²⁵ Blacker draws on the work of Gotō Shuichi in her suggestion that topographical elements of this universe resemble the fourth and fifth century tombs constructed on

nether world, if you recall, Izanami's corpse reposed after her fiery death. The land of humans lays sandwiched between these two opposing worlds. For Blacker, however, this is a place that most probably mirrors topographical features that existed in the fourth and fifth centuries in Japan, reflecting the locative position of the compilers of the text, and not a world where shamans of her study operate.

Blacker turns to the work of Origuchi Shinobu, focussing her attention on a character the ethnologist associates with his understanding of the other world that pervades Japanese religious belief and practice – the *marebito*, a ritual figure best described as an “outsider.” The ritual function of this figure involves revivifying the land on a regular basis with “life and energy” at celebratory times such as harvest and the New Year.²⁶ *Marebito* live in Tokoyo and traverse the sea separating the land of the “deified dead” and the world of humans in a boat, a supernatural journey influenced no doubt by the maritime orientation of the archipelago. This theory stems not from documents; rather, Origuchi bases his idea on annual ritual performances – no longer performed – that he views as ritual re-enactments of these annual visits. Blacker characterizes Origuchi's other world as an ambivalent “world of power” that lies “both across the sea and beneath it.”²⁷ Still, this world is the world Blackers shamans traverse to communicate with ancestors and *kami*.

Blacker's study of shamanism resonates, however, with Hori Ichirô's theory of cosmology that focuses on a mountainous universe where the *kami* abide, visiting agricultural villages to bestow “life and fecundity.”²⁸ Hori Ichirô turns to mountain

the Yamato plain. Please see Matsumura Takeo, *Nihon shinwa no kenkyû*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: 1971), 394-407.

²⁶ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow: A Study in Shamanistic Practices in Japan*, 72-73. These ideas can be found in “Kokubungaku no hassei,” pt. 3, *Origuchi Shinobu Zenshû*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Chuo Kobun sha, 1966), 3-62; and in “Tokoyo oyobi marebito,” *Minzoku*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Tokyo: Kodai Kenkyû, 29), 1-62 .

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

worship in Japanese religions to illustrate the power of mountains. The cosmology evolved as sea-dwellers moved inland and settled in Japan's vast mountainous regions, taking with them their *kami* and ancestors. He argues that while esoteric Buddhism and Shugen-dô, ascetic mountain-based tradition, constitute a part of the religious activity revolving around mountains, it is largely forms of shamanism practiced in pre-historic times that has influenced mountain worship. Hori demonstrates how global shamanic beliefs and practices that access the powers of mountains and envision them as *axis mundi* are deeply interwoven into Japanese multivalent understandings of mountains, conceived of as places where the dead are located; where the living and the dead mingle; and, as conduits between *ano yo* and *kono yo* and the sacred and the profane.²⁹ For Blacker, the shamanic activity she investigates holds the mountains as the locus of their power.

Blacker grapples with the ambiguity of the various other worlds, moving, morphing universes affixed to no one place. They continuously shift from the sea to a nether world accessed through the sea; from mountains to plains, and their inhabitants continuously traverse between them. Alan Grapard, holding up the *Kojiki* as the paradigm of place for shamanic activity in Japanese religions, does not at all read ambiguity into Japanese cosmological understandings; in fact, he argues they are clear-cut in their expression of transgression, power, and gender relations.³⁰ Furthermore, multiple cosmologies are expressed in the text through "spatial metaphor."³¹ Finally, for Grapard, expression of cosmology does not reflect pre-

²⁹ Ichirô Hori, *Folk Religion in Japan: Continuity and Change*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Alan L. Miller, *Haskell Lectures on History of Religions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 177.

³⁰ Allan G. Grapard, "Visions of Excess and Excesses of Vision: Women and Transgression in Japanese Myth," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 1 (1991).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

modern concerns about establishing the relationship between the living and the dead, they reflect the political impulse to erect social boundaries that reinforce patriarchal hegemony that ultimately subjugates women.

Grapard focuses on three stories in the *Kojiki*: the transgression of Izanagi viewing the corpse of his wife Izanami in the land of Yōmi; the crocodile shape shifting of Tōyō-tama-hime and her retreat in shame to Tokoyo; and, a sacred striptease danced on Takama-no-hara, the Central Land of the Reed Plains, a tale I have not yet discussed. In this story, Susa-no-o torments his sister, the sun goddess Amaterasu, by breaking up the ridges of her rice paddies, defecating in the dining hall, and flaying a pony backwards. Horrified at these transgressions, the sun goddess hides herself in a cave, bringing darkness onto the plain. The deities, the inhabitants of the plain, descend into chaos save for one clever goddess, who quickly assembles a makeshift stage out of a bucket which she places in front of the cave door. Jumping atop the bucket, she performs an erotic dance. Her audience, the deities, erupt into laughter, piquing the curiosity of Amaterasu. Attending deities capture the goddess when she peeks out the cave door and the sun shines again on Takama-no-hara.

A similar pattern emerges in all these tales (males encroaching on feminine territory, distressing interactions, women retreating to private places, the viewing of women's bodies), as do motifs of transgression and the "occultation of a female."³² They also express the conflicted relationship between sexuality and power: "Those myths turn out to be powerful tales that exhibit human sexuality in its raw movement towards limits, and use it to delimit the space and time of existence, to construct rules, circumscribe corners, trace boundaries, and erect the poles that mark them, and, finally, to inscribe values and so trace the contours of the sacred and the ritual

³² Ibid., 13.

conditions of its approach.”³³ Epistemologically, power is established in these spaces and journeys; moreover, it is inscribed on bodies. We are not dealing with time and space in these stories, we are working at the level of discourse and metaphor.

Grapard’s provocative study identifies certain features of the tales of the *Kojiki* that apply to this study including transgression, social rules of conduct and behavior, and gender dynamics; but, what does he tell us about how notions of cosmology are played out in the real world? Where does childbirth fit in to these tales, because they are as much about birth and rebirth as they are about transcribing social values onto bodies. These answers exist in the customs of childbirth – which derive their practices from Japan’s earliest oral literature and are found at the level of local practice.

Let us look at how the community of Ôbara envisioned its cosmological world. On that blustery February visit to Ôbara’s *ubuya*, Hayashi Shûjûn, the head priest of Ôbara shrine whom I introduced previously, explained how the parturition hut lay at the intersection of the crossroads of this world and the other world, positioning his arms in the shape of a cross to emphasize this point.³⁴ Furthermore, the topographical features and locative position of the other world depend on the geographical location of the community in which it is envisioned. The members of a community located in a mountainous region imagine the other world to be located over the mountains. In the agricultural community of Ôbara set deep in the mountains of Kyoto prefecture, the other world lay over the mountains and below the ground. The exposed dirt floor of the *ubuya* reinforced the community idea of the other world existing in the nether regions of their universe. People who live close to the sea in Japan imagine the other world on the other side of the expanse of water they see everyday.

³³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

³⁴ Personal communication, February 25, 2007, Miwacho, Kyoto Prefecture.



Figure 4-4 Author (center) with Hayashi Shûjûn, head priest (*Kannushi*) of Ôbara Shrine and Yagi Tôru, Professor, Department of Literature, Bukkyô University, Kyoto. Photograph by Branislav Vasilijevic, the author's husband.

The point overlooked by both Grapard and Blacker concerns issues of life and death, and specifically the fluidity between these two states that occupies Japanese religious consciousness. It would make sense, then, that this major religious motif flares up when a child is born. What I have just discussed illustrates how topographies and space put into focus the relationship between life and death; rituals also underscore this relationship. The most profound expression of this relationship occurs at the moment the mother expels the baby from her body and into the world. The *toriagebaasan* is a ritual figure who mediates this passage and crystallizes the relationship between *kono yo* and *ano yo*.

Toriagebaasan

This figure is considered a preprofessionalized childbirth assistant or midwife (*sanba*). Her skilfulness and experience – she was often an elderly woman – kept her in demand. Her ritual importance and sacred stature shifted throughout Japan; in some regions, communities treated her with utmost respect; in others, she was the next-door neighbor who merely assisted women in labor. In many regions, the bond between the *toriagebaasan* and the child she delivered equalled that of family.

In their work *Shûkyô Izen*, Takatori and Hashimoto demonstrate how some communities viewed the task of “taking up” (*toriageru*) or “pulling out”³⁵ (*hikiageru*) children as essential to childbirth as they thought that the child returned to the other world if this ritual attention did not occur.³⁶ Magical or shamanistic qualities are overlaid onto her ritual responsibilities as some communities conceived of her as a ritual specialist who moved spirits between *ano yo* and *kono yo* or assisted spirits in their spiritual growth.³⁷ Her powers also address community’s concerns for pollution. Ella Lury Wiswell remarks on the treatment of a newly delivered naked neonate. Women who assisted the mother quickly placed the child on the cold ground after delivery and waited for the midwife to arrive as she possessed the ritual power to absorb the baby’s pollution.³⁸ Ôto Yuki speaks of the function of the *toriagebaasan* as one who “drags” children into the circle of humanity of this world.³⁹ In many cases, this ritual attention continued long after the baby was born.

³⁵ She is also referred to as *hikiagebaasan*.

³⁶ Takatori, *Shûkyô izen*, 184.

³⁷ Kanda Yoriko Fukuta Ajio, Shintani Takanori, Nakagomi Mutsuko, Yukawa Yôji, Watanabe Yoshio, *Seisen Nihon minzoku jiten* (Tokyo: Koshikawa Kôbunkan, 2006), 397.

³⁸ Smith, *The Women of Suye Mura*.

³⁹ Ôtô, *Ko yarai*, 53.

The *toriagebaba* attended seventh night celebrations and first visits to the local shrine (*miyamairi*) of the children she delivered. In the Katori district of northeast Chiba prefecture, the family invited her to the celebration of the third night at the *ubuya* (*mikka ubuya*) and the twenty-first day after birth when the *ubuya* was ceremoniously opened (*ubuake*).⁴⁰ In the Awa and Itsu regions of the same prefecture, the communities valued her felicitous abilities to bless a newborn baby with good health, success, and happiness and her stature was that of a parent.

She attended ceremonies celebrating the seventh year of a child's life; an auspicious occasion as well as a celebration signalling a child successfully passed through the dangerous, life-threatening perils of childhood, such as famine and epidemic. As children moved into adulthood, families invited her to coming of age ceremonies and marriage celebrations. When the *toriagebaba* died, the children she delivered stood next to her coffin with members of her family at the burial ceremony. The custom of bathing her corpse with water (*yukan*) occurred in many regions, where the children she delivered – males, for the most part – performed the ceremony.

In Ônishi village of the Kume district of Okayama prefecture, the *toriagebaasan* held another occupation as that of official crier at funerals. She presided over the *yukan* ceremony, then, as *nakibaasan* (the first character of the word stands for “cry,”) she stood at the doorway of the house of mourning with her head covered and wailed as the funeral procession departed.⁴¹ I do not think a more clear-cut example exists demonstrating the proximity of life and death and how a community deals with this uncomfortable closeness by assigning a person to give a face and a voice to the ontological conundrum. As the midwifery profession became

⁴⁰ Onshi zaidan boshi aiiku kai, *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei*, 219.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

professionalized in the Meiji period, requests for the *toriagebaasan*'s services gradually diminished.

A ritual specialist straddling life and death, or a simple childbirth assistant recruited because she lived a few houses away from an expectant mother, the figure of the *toriagebaasan* is as ambiguous as Blacker's cosmologies. This is a refrain in Japanese religions and culture I echo throughout this dissertation: what occurs at the level of text and theory is often at odds with the practices on the ground. For some communities, the relationship between a *toriagebaasan* and her children speaks to a deep respect for the interconnectedness between life and death; a relationship extending beyond Confucian notions of filial piety, to a cosmic indebtedness to the figure responsible for helping a child navigate the journey from the other world to this world. The *toriagebaasan* also sheds light on processes of cosmology that Origuchi Shinobu's *marebito* does not. We have clear evidence of such a person; she was not ritually represented, but performed medical and sacred functions most likely on a daily basis.

I have just shown how a specific place designated for childbirth and a specific person assigned with the task of assisting childbirth tells much about the way in which communities work out their cosmological concerns. The place of birth can also tell us much about gendered attitudes towards reproduction held by a society, attitudes shaped by social, political, medical, and economic forces. It is useful to activate Brigitte Jordon's notion of "birth territory" to see how these gendered attitudes are translated into practice. Jordon develops the term "birth territory" in her book, *Birth in Four Countries: A Cross-cultural Investigation of Childbirth in Yucatan, Holland,*

Sweden, and the United States as this idea expresses a fundamental truism of birth: births do not take place somewhere, births take place “on somebody’s territory,”⁴²

Enforcing Birth Territories

Jordon demonstrates how the physiological process of birth and the cultural rules around it are inextricably intertwined, making childbirth a “social production.” This classic medical-anthropological work relies on quantitative and qualitative data, ranging from interviews, statistics, and health policies. Jordon was also present at numerous births in all four locations. It is the first substantive cross-cultural study of its kind. Jordon began the project in the early 1970’s, a time when few ethnographies focusing exclusively on women’s activities existed and little information on childbirth available. Not only did Jordon’s ground-breaking work advance knowledge about women’s reproductive issues, her multiregional, comparative approach opened new doors in which to examine the physiological and social cultural processes related to childbirth.

Birth, in any culture, is not simply a physiological process: it is embedded in that culture’s history and social structure. How it is achieved depends on various factors including the culture’s ecology and level of technological development.⁴³ Taking into consideration all these variables, Jordon characterizes birth as a “biosocial” event. Despite the particular circumstances of each culture, however, childbirth is universally framed as a “life crisis event.”⁴⁴ As such, Jordon identifies “internally consistent and mutually dependent practices and beliefs” produced by discrete cultural groups to manage the “ritual danger” to which family and community

⁴² Brigitte Jordon, *Birth in Four Cultures: A Crosscultural Investigation of Childbirth in Yucatan, Holland, Sweden, and the United States*, ed. Sherri Clarkson, *Monographs in Women's Studies* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1978), 47.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

are exposed when a member gives birth. The vulnerable predicament of mother and child is also addressed through these sets of practices and beliefs that broaden to encompass not only physiological concerns for the demands of birth but also concerns of the moral well-being of the society where childbirth takes place.

We can look at this idea of the overlay of culture over nature from a different perspective. Bruce Lincoln's analysis of rituals of women's initiation in the work *Emerging from the Chrysalis: Rituals of Women's Initiation* is also a cross-cultural study of rituals associated with puberty and menstruation.⁴⁵ Lincoln demonstrates how these rituals honor an important stage in a woman's life and put on "center stage" women's fundamental contributions to their communities: they produce children, cultivate the fields and provide nourishment, and they support life.⁴⁶ But it goes beyond that. The rituals affirm, "through the process of symbolic amplification,"⁴⁷ women's contribution to cosmic creativity, where their ability to generate life is only a suggestion of their greater ability to ensure the family and her community will extend into the future – women not only perpetuate generations, they extend time, ensure the fecundity of crops, permit order to conquer chaos. Lincoln traces these themes throughout three different rituals of initiation to demonstrate how creativity associated with women has broader implications in the cosmic well being of these societies.

The work not only puts in focus how societies recognize women's contributions, but also captures the fundamental nature of ritual in a very simple way. Lincoln tells us: rituals "do not focus on the emptiest aspects of people's lives, but on those aspects that are most full."⁴⁸ The cross-cultural comparative framework is an

⁴⁵ Bruce Lincoln, *Emerging from the Chrysalis: Rituals of Women's Initiation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

important feature of Lincoln's study, where he exposes consistent themes and highlights divergent concerns, all expressed ritually, which reflect differing social and political structures. Why is a cross-cultural examination of birth important?

While birth is a naturally occurring, physiological event, it is more charged than other everyday activities; a cross-cultural analysis reveals a wider range of physiological and behavioural variegation.⁴⁹ This type of analysis also facilitates a deeper understanding of "the organization of female networks, interests and strategies."⁵⁰ A comparative study of birth unearths a tangle of complexities, but sorting through this confusion yields a greater understanding of the process or childbirth that would not be available from a study focusing exclusively on one cultural context. For example, analgesics and oxytocins, generally considered harmful to mothers and babies by Dutch medical practitioners, are routinely administered to birthing women in the United States.⁵¹ Research on the benefits of these drugs could not be undertaken in Holland for ethical reasons, but with the data Jordon unearths, Dutch researchers can make informed guesses on how oxytocins might be beneficial in birth in Holland. A cross-cultural study, then, not only reveals how childbirth is culturally constructed, it also accentuates the "physiological-medical aspects of birth."⁵²

The importance of a cross-cultural investigation of birth is revealed in the divide between obstetrical practices in the developing world and practices in the United States, the basis of which form a medical model considered a gold standard, despite its deficiencies. As cultural notions of birth differ throughout the world, the danger of imposing a standardized medical model is obvious. Traditional systems of

⁴⁹ Jordon, *Birth in Four Cultures*, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵² *Ibid.*

birth, and the definitions of birth within these systems, must first be understood so improvements in maternal and infant mortality rates can be accomplished. The local practitioners whom Jordon meets in her study are the most important resources in implementing change, as those individuals understand what adaptations are necessary and what changes would be met with resistance by women of the community.⁵³ Jordon stresses that the “crosscultural biosocial”⁵⁴ model developed from her study allows for a “rational assessment” of local ways of birthing, rather than an “automatic devaluation” of those methods. Sadly, thirty-five years after publication of *Birth in Four Cultures*, the situation for birthing women in developed nations is desperate, with high maternal mortality rates claiming lives at an alarming rate.⁵⁵

While the work has done little to improve the lot of women in developing nations, one of its contributions to the field of gender studies is Jordon’s model of “birth territory”; although, as Jordon demonstrates, these territories are easily penetrable as a researcher equipped with interpreters and audio-visual equipment can, provided presentable academic credentials are produced, invade them for the purposes of the expansion of knowledge. Jordon identifies two types of territories: the woman gives birth in either a specialized environment or a setting not outside her “normal sphere.” The main elements that comprise these territories are the available resources and the types of “social interactions” occurring in these places.⁵⁶ It goes without saying that the notion of birth territory figures prominently in a study focusing on places of parturition.

⁵³ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ I discuss this issue in the second chapter of this dissertation.

⁵⁶ Jordon, *Birth in Four Cultures*, 47.



Figure 4-5 Interior view of the *ubuya*. The white paper strip (*shimenawa*) in the center of the hut denotes the presence of the kami. Visitors to the hut collect the sand from the dirt floor to take home with them. The sand is considered to have magical properties.

Mythic Embarrassment

One area where we see birth territory in action comes from the field notes of Ella Lury Wiswell, a young mother who accompanied John F. Embree, her anthropologist husband, on a one-year research trip in 1935 to investigate the daily activities of the agricultural village Suye. Although not a formally trained ethnographer, Ella Lury Wiswell was raised in Japan and thus able to interact in Japanese with the inhabitants of this southern Kyushu village. While her husband worked away at his research, she conducted her own project to observe and record the daily lives of women in Suye village. Tragically, fifteen years after the Wiswell-

Embree family returned from Japan, John Embree and their only daughter died in an accident. In an effort to salvage her husband's research, Ella Wiswell visited anthropologist Robert J. Smith at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. and asked him to edit Embree's voluminous notes. She also handed over her data to Professor Smith.

Smith realized that the notes of the amateur scholar that concerned "the business of everyday life" were written poignantly, conveying "a sense of immediacy" and that they would make an enormous contribution to the field of Japanese studies.⁵⁷ Together, they converted her notes into the book, *The Women of Suye Mura*. The integrity of the notes strikes me, for Wiswell did not filter her observations through theoretical lenses and transcribed her interactions honestly, keeping her assumptions at bay.

Her work reveals behavior and attitudes towards childbirth that add another dimension Jordon's notion of "birth territories." Wiswell attempted on two occasions to observe women giving birth, but did not get the opportunity; in fact, midwives and family members rudely rebuffed her. For the women in this community, childbirth was an intensely private experience, and the magnitude of their embarrassment kept even their husbands and mothers from entering their "birth territory." In spite of the resistance she met up with, Wiswell persisted, milling around the houses where she knew women were in labor, fortifying herself with quick cigarette breaks, until she finally received word that the babies had been delivered safely. She never witnessed a live birth; she did, however, gather first-hand accounts explaining the women's attitudes towards childbirth: "At childbirth...women never cry. In Japan it is considered very bad to cry at such a time. No matter how terrible the pain you clench your fists and keep your mouth shut tight, for the neighbors must not know what is

⁵⁷ Smith, *The Women of Suye Mura*, 293. John Fee converted the notes of her husband. Please see John F. Embree, *Suye mura: A Japanese Village* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

happening...Delivery is the most secret thing – even one’s husband is not allowed in.”⁵⁸

Wiswell’s experience dealing with midwives and family members acting territorially to protect women in labor demonstrates how social interactions enforce the boundaries of a birth territory. Her experience also raises the question: what issues are being worked out within the parameters of the territory?

Shielding the birthing woman from even her husband appears to be the primary concern and the reason which birth territory is enforced in this locality, a theme we have met in the introduction of this dissertation, with the example of the spouse of Tōyō-tama-hime viewing his wife in labor that is laid out in the *Kojiki*. Ashamed at having been seen giving birth, the new mother retreated to her aquatic natal home, never to set eyes on her husband again. Concerns about ritual pollution are imbricated in the paradigm laid out in the *Kojiki*; in the case of Suye *mura*, women re-enact the mythic model of embarrassment. Attitudes towards the gendered body at a pivotal point of its expressiveness shape the borders of birth territory. As we see from the quotation that introduces this chapter, the family enjoying a meal in a room where birth just occurs dispels any notion that issues of ritual pollution are behind the construction of these borders.

Wiswell’s “fly-on-the-wall” approach to gathering information allowed her to identify nuances, complexities, and even inconsistencies in the ideas about where and how birth should take place. We are almost forced to reconsider the strength of Jordon’s observation that communities produce “internally consistent and mutually dependent practices and beliefs” to manage the concerns raised by childbirth. Wiswell’s observation of the family that enjoyed a meal in the room where a birth just

⁵⁸ Ibid., 293.

occurred, a violation of a strict cultural rule, reveals much about the inconsistencies of practices and beliefs.

Another aspect of Jordon's theory Wiswell's findings challenge involves the perceived concerns about danger and "existential uncertainty" to not only the mother and child, but to the entire community. These anxieties are, in Jordon's view, responsible for the formation of sets of beliefs and practices integral to specific cultures that are employed to "manage" the "physiologically and socially problematic aspects of parturition."⁵⁹ In the village of Suye in 1935, it appears "embarrassment" rather than "existential uncertainty" had the strongest influence shaping attitudes towards childbirth. Of course, Wiswell reveals customs, such as safe birth devotionalism and rituals designed to assuage anxieties around birth, but at the point of parturition, the primary concern shared by all involved in the outcome of the birth, was that of shielding the woman from embarrassment.

Now let us turn to an overview of parturition practices in Japan. In the introduction of my dissertation, drawing on examples from the *Kojiki* and *Nihongi*, I illustrated how attitudes towards the female body and the concern for life and death inform customs of parturition from very early on in Japanese religions. I also brought up the ideas presented by Mary Douglas and Jean Cazeneuve concerning the volatility of religious ideas combined with the notion that the thing itself is not taboo, but the symbolism surrounding it is, to show how the parturition hut in one region can be regarded as sacred, and in another, polluted. I now draw out further nuances in customs of parturition illuminated through rigorous ethnography conducted throughout the country and published in the *Nihon Saniku*. In this section, it is important to consider the ways in which Brigitte Jordon's notion of birth territory applies to customs of parturition in Japan. What issues and concerns do birth

⁵⁹ Jordon, *Birth in Four Cultures*.

territories in this geographical context reflect? How are birth territories enforced? Is the notion of birth territory static or subject to change? What has influenced the development of birth territories in Japan?

Of Closets, Sleeping Rooms, Auspicious Directions, and Concerns for the Health of
Mother and Baby

Common Places for Giving Birth

The *Nihon Saniku* enumerates the multiplicity of customs regarding parturition throughout Japan. The main point I wish to stress in this section is the malleability and adaptability of this customs: researchers of the *Nihon Saniku* take pains to point out the varieties of the customs within localities and the changes that occurred throughout the lifespan of customs of parturition. These descriptions cover thirteen pages of text under the chapter heading of “*Ubuya*,” which is translated as either a room used for delivery or a specialized structure for the purpose of childbirth.

To begin, a custom that occurred regularly throughout the country had women – most often for their first pregnancies – returning to their natal homes (*jikka*) about one month before they were expected to deliver, as it was thought mothers were the most suitable people to help them through the experience. As I have discussed in my chapter on the low birthrate in Japan, the custom occurs today. This custom is often called *satogaeri*; however, the researchers in the *Nihon Saniku* do not use the term.⁶⁰

⁶⁰In the *Seisen Nihon minzoku jiten*, the term *satogaeri* includes many types of trips to the natal home, including the trip a new bride makes to her parents' home soon after the wedding ceremonies finish and visits people make on Obon and celebrations for the new year. Please see Fukuta Ajiro et al., *Seisen Nihon minzoku jiten* (Tokyo: Koshikawa Kôbunkan, 2006), 227. In *The Women of Suyé Mura*, Wiswell and Smith discuss the small, mountainous village Hirayama, which is not too far away from Suyé. In Hirayama, first-time mothers do not return to their natal homes. It is thought newborn babies should not cross bodies of water until they are thirty-three days old. The village is surrounded by streams; therefore, if a mother gave birth in her *jikka*, she

The most common space assigned as the birthing room was a dark, small, poorly ventilated closet. From Miyagi and Iwate prefectures in the north to the various districts in Chiba prefecture, to various districts of Ishikawa Prefecture, this type of space is mentioned throughout the entries in the *Nihon Saniku*. Within this simple type of parturition, however, variations and themes abound. A closet birthing room in the city of Sendai must be windowless and have no sliding doors (*shôji*) and be located on the northern side of the house. The researchers characterize it as a dim, gloomy place (*usugurai*).⁶¹ The birthing closet in Gunma prefecture is a dim place, where the noise from the household cannot be heard. It is unclear whether this is so the noises made by mother and child did not inconvenience the other occupants in the house, or to protect the laboring woman from external noise. The closet a woman gave birth in Fukushima Prefecture was poorly ventilated and dimly lit. In Takaoka city of Fukuyama Prefecture, the darkest place – a closet – was chosen as the room for delivery to separate the woman and child from the rest of the household, but by the time researchers of the *Nihon Saniku* visited the location, women gave birth in bright locations within a house. In the Kasuya, Kurate, and Kasui regions of Fukuoka Prefecture, childbirth took place in dark, poorly ventilated closets; however, bright, cheerful birthing rooms eventually replaced the closets.

The second most popular designated space for childbirth was a commonplace room used for sleeping. In locations throughout Aomori Prefecture, Iwate Prefecture,

would not be able to return to Hirayama to present her baby at his or her naming ceremony which occurred thirty-one or thirty-two days after birth. Please see Robert J. Smith and Ella Lury Wiswell, *The Women of Suie Mura*, 109-110. Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney does use the term *satogaeri* and mentions that variations of the way it is practiced exist and brings up the notion of women permanently returning to their natal homes if they failed to produce offspring, particularly boys. Please see *Illness and Culture in Contemporary Japan*, 185.

⁶¹ Onshi zaidan boshi aiiku kai, *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei*, 181. All references to customs of parturition, unless otherwise noted, come from pages 81 to 93 of the *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei*.

Akita Prefecture, in the Inashiki district of Ibaraki Prefecture, the Katori district of Chiba Prefecture, and Sakai City of Fukui Prefecture, women generally gave birth in the household's sleeping room. Such usage of space suggests restrictions of impurity governed the designation of places of parturition less than did issues of space – large, spacious houses with specialized rooms for parturition were the exception, not the norm, throughout the country.

Large houses in Japan contain a Japanese-style room (*zashiki*). The flooring in a Japanese-style room is covered with woven straw matting (*tatami*) and sliding doors (*shoji*) separate it from the rest of the house. Japanese-style rooms contain family altars (*kamidana* or *butsudan*), making it a room where family members performed devotions to their ancestors. Rules regarding the *zashiki*'s usage as a “birth territory” are ambivalent. Throughout the country, the Japanese-style room was either off-limits to parturition, or assigned as a place to give birth; this is apparent in the entries for various districts in Iwate prefecture.

In the village of Iwashima, if a woman gave birth near the *kamidana* or *butsudan*, the community thought her child would contract dysentery and the children of that child would also be born with the disease. In areas of Fukuyama Prefecture, birth took place in a small, dark room in a location far away from a room containing a *kamidana* or *butsudan*. In Chibane Village of the Ôno district of Fukui Prefecture, the community considered a Japanese room in the back of a house taboo; similarly in the same district, birth did not take place in a room containing a *kamidana* or *butsudan*. The community considered a room facing the *zashiki* a suitable place of parturition. In Nyûgun district of Fukui Prefecture, women gave birth in a room adjacent to a room housing Buddhist statues; although, it could not face the southeast. In the Nanjyô district, women avoided giving birth in a room housing Buddhist statues. In Konbata of Tottori prefecture, parturition rooms were attached to a shrine, yet there are

instances where women were not allowed to give birth in a room containing a *kamidana*. In Hashihama city of Ehime Prefecture, an interesting example of the diachronic appears as in olden days, birth did not take place in Japanese-style rooms containing *kamidana*, but at the time of compilation of the *Nihon Saniku*, births did take place in rooms containing *kamidana*.

Proper Locations and Directions

Delivery rooms were assigned based on their location in the house and the direction they faced. Often, the issue of light determined their location, as in the case of the town of Higashi in Gunma prefecture, the community considered a room facing north as undesirable; women gave birth in bright rooms. In Kagawa Prefecture, childbirth took place in a room near the washroom on the lower floor in the central area of the household as the community thought that a difficult birth would result if the room faced an unlucky direction. In cases throughout Fukushima Prefecture and in Shiozawa city of Niigata Prefecture, birth took place on the ground floor as pregnant women were prohibited from climbing stairs. Also in a couple of locations in the Onyû and Ooi districts of Fukui prefecture, areas near the kitchen fire were designated as places for giving birth; this community obviously did not consider childbirth a polluting event. In the Ikoma district of Nara Prefecture, childbirth usually took place in a room next to the kitchen. Likewise, in Tokushima Prefecture women gave birth in a room near the kitchen or in a closet. In the Tagawa region of Fukuoka Prefecture, the community thought that a difficult birth would occur if childbirth occurred in a room in the center of the house. The community thought that children born in a room at the center of a house in the Howa district of Saitama Prefecture would not be raised in that house. In the same district, women avoided giving birth under the beams of the house.

In a practice appealing to forces of good fortune, many communities chose the place of parturition according to the calendar. Cardinal orientation then became a central issue in deciding places of birth. In villages throughout the southwestern part of Nara, it was customary to choose a space facing the direction of the *toshitokujin*, one god of the lunar calendar. In the district of Nakajima of Aichi prefecture the community chose the direction of a room for parturition (which had to be quiet and separate from the rest of the household) depending on the day or month on which the birth occurred, and it faced the corresponding animal sign of the lunar calendar. A practice of safe child devotionism occurred in the Howa district of Saitama Prefecture where women gave birth facing the direction of the dog and wild boar. Alternately, avoidance of the very same direction was practiced for the same reason.⁶² In Kôchi prefecture, rooms of parturition faced the direction of the *kinjin*, a *kami* who was assigned this position according to the calendar of the year of birth and was associated with gold. In Miyazaki Prefecture, women gave birth in a room facing the direction of the *saitokukami*. In the villages of Miato and Hirabu of the Ikoma district of Nara Prefecture, the room of parturition faced a bright direction according to the calendar of the year. The one restriction, however, was that the room could not face the direction of the earth or gold gods (*dokinjin*). In the town of Nakanojô, Gunma Prefecture, the direction a woman in labor faced depended on the calendar. The restriction guiding the direction the woman faced required that her feet not point towards the *kami* but must point towards the sun. This begs the questions: in what position did a birthing woman face when she labored at night and did women give

⁶² There are other examples where animals and childbirth are connected. In the district located on the upper part of the Tamagawa river, the river running between Tokyo and Kanagawa, it was thought that a safe birth would result if a woman gave birth in a room where she could here the sounds of a dog or a chicken, or other animals. In Miyagi Prefecture, women avoided giving birth in rooms where cats had been born.

birth in the supine position? In Shimane Prefecture, in Tôjô village in the district of Nita, a Shintô priest decided on the delivery room after consulting with the tutelary *kami*.

These types of practices bring to mind a contemporary custom popular in Kyoto that I experienced during my fieldwork. A day in February was set aside as a special day in which to eat *norimaki*, long, tube-shaped rolls of rice and filling wrapped with seaweed (*nori*). People held the *norimaki* at their mouths, facing the auspicious direction for that year designated by the calendar. Grocery stores were stocked with special orders of *norimaki* that customers bought like hotcakes – testimony that the custom was alive and well. The festive nature of the quirky day bubbled out of the grocery stores and into the streets and makes me wonder if the same sense of exuberance and celebration did not fill the parturition room when the child was safely born in the special room facing the direction of the sun or the god of good fortune or the lunar sign representing the *inoshishi*.

Themes of Darkness and Light and Size

As I have mentioned earlier, communities also took into consideration themes of darkness and light when designating places of parturition. In Fukui City of Fukui Prefecture and Ôta village of Gunma Prefecture, women gave birth in brightly lit rooms. In Nagano Prefecture, women gave birth in a room on the northern side of the house to distance the mother and child from the sun. In Gifu Prefecture, dark, quiet rooms at the back of the house were customary for giving birth, although there were instances of the tradition changing to have birth taking place in bright rooms. The same trend was apparent in the Kenjô region of Shiga Prefecture where women used dark rooms in the past but bright, sunlit rooms replaced them.

Communities considered the size of the parturition room as important in a few places throughout Japan. In general, three-mat rooms were considered taboo (Kôchi

Prefecture, Fukoka Prefecture, Igankuni of Mie Prefecture.) In Kenjô region of Shiga Prefecture mentioned above, a room where previously a difficult birth occurred could not be used; furthermore, the size of the room had to be greater than six tatami mats. In the Nanjyô district, where I previously discussed how women avoided giving birth in rooms housing a Buddhist image, a further restriction existed. Women could not give birth in rooms the size of four and a half tatami mats. Also, straw was spread over the tatami. Although it is difficult to interpret these regulations, it is safe to say residents of this region were concerned about the polluting properties of childbirth.

Parturition Huts

Parturition huts were also common throughout the country. In the Musashi district of Kanagawa Prefecture, a special parturition hut called an *ubuya* or *konashiya* was built for the occasion of birth but that custom was no longer practiced at the time of research of the *Nihon Saniku*. The Onyû district in Fukui prefecture is known for its parturition huts called “*koya*,” expressed in the katakana syllabary system. These were temporary rooms built under the eaves of storehouses where newborn boys remained for seventeen days and newborn girls for eighteen days after birth. There are instances of the parturition hut being used in Nishiôji village of Shiga Prefecture. In Manabe island of Okayama prefecture, up to about twenty years before the publication of the *Nihon Saniku*, women gave birth in a parturition hut called a “*katsuya*,” written in the katakana syllabary system. The researchers of the *Nihon Saniku* state that members of the birthing woman’s family, or her neighbors, brought food to the hut.

In the village of Takayama of Okayama Prefecture, women gave birth in a small structure called a “*kamaya*” or “*kageya*,” written in the katakana syllabary system. Eventually the custom of giving birth in these huts died out, as birth territory shifted to the home and then to hospitals and maternity clinics. The people of the community, however, transformed the huts into workshop for making *miso*, soybean

paste used for cooking. This example of the transformation of the parturition hut to a storehouse for a food product dispels any notion that the community considered childbirth a polluting event. In Sonjô village of Ketaka district of Tottori Prefecture, women retired to a communal parturition hut in their final month of pregnancy and remained there until the period of taboo lifted. This example of a permanent parturition hut used by all the women of the community contrasts sharply with the temporary parturition huts of Wakasa Bay discussed by Tanigawa. In Aichi Prefecture, women gave birth in the *beshiya*, or separate hut where menstruating women were confined. Cases of birth taking place in parturition huts are also documented but this was not a common event.

On Ibuki Island in Kagawa prefecture, women gave birth in a communal parturition hut until approximately the fifth year of Shôwa (1931).⁶³ The hut occupied a quiet, beautiful location at the midpoint of the northern beach shared by the islands of Ibuki and Hon. It had windows on all sides and a earthen floor and women remained there until the period of taboo after birth lifted. Men were prohibited from entering the place. The only other instance of a community prohibiting men from entering the birthing room that researchers mention in the *Nihon Saniku* occurs in Asuwa district of Fukui Prefecture, where the community considered it taboo for boys to enter into the birthing room. In Fukuoka Prefecture, women gave birth in parturition huts.

⁶³ Yagi Tôri in a presentation given at Bukkyo University on 9 May, 2006 entitled “*Shussan wo meguru Shûzoku to jenda-: koya, samba, shussankan*” refers to these structures as “*debeya*,” and points out that the structures were used up until the middle of the Meiji period (around 1890) for not only parturition, but also menstruation and after the period of isolation was complete (thirty days for childbirth, but he does not state the period of isolation required for menstruation), women purified their bodies with ablutions performed in sea water. He confirms that men were strictly forbidden from entering the structures.

.Health Reasons and Parturition

Another reason parturient women were separated from household and community involved concerns for the health of the new mother. First, a common theme running through descriptions of places of parturition is the concern that both mothers and their newborns required a tranquil environment in which to recuperate from the trauma of birth: some communities considered quiet, dim rooms as restful places. In the Kurata village of the prefecture of Tottori, a bright room was not desirable, as the community thought that the parturient woman's mind, body, and soul could better recover from the trauma of childbirth in a dark room. This very same concern is raised in the custom of Ôbara shrine's *ubuya*, which I shall discuss shortly.

The notion of light as injurious to the baby's eyes is also present in descriptions of places of parturition. In Iganokuni of Mie Prefecture, childbirth took place in a dark room as the community thought a newborn baby's eyes would be harmed if exposed to sunlight. In Ogawa village of the Mikata district of Fukui Prefecture, people placed a shroud-like cover over the mother and her child the day following birth to protect them from the direct sunlight. In the village of Kokukami in the Nishi Hogen district of Niigata Prefecture, women gave birth in a dark room to protect their eyesight and that of their babies.

Even today, a popular medical concept identified by Jan Zeserson in her work on menopause amongst Japanese women involves the concern that the eyes and eyesight of not only the newborn but the mother are affected by childbirth. In her article "*Chi no Michi* as Metaphor: Conversations with Japanese Women about Menopause," Zeserson unpacks the term "*chi no michi*," translated as "path of blood," a multivalent metaphor, the meaning of which embraces women's particular conditions during and after childbirth and physiological conditions experienced by

menopausal women.⁶⁴ A woman whose mother-in-law refuses to care for her after her pregnancy and is not given sufficient time to recover might suffer from *chi no michi* symptoms such as failing eyesight, dizziness, and fatigue when she reaches menopause. Childbirth, viewed by the women of Matsuyama City of Ehime Prefecture whom Zeserson interviewed for her study, is such an important event, post-partum women are expected to refrain from hard work, both physical and intellectual, including such activities as reading, so they can attend to their newborn babies and their own recovery. This popular medical concept could very well be behind the custom of assigning small, dark places as suitable areas for parturition.

Other medical reasons guided decisions to allocate particular spaces for parturition. In the village of Tajima, Onyû district of Fukui Prefecture, twenty days recuperation at a parturition hut was also customary. The woman's mother helped during her period of convalescence. Also, in the village of Otomi of Ooi district in Fukui prefecture, women gave birth in a room appropriate for the season – a warm room in the winter and a cool room in the summer. In this region, new mothers rested in seated position for one week after giving birth as the community thought that this position aided recovery. In Ogawa village of Fukui Prefecture, the community considered a seventy-five day period of isolation as an appropriate period of convalescence for the mother. This confinement took place in a parturition hut located at the outskirts of the town. Researchers stress the new mother prepared her food on a

⁶⁴ Jan M. Zeserson, "Chi no Michi as Metaphor: Conversations with Japanese Women about Menopause," *Anthropology & Medicine*, Vol. 8, Nos 2/3, 2001. The theme of new mother being denied by her mother-in-law also appears in Margery Wolf's ethnography of women in agricultural villages in Peihotien, Taiwan in the late 1950's. Elderly women suffering from aches and pains attributed their discomfort to the fact that miserly mother-in-laws refused them chicken after they gave birth. It was customary for post-parturient women to be fed chicken to replenish their protein supplies. Please see Margery Wolf, *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), 56.

separate fire, with the implication that the community considered the mother and child to be polluted.

Impurity and parturition

The examples of parturition I have discussed so far reflect issues of space, geomancy, and auspiciousness and concerns for the health of the mother and child. A common element binding these “birth territories” is that they were embedded in a woman’s normal sphere of existence. As the sleeping room was the most common place to give birth, it suggests that people held the attitude that birth was a naturally occurring event. The ubiquitous dark, poorly ventilated closet perhaps shielded mother and child from drafts and injurious direct sunlight – concerns stemming from folk practices – but in all probability was the most available space in Japanese household after the room for sleeping. The specialized places for parturition involve cultural interpretations of birth and suggest some sort of system of enforcement was in place. For the most part, ritual purity systems do not seem to be involved in these spaces. The instances where special places are designated for birth because of its polluting properties are, remarkably, few.

In the prefectures of Saga, Yamanashi, and Nagasaki women gave birth in closets due to impurity associated with childbirth. Also, in the Nita region of Oita Prefecture, women gave birth in closets because the community considered childbirth *aka fujô*. This term is one form of *kegare* associated with menstruation. In the town of Jimokuji of Ama district of Aichi Prefecture, women gave birth in a special room away from direct sunlight because the community considered childbirth polluting. Parturient women wore indoor slippers for seven nights to prevent them from coming into contact with the *tatami* matting. There is also evidence that communities in this region required women to give birth in one-room parturition huts. In the Shima district of Mie prefecture, the community considered childbirth a polluting event, thus women

gave birth in parturition huts called *obiya*; although, no material evidence of these structures exists. In the city of Niihama in Ehime Prefecture, the community thought that deities would be offended if a woman gave birth in a bright, sunlit location. Also, newborn babies were considered impure, so they could not be brought into a room containing a *kamidana*. In Mie district of Mie Prefecture, the community considered the parturition room to be an impure place; therefore, women did not labor in a room lit by direct sunlight. In the Suzuka district of Mie Prefecture a bright room was also considered off limits as a space for birth; in this region, birth took place in a quiet room at the back of the house near the washroom. Also, in several locations in Tottori prefecture, families spread straw over the earth floor and in various rooms including the toilet and entrance hallway to protect those areas from the polluting properties of childbirth. In the village of Izaku of Kagoshima prefecture, childbirth took place in a dark, quiet closet where the tatami had been lifted so the impurity could flow beneath it.

Delivery Charts, Birth Tents, and Placating the Deities

To what extent did Chinese medical practices, religious interpretations, and customs of childbirth influence customs of parturition in Japan? Translations of medical texts from Tang Dynasty China (618-907) circulated in Japan from the tenth century, so pollination of customs, practices, and ideologies did occur. The “delivery charts” consulted to determine auspicious locations and directions in which to give birth and the “birth tent” where Chinese women of high social standing gave birth seem to have influenced practices of parturition presented in the *Nihon Saniku*. Jender Lee, in her article, “Gender and Medicine in Tang China” presents these topics.

In her discussion of childbirth practices in Tang Dynasty China, Lee underscores how such a quotidian event cast a light on the intersection of gender and

medicine in a “preprofessionalized” society.⁶⁵ By the Song period, gynecology was an established field. By following Barbara Duden’s methodology to uncover the fissure between medical science’s view of the woman’s body and women’s understanding of their own bodies culled from a doctor’s medical diaries, Lee turns to medical texts of the period to demonstrate how health concerns of women reflect broader attitudes towards women. Notably, she begins her study by introducing the earliest record of a birth in a sixth century text written by a Buddhist monk who assisted a woman with a history of childbirth loss, showing how deeply imbricated are health issues and religion in a society without regulated, professional systems of medicine.

Sifting through the texts of medical doctors who attended issues ranging from conceiving a son to postpartum care, Lee discovers that male doctors had “developed a gendered view of the body through a discourse of reproduction.”⁶⁶ At first, it seems Lee states the obvious – how can doctors assisting women with their reproductive issues not develop a gendered view of the body? Her discussion on infertility, however, illustrates how doctors in some contexts shifted the focus from men to women as they developed approaches to cure barrenness. Moreover, the lens through which women were identified resonates with issues I identified in the second chapter of this dissertation. Medically, women were defined by their reproductive capacities, first, followed by their physical weakness and emotional instability.⁶⁷

Lee brings up “delivery charts” that were consulted when a woman was about to give birth. Delivery charts instructed the proper position in which to give birth – squatting being the most favorable position – and the “proper geomantic directions” to face during delivery. Delivery charts also determined the proper location to bury the

⁶⁵ Jen-der Lee, "Gender and Medicine in Tang China," *Asia Major* 16, no. 2 (2003).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

placenta.⁶⁸ Important information included in the delivery chart was the mother's year of birth, her age, and the expected month of delivery. Incidentally, Japanese temples and shrines conducting rituals of safe childbirth require this information.

The system of delivery charts was organized in the *Chanjing*, a sixth century text by an unknown author, who drew from an earlier collection of charts. The author claims to have created a twelve-month system that was easier to use. Sections of the *Chanjing* can be found in *Ishinpô*, a tenth century Japanese collection of Chinese medical texts. These texts emphasize squatting position, proper geomantic directions, and months in deciding how a Japanese woman's birth should be conducted. Lee suggests these recommendations helped the woman avoid offending a deity that would in turn harm her or her child.

Much of this has to do with inculcating proper "behavior"⁶⁹ during birth. The first step in this proper behavior involved setting up a "birth tent," either a space in a household or on its compounds. The space separated the birthing woman from pollution and protected her from "winds and evil spirits."⁷⁰ The second step involved acting appropriately to gain the good graces of the deities. Furthermore, a major concern of those involved assisting childbirth was the issue of complicated births, thought to have been brought on by too many people in the birth tent and improper practices of midwives. A common theme Lee notices is that restrictions were placed on the number of people who assisted the birthing woman as male doctors thought noise and bustle contributed to unfavourable birth outcomes and difficult deliveries.

⁶⁸ Jessey J.C. Choo, specialist of gender issues in T'ang dynasty in the history department of University of Missouri, Kansas City, mentions delivery charts helped people determine "auspicious" locations and directions for setting up birth tents, delivering the baby, and burying afterbirth. She asserts that the direction is determined by the season and the month in which birth occurs. Personal communication, November 7, 2008.

⁶⁹ Lee, "Gender and Medicine in Tang China," 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

The extent to which childbirth practices in Tang China influenced customs of parturition throughout Japan requires further investigation; however, we can see that there are similarities and information from the *Ishinpô* no doubt leaked into the wider society.

Awareness of the numerous practices of parturition that occurred throughout the country is the most important item that must be taken from this summary of ethnography of customs of parturition. The second important point involves the flexibility with which they were practiced. Conventional paradigms comprising systems of ritual purity in Japan hold childbirth, next to death, as the most polluting events punctuating the span of a lifetime. As it is laid out in the *Nihon Saniku*, the motivations behind the practices also cannot be painted by one swathe from the palette of pollution and taboo: there are shades, degrees, and nuances coloring these customs. To conclude this section, I want to point out that the entry for Okinawa lists numerous customs that deserve scholarly attention; however, I do not discuss them in this study. In the *Nihon Saniku* there are other omissions that are just as interesting as the additions. Very little is written about the customs from Hyôgo Prefecture, the current capital of ritual activity around childbirth generated by Nakayama-dera. Also, the customs of Kyoto prefecture are not included in this section of the *Nihon Saniku*, as they were omitted in the section discussing the *hara-obi*. Why, would Ôbara shrine's *ubuya*, the subject of much scholarly inquiry, not be discussed in this reference? In the following section, I address this lapse by performing a detailed ethnography of the parturition hut. In doing so, I also demonstrate how the community presents its customs and supports the designation of its *ubuya* as a cultural treasure.

How Do We Spin the Merits of a Parturition Hut?

On the first of March in the year 1960 (Showa 35) Kyoto Urban Prefecture designated the parturition hut as a Tangible Folk Treasure (*Yûkei minzoku bunka zai*). With such a designation, one that secures funds for the community and places the otherwise obscure and inaccessible location on the map at the intersection of tourism and culture in Japan, it is important to ask: what gets promoted? How has the community polished the image of a confinement hut?

Basically, the community has transformed the *ubuya* into unique site on the map of gender, sexuality, and family studies in Japan. Two symposia hosted by the town of Miwachô, the Kyoto prefecture location of the parturition hut, are largely responsible for generating interest and redefining the hut to make it more palatable to modern sensibilities. The town's museum (*shiryôkan*) sponsored the first symposium in January 1999 and published the contents, which included maps of the village, pictures and diagrams of the hut and comparative examples of parturition huts, and information about Ôbara shrine.⁷¹ The panelists include Suzuki Nanami from Kyoto Bunkyo University, and the chair of the meeting, Nishimura Masamichi, a member of the Miwachô board of education and Yagi Tôru, an anthropologist by training and specialist in gender and Japanese folklore based at Kyoto's Bukkyo University, and the primary ethnographer of Ôbara's *ubuya*. He has cultivated a close relationship with Hayashi Shûjûn, the head priest of the shrine, and brings his students to the site for instructional purposes and to participate in the shrine's annual festival. His analyses of the parturition hut appear in his book *Nihon no Tsuka Girei*.⁷²

Transcripts of the presentations of the panelists are also included. Yagi Tôru situates Ôbara shrine's parturition hut in the context of parturition huts in Japan.

⁷¹ Miwachô Kyôdo Shiryôkan, "Ôbara no Ubuya," (Amadagun Miwachô: Miwachô Kyôdo Shiryôkan, 1999).

⁷² Yagi, *Nihon no tsûka girei*.

Suzuki Nanami's analysis is comparative, focusing on converging examples of ritual purity systems guiding behavior of parturient women in the United States and Europe. The publication also contains transcriptions of interviews with members of the community who were confined in the parturition hut.⁷³ The summations of Yagi and Suzuki conclude the report.

The second symposium, hosted by the village itself, took place in March, 2000 (Heisei 12) and was also leveraged into a publication.⁷⁴ The town's mayor, Tanaka Keio, introduced the event. The panel included Yagi Tôru and Namihira Emiko, a professor from Tokyo's national women's university (Ochanomizu Joshi Daigaku), whose research on issues of ritual purity in Japanese society I discuss in the first chapter of this dissertation. Namihira lectured on "The power of women, the power of babies, and the power of the *ubuya*" and Yagi Tôri discussed life cycle rituals of children. A series of articles about the shrine and the *ubuya* published in the Kyoto newspaper (*Kyoto shinbun*) in October 1998 are also available in the report.

The main thrust of the symposia is to legitimate the claim that women drew succour from the experience of confinement.⁷⁵ A transcription of an interview with a woman from Ôbara who was confined in the hut in Showa 19 (1945) with the birth of her first child bolsters the claim.⁷⁶ She would go on to have four more children,

⁷³ The interviewees include a man who was born in the hut in Meiji 34 (1901), a woman who spent a night with her newborn baby in the hut in Showa 19 (1944), various women who used the hut, and Mitsui Mine, a midwife who practiced from Shôwa 20 (1945) in the district of Amada, where the *ubuya* is located.

⁷⁴ Zaiseika, *Shinpojiumu Ubuya to-ku II*.

⁷⁵ Kristen de Troyer mentions that a similar claim of protecting the mother after childbirth is made by commentators of *Levitucus* 15, where proscriptions are laid out regulating behavior around the blood of childbirth and menstruation. The difference, though, is that the mother is in a state of danger after giving birth. Please see De Troyer, Kristin. *Wholly Woman, Holy Blood: A Feminist Critique of Purity and Impurity, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003), 52.

⁷⁶ Zaiseika, *Shinpojiumu Ubuya to-ku II*, 1.

following the same custom with each one. At that time, she gave birth in her house with the assistance of a midwife (*sanba san*), and then holding her baby in her arms, crossed the river following her husband. In response to the interviewer's query as to how she made her way to the hut she replies: "[My husband] built a bridge for me. Because the steps of the ladder are called "*ko*," it is said so that you can have lots of children. So that's why we built a bridge of a ladder. He put a plank over it, and teetering away we crossed the bridge. Even if there were a normal bridge, we would use the same type of bridge. He lay down two planks and we staggered across."⁷⁷ The interviewer asks the woman: "As you went to be confined, how did you feel? Were you happy or were you relieved?"⁷⁸ To which the woman responds "Relieved." The interviewer presses her "As you were walking, you were happy?" The response: "Happy." And finally, to reinforce, the interviewer asks: "Was the relaxation good, when you spent the night in the parturition hut?" to which the woman responds, "good."

The methodology of the interviewer deserves consideration: she prods the interviewee with leading questions; the one-word responses the mother utters suggests she echoes party-line. The community of Ôbara has a vested interest in spinning the merits of the hut as it benefits from the boons of tourist revenue and prestige that come with hosting a cultural treasure. Tourists, educational tour groups, and scholars gravitate to Ôbara to view this unique parturition hut, so a concerted community effort to market their *ubuya* makes sense from an economical perspective. Putting this cynicism aside, however, it is also important to keep in mind the quality of life the mother of five experienced. Life in a pre-War Japanese agricultural village was, without a doubt, physically taxing.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Robert J. Smith and Ella Lury Wiswell describe the hard work performed by women in the agricultural village of Suye, who chopped wood and carried heavy loads of lumber from the surrounding mountains and worked in the fields, even into the late stages of pregnancy and while nursing.⁷⁹ We can see, then, how a new mother would welcome even a brief respite from a strenuous daily routine.

Nonetheless, the claim of the hut being a comfortable, pleasant place to give birth did not sway me. I visited the site six weeks after giving birth in private clinic in downtown Kyoto, and the thought of experiencing labor in this cold, damp, cramped hut sent chills up my spine. When I discussed this with Yoshimura Noriko, who too shared my unease, she reminded me that the women of the community of Ôbara viewed the space differently, evoking the “insider/outsider” argument.⁸⁰ The hut was an important feature of women’s everyday lives and they were raised with the knowledge that their grandmothers, their mothers, their sisters, and their neighbors all gave birth in the *ubuya*. I left my meeting with Yoshimura Noriko realizing that a twenty-first century North American woman living in Kyoto who had experienced prenatal care and obstetrical medical treatment in Canada, the United States, and Japan could in no way even begin to imagine what occurred in the minds and bodies of the pregnant women and new mothers of Ôbara. Or, in Barbara Duden’s words “I cannot be too careful *not* to use my own body as a bridge to the past.”⁸¹ But, as I point out in the second chapter of this dissertation, the birth territory shifted drastically from home to institution in the decade following World War II, so I stand behind my initial reaction and support my conviction that women would much prefer the comfort of a hospital bed over giving birth and spending a few days alone in this hut with a screaming newborn!

⁷⁹ Smith, *The Women of Suye Mura*, 293.

⁸⁰ Personal interview conducted in April 2007 in Wakayama, Ehime Prefecture.

⁸¹ Duden, *The Woman beneath the Skin*, 2.

Another issue to consider is the contemporary medical system in Japan that holds the attitude that mothers and their newborns require time alone to recuperate and bond; this attitude is supported by a national health insurance system that offers complete financial coverage for a six or seven-day hospital stay. I suggest that a community project to maintain the status of the *ubuya* as a cultural treasure involves repackaging pre-War attitudes towards pregnancy and childbirth to mesh with contemporary attitudes. The academic community contributes to the dissemination of this revised and resubmitted rhetoric of reproduction.

The Merits of the *Ubuya* Seeping into Scholarship

Yagi Toru, in *Tsuka Girei*, asserts that the *ubuya* was built not to shield the *kami* from the blood pollution of childbirth, but to “separate women from the space of everyday life,” so they could enter into a purified state in which to bring new life into the world.⁸² Influenced by Arnold van Gennep’s (1873-1957) use of the term “rites of passage” in the beginning of the twentieth century, Yagi Tôru identifies customs and rituals that occur at critical junctures throughout a Japanese person’s lifespan, which he categorizes as childbirth, coming-of-age celebrations, marriage, unlucky years (*yakudoshi*); funerals, and ancestor worship. Yagi’s focus, however, is not only on the events themselves, but how human relations are constructed vis-à-vis these events. Marrying *in situ* research with historical overview, he demonstrates how community – might we say culture – is maintained and nourished through these ritual events. The proximity of the hut to the shrine and the fact that its only door faces the direction of the shrine reinforce the idea that the fluids produced in the *ubuya* did not offend the *kami* of Ôbara shrine. Early descriptions of the hut refer to *shimenawa*, white paper strips, the presence of which denotes sacralty, which were strung around the interior of the hut. When I visited the site in February of 2007, a pole with a strip of

⁸² Yagi, *Nihon no tsûka girei*, 271.

shimenawa stood upright in the center of the hut. There is also a saying that is associated with the parturition hut “*anzan wo naetomorau*” (“to bring about a safe childbirth”), a saying considered to be a blessing of the *kami*.⁸³ Yagi stresses the uniqueness of the site and the deep connection between the hut and the shrine is the only example of its kind in Japan.⁸⁴

Takatori Masao and Hashimoto Mineo analyze the parturition hut in their monograph *Shûkyô Izen*, a work which found its genesis on a Sunday morning television show – broadcast every week at 6:00 a.m. – produced by NHK, Japan’s national television station. In their program, the two scholars explored major issues in Japanese religious culture, offering insights afforded by their respective academic specialties – Hashimoto from the perspective of philosophy and religion and Takatori from *minzoku gaku* (folklore studies) and history.⁸⁵

The central query that emerged, as the discussion moved from the airwaves to print, asks, from within the paradigm of a religious culture, how do the Japanese navigate the cycle of life and death, and, today, how must these religious customs change? Through discussions on such themes in Japanese religions as the firmly entrenched observances of austerities and prohibitions, the nation-wide practices of petitioning the gods and buddhas for protection, communications with the *kami*, and deeply encoded customs of ancestor worship, Takatori and Hashimoto isolated a recognizable “cultural core” and constant patterns of religious practice that withstood the forces of change. Essentially, Japanese religious experience is present on a daily basis, with such practices as ancestor worship and continuous exposure to the realm of the sacred, made publicly available in the sacred events hosted by shrines and temples. Takatori and Hashimoto contrast this permeability between the sacred and the public

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Takatori, *Shûkyô izen*.

to Western religious practices where access to the sacred occurs only in sanctified spaces that are closed to the public.⁸⁶

It is from within this framework that Takatori Misao and Hashimoto Mineo explore Ôbara shrine's parturition hut, echoing much of the material circulated by the symposia. A point worth stressing is the sensitivity with which they explore women's religious experience as it is implicated in the deeply entrenched systems of ritual purity. They evoke the example of Nyônin-do, a temple at the entrance of Koya-san where women performed their devotions to Kûkai, as they were not allowed to enter into the mountain because of their impurity.⁸⁷ The anomalous example of Ôbara's *ubuya* has to be balanced with the example of Koya San's *nyonin-do* as a reminder of the obstacles women in Japan faced due to their gender.

There is one obstacle that the community of Ôbara has not taken into account and it involves laundry!

Airing the Dirty Laundry of Ôbara: The Problem of Water

It is said that the hut was built in the beginning of the Edo period.⁸⁸ Scholars point to "Ôbara Jinja Hongi" as the only extant document where mention of the parturition hut exists. This document, written sometime during the Kanbun era (1661 and 1673) and transcribed in the year of Meiji 25 (1892), reports that the *ubuya* had already been in use by the beginning of the Edo period.⁸⁹ In the report *Ôbara jinja – rekishi to shinkô* (*Ôbara Jinja: History and Belief*), a document published by the ethnographic museum of Miwachô in 1988, it states that from the early modern

⁸⁶ Ibid., 230.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁸ Zaiseika, *Shinpojiumu Ubuya to-ku II*.

⁸⁹ Yagi, *Nihon no tsûka girei*, 271. The source of the document is Miwachô Shihen San inkai, ed. *Ôbara Jinja hongî*. Edited by Miwachôshi Shiryôhen (Miwachô: Miwachô, 1998).

period, people from distant fiefdoms came to the shrine to receive prayers for safe childbirth.⁹⁰

The miracle story associated with the parturition hut tells of a flood in 1667 that submerged the area around Ôbara shrine, leaving only one area dry. The community members of Ôbara chose this spot upon which to construct the parturition hut, using driftwood from the flood as building material. The flood motif figures again in the history of this *ubuya* in 1953 (Showa 28), when a torrential rain caused the river running alongside the hut to swell; once again the area around the hut remained dry.⁹¹

We encounter the theme of water once again. In the services for safe childbirth of Buddhist temples, water is the medium used by priests to inscribe Sanskrit symbols in the air. These gestures evoke ideas of the watery world of the fetus and drew our attention to the origins of life. On a deeper level, they expressed the ritual predicament of services for safe childbirth: the pregnant body is a fluid organism, its status continuously shifting until the baby within is expelled. Once the child is safely born, what next? The water used in the services also evokes the *mizuko* – child of the waters – the ambiguous symbol of a child-like bodhisattva spiritually accessed through memorial services designed to help parents assuage guilt and manage grief. Water is also the medium that spreads blood pollution generated by women.

Bernard Faure, in *The Power of Denial: Buddhism, Purity and Gender*, recites a song taken from a collection of folk songs: “Rain has not been falling/But Yamada

⁹⁰Morikawa, "Murabito no issei to girei," 79-89. Morikawa Keiko, in a student report published by Bukkyô University's Folklore Studies Research Group (Bukkyô Daigaku Minzokugaku Kenkyûkai), provides a descriptive account of rituals of safe childbirth associated with Ôbara shrine's parturition hut and a brief history. Her analysis is framed in the larger context of rituals of childbirth and life-cycle rituals for children and is part of a student project where graduate students of a research group of folk practice conducted fieldwork in the village of Miwachô.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 79-89.

river is dirty. Yamada women's/ Skirts' juice."⁹² This vulgar ditty reminds us that the soiled garments of women washed in rivers and lakes formed the basis for consigning women to bloody pools in hell because the action defiled the buddhas and deities. Faure looks to the Song period in China to show the genesis of this aversion to blood. The story of Woman Huang appears in numerous sūtra from the period and is associated with the sin of childbirth. In one such sūtra her husband scolds her for her blood transgressions:

When you gave birth to your children you also committed a sin:
How many bowls of bloody water, how many bowls of fluids?
For every child, there were three basins of water;
Three children, and thus nine basins of fluids.⁹³

The tirade extends to include a rant against the mother for offending the deity of the hearth because she commenced kitchen duties too soon after giving birth; for polluting the entire cosmos because she left the house before the period of confinement was officially lifted; and, for polluting the nation's great water systems because – she laundered her soiled garments.

Why is it so important to the community of Ôbara that the patch of ground on which it constructed the *ubuya* remained dry? Was it out of concern for the mother and child? I do not think so. The motif of water – this doctrinal insistence that the patch of ground remains above the river's waterline – expresses the concern about the pollution of childbirth filtering into the small community's water system. This concern speaks to the larger framework of institutionalized misogyny of religious institutions in Japan, particularly Buddhism.

Faure brings up the “double-bind” in which women are situated: the natural processes their bodies undergo, physiological cycles necessary for continuing the

⁹² Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 66.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

human race, are the same processes which Japanese Buddhism condemns as sinful. Basically, women are guilty of “the sin of gender.”⁹⁴ As I have discussed previously, the Buddhist notion of sin expressed in the *Ketsubonkyô* filtered to all levels of society in Japan.

Faure shows how the Kumano Bikuni – the sect of female preachers – whose narrative performances of the picture scrolls of Blood Pool Hell were actually proselytizing tools to help women achieve salvation. While the nun attempted to convey a message of “feminine emancipation” in their sermons – sermons designed to terrify audience members – the nuns simply “contributed to the subjection of women to Buddhist male ideology.”⁹⁵ A similar logic is evident in Kathleen O’Grady’s observation of the ideas circulating in feminist circles that periods of confinement were celebratory occasions. This rose-colored view ignores the fact that androcentric ideologies punished women.

Let us move to present-day Dadeldhura, a village in Western Nepal. Rules of parturition require women to be confined with the newborns for ten days because the community considers the pair to be “unclean.”⁹⁶ The practice is called *chhaupadi* and women also observe it when they menstruate. Their foods and behavior are also restricted and sometimes the places of parturition are dirty cowsheds and cramped, airless rooms, or huts far removed from the community. From a medical perspective, it is a dangerous practice, as women need proper nutrition and hygienic surroundings; indeed, a fifteen-year-old girl died from diarrhoea whilst confined because people in the community refused take her to the hospital. I mentioned the 2006 Supreme Court

⁹⁴ Ibid., 78.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Charles Haviland, "Nepal's Confined Women Want Change," BBC News, Dadeldhura, western Nepal, Wednesday, 4 March 2009; available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7870616.stm; accessed March 13, 2009.

action to abolish the law of *chhaupadi* in the introduction of this dissertation; three years later the practice still continues under the radar of the law. Women have fought for the restrictions to be lifted but to no avail.

I cannot collapse cultures, and there are distinctions between present-day practices in Dadeldhura and pre-War Ôbara, but to put a positive spin on the idea of women giving birth in a dirt-floor hut and being forced to spend a certain number of days alone with their wailing newborns is disingenuous at best. Basically, an androcentric ideology is sugarcoated with political-correctness and nostalgia for an imagined past and dished out as tourism fodder.

This sexism is internalized. Today, women, without fully understanding the implications of the *ubuya* and the ideology associated with it, collect a few grains of sand to take home with them as *omamori*. The sand of the earthen floor of the hut is considered to have apotropaic properties; women of the community would place a handful under their futons when they gave birth in their homes. Similar to the *sūtras* pronouncing women's pollution that women chanted and copied to attain salvation, the sand is the very material that signifies their polluted status in the world of Japanese religions.

Conclusion: Of Blood and Passages

I have demonstrated how a community puts a positive spin on a distasteful custom; yet, there are important points about Japanese religions and social and cultural issues with the customs of Ôbara's *ubuya*. The community poignantly addressed its concern about the nature of life and its relationship with death.

In the overview of parturition in Japan, the notion of birth territory is rather oblique, given the shifts and movements within traditions; furthermore, birth territories are contested spaces as conflicting attitudes within a locality designated appropriate places for women to give birth. The issue at stake here involves flexible

and malleable attitudes towards the notion of a birth territory rather than concerns about the designation of a space for the purposes of childbirth and the social interactions that occur in that space. The case of Ôbara's parturition hut further widens the category of birth territory because it is not only the space but how ritual activates the space. While it is indeed useful to explore the available resources and types of social interactions occurring in this space – white paper strips denoting sacrality and divinity were strung along the walls and a sickle hung at the door the ritual intent of which to protect the woman and her baby from evil – the other processes occurring cannot be explained by simply the space alone. Rather than the notion of a fixed, rigid territory, a more fluid, processual theme of separation and integration occurred: at the same time a parturient woman was removed from her daily routine, her household, and her community, a new life was separating itself from the other world and travelling a journey where it would be absorbed into a daily routine, a household, and a community. The symbolic system and ritual process expressing that involved a family-to-be crossing a bridge on a ladder constructed specifically for the purpose under the watchful eyes of the members of the *machigaito*.

While I have mentioned earlier the need for ritual attention to issues of blood impurity, especially the insights offered by Kathleen O'Grady, for whom blood is "the shifting valence between life and death" the case of the *ubuya* of Ôbara shrine, brings up the issue of the need of ritual attention to not issues of blood impurity, but issues of social reproduction and the deeply held religious impulse to keep open the passage between this world and the other world.

CHAPTER 5

SEEKING HELP AND FINDING IT WITHIN: RELIGIOUS DEVOTION AND WOMEN'S ISSUES IN JAPANESE RELIGIONS

The Trembling with Anticipation Diaries

In *Tamago Kurabu (Egg Club)*, a widely read pregnancy magazine in Japan, an article from September 2006 entitled “*Wakuwaku Ninshin Nikki*” (The Trembling with Anticipation Pregnancy Diaries), features the pregnancy experiences of women throughout the 10-month period.¹ The topics circulate around the activities they engaged in, their diets, and, their transforming bodies. The women discuss their devotional activities in a section entitled “*Watashi no Anzan Kigan Gudzu*” (“*My Safe Childbirth Prayer Goods.*”) Of the sixteen women interviewed, all but three follow the devotional procedures of religious rituals of safe childbirth laid out for them by the temples and shrines that I have explored in depth in this dissertation. Those in the later stages of pregnancy had purchased or been given by members of their families, amulets, charms, and *hara obi*. They visited a temple or shrine – often they did not specify which – on *Inu no Hi*. One woman used the amulets and charms her mother had purchased twenty-five years ago and which conferred the safe delivery of the current mother-to-be. But, she also visited Tokyo’s Suiten-gu. Two women carried on their bodies amulets they had received from Okinawa. One woman kept close to her a picture of a dog with healthy puppies drawn by her son, the boy obviously aware of the connection between dogs and safe childbirth.

Three women, however, stood out, as they had scripted their own devotional practices and developed their own rituals. One woman in her fourth month of pregnancy, upon discovering she was pregnant, bought a seedling of a cherry tree which she planned to nurture along with her pregnancy. This was her prayer for the

¹ Reiko Okabu, "Wakuwaku ninshin nikki," *Tamago Kurabu*, September 1 2006.

safe birth and subsequent nurturing of her child. Another woman had not yet made her visit to the shrine or temple because she too was only in her fourth month, so she bought as her prayers for a safe childbirth books on childbirth and childrearing. One woman's "*gudzu*" was a necklace. Her mother-in-law had brought her a pendant of a pressed flower from Spain. From her mother she received a chain, on which she wore the pendant continuously throughout her pregnancy. She explained how this piece of jewelry helped her access "The power of Mothers" which she drew on to help her through her pregnancy.

As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, rituals of safe childbirth in Japan are primarily mediated through religious centers. Nakayama-dera and Obitoke-dera, two Buddhist temples in the Kansai region of Japan are popular sites, as is Suiten-gu, a Shintô shrine in the heart of Tokyo. Enlisting the forces of commodification and tradition, these sites have cornered the market on religious rituals of safe childbirth and have virtually defined women's religious experience of pregnancy and childbirth. For the women who choose not to visit the sites or do not wear the *hara-obi*, or those who supplement the traditional practices with personally derived devotional practices, they have resisted the advances of these religious institutions, but their numbers remain small. What does this tell us about the ways women employ a religious framework to help them deal with their life cycle concerns? Are women who construct their own practices resisting the pressures of commodification in the religious setting? Or, are they examples of how secularization and religion have converged? Are the few women who develop their own devotional practices indicative of a postmodern religious attitude, or do these patterns of "private religion" exist in Japanese popular religious practice throughout history?

To answer these questions I will explore the history of women's devotion in Japan focusing on three bodhisattvas associated with safe childbirth: Jizô, Kishimojin,

and Kannon. In looking at the historical development of women's devotion in relation to these deities, I will ask the following questions: How did particular bodhisattvas and deities come to be the object of women's devotion and how has this devotional relationship been sustained throughout Japanese history? Is female devotion connected primarily to life cycle events or do other features of women's existence require maintenance through devotional practices to bodhisattvas?

I will begin with a discussion of Jizô, highlighting the highly contentious service called *mizuko kuyô*, memorial services for aborted, miscarried, or stillborn babies. This will be followed by an exploration of Kishimojin, the syncretic deity whose lifespan as a devotional image for women's issues was relatively short. Then I will look at Kannon, focusing on how women's devotion to the bodhisattva is implicated in the feminization of the bodhisattva that occurred in China and how this influenced women's devotional practices to Kannon in Japan. Finally, I will conclude with the natural childbirth technique of Sophrology popularized by obstetrician Matsunaga Akira that I introduced in chapter 2 of this dissertation. The curious inclusion of this topic in a chapter focusing on bodhisattva devotion helps us understand how women's devotional practices related to childbirth have changed, especially in the secular context of contemporary Japanese society.

At the heart of this discussion lies the tension between "other power" (*tariki*) and "self-effort" (*jiiriki*), a debate in itself that has been played out through the history of Japanese religions. The Pure Land Buddhist tradition (*Jôdo-shû* and *Jôdo-shinshû*) developed this type of faith, expressed in the practice of *nenbutsu*, where adherents put their complete faith in the power of Amida Buddha by chanting the deity's name, in direct contrast to the efforts of practitioners of the Zen school of Japanese Buddhism who focus on cultivating spiritual and moral perfection through forms of

self-discipline.² Broadly speaking, *tarikī* is an important element in devotional practices of all the major schools, and does indeed crop up in practices associated with Japanese Zen. It also figures prominently in devotional activities related to women and childbirth, as I shall demonstrate in this chapter. How does the debate between *jiriki* and *tarikī* play itself out in religious rituals of safe childbirth in Japan?

Jizō: The Friend of the Japanese

Hayami Tasuku opens his book on *Jizō* veneration noting that among the bodhisattvas inhabiting the pantheon of Buddhist deities in Japan, the Japanese people are on most familiar terms with Jizō.³ He attributes the *Jūringyō* and the *Hongankyō* as the main sūtras that laid out the properties and qualities of the bodhisattva Jizō in Japanese Buddhism. Hayami stresses the pious acts of the bodhisattva depicted in these sūtras made him the most suitable bodhisattva responsible for releasing people reborn in the six migratory paths (*rokudō*).⁴ The *Jūringyō* is set against the backdrop of Mappō, a time between the reigns of Śākyamuni Buddha and the future Buddha Maitreya. Considered the latter days of Buddhism, or “The Period of Degenerated Law,” the primary spiritual concern occupying Japan’s nobility during this period centered around a favorable rebirth and avoiding banishment to Hell. Jizō as one of his many incarnations assumed the guise of Emma-Ō, the Judge of Hell.⁵ It is this

² Paul O. Ingram, "The Zen Critique of Pure Land Buddhism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41, no. 2 (1973): 184-85. Paul Ingram points out, though, that even in the conflict-ridden twelfth century in Japan’s religious history, where competing schools of Buddhism fought fierce turf wars, the Pure Land school and the Zen school were closer ideological allies, whose differences lay in doctrine.

³ Tasuku Hayami, *Jizō shinkō* (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 2001; reprint, 9), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵ Yoshiko K. Dykstra, "Jizō, the Most Merciful Tales from Jizō Bosatsu Reigenki," *Monumenta Nipponica* 33, no. 2 (1978): 180. Senbon Emma-dō, a Shingon temple that could easily be mistaken for a used car lot displays a magnificent model of its *gohonzon* at its entrance, replete with menacing halberds and illuminated eyes that

association with the King of Hell that the bodhisattva became popular both in China and Japan as the deity most suitable for saving people from the torments of Hell.

Jizô was originally known as *pr̥thvī*, “an Indian goddess who personified the earth.”⁶ and is also referred to as *Kṣitigarbha*. Miraculous stories, images, and statues of the bodhisattva appeared in China, where the bodhisattva is known as *Ti-tsang*, at the end of the Sung dynasty (960-1279).⁷ The first image of the bodhisattva arrived in Japan between 725-749 during the reign of Emperor Shômu. It was installed first in Tachibana-dera, and then moved to Hôryûji.⁸ The date *Tempyô* (747) is inscribed on an image of the bodhisattva from Tôdai-ji, the main temple representing Nara period Buddhism; however, Yoshiko Dykstra assumes earlier images exist; however, no specific images with dates have been documented.

Jizô’s reputation traveled throughout the country by way of “legends and oral traditions” and through *sûtras* copied by priests and monks as early as the Nara period. Awareness of the bodhisattva filtered down to the masses during the Heian period (794-1185) through a genre of religious literature called *setsuwa*, performed by itinerant priests and nuns. In particular, a sect of nuns called *Kumano bikuni* read *setsuwa* to audiences of commoners using narrative picture scrolls called *etoki* to illustrate their stories. The *Ryôiki*, compiled around 822, is the earliest *setsuwa*.⁹ In it, Jizô, appearing as Emma-Ô, instructs Fujiwara Hirotari to perform a memorial service for his deceased wife, whom the nobleman met on a sojourn to Hell from which he managed to return. Fujiwara must copy the Lotus Sûtra. Yoshiko Dyksta whose article

flash bright red at passing motorists and pedestrians. The temple is located at the intersection of Senbon dori and Kuramachi dori in Kyoto’s west side.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 179. Daigan and Alicia Matsunage refer to Jizô as the “Buddhist assimilation” of *pr̥thvī*. Please see *Foundation of Japanese Buddhism*, Vol. 1 (Los Angeles: Buddhist Books International, 1974), 232.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

focuses on the similarities and differences between veneration of the bodhisattva in China and Japan, such as the practical benefits obtained in the present including longevity and assistance in entrance to the Pure Land, and his association with the Lotus Sūtra, maintains that the paradigmatic representation of the bodhisattva is depicted here, with the deity “recommending the virtuous copying of the sutra and delivering a sinner from Hell.”¹⁰

The Japanization of Jizō occurred throughout the Heian period through *setsuwa* such as the *Nihon Ōjō Gokuraki*, (c. 984) and *Hokke Genki* (c. 1043). It is, however, in the *Konjaku Monogatari* that Jizō receives the most attention and is transformed into a deity who can bestow practical benefits (*genze riyaku*). Thirty-two stories based on miracles performed by the deity are included in the text, confirming the popularity of the deity at all levels of Japanese society and providing a template for the practices and beliefs associated with the veneration of Jizō.¹¹ The compilation of the *Konjaku Monogatari* is unknown but records date its compilation to sometime in the Heian period. The *Reigenki* shares the same stories and much debate still occurs as to which text influenced the other as its date of compilation is also unknown.¹²

Jizō Kō Throughout History

The main area of devotion involving the bodhisattva and issues related to women is located in contemporary memorial service for aborted or miscarried fetuses and stillborn babies called *mizuko kuyō*, Families generally attend these types of services, but as I shall demonstrate shortly, religious institutions responded to the high rates of abortions in the 1970's, during Japan's period of economic prosperity, and engaged in aggressive campaigns targeting young women. Other devotional activity related to women, however, is associated with Jizō.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid., 183.

¹² Ibid.

Dykstra alludes to the Jizô *kô* associations attended by women on the twenty-fourth day of the month mentioned in the *Kammon Gyoki*, written in the Kamakura period (1192–1333).¹³ The ages of attendees ranged from elderly women attempting to secure salvation and young women concerned about reproductive issues and the health of their children. She mentions the dates of the twenty-third and twenty-fourth of the month as being considered auspicious, especially at a time early in the morning and discusses the flavor of these meetings: “Those who did not wish to miss the dawn of the twenty-fourth would therefore gather on the previous evening and pass the night listening and talking about Jizô or sometimes simply enjoying small talk and gossips (*sic*).” The attendees were “commoners, merchants, and townfolk (*sic*) throughout the Muromachi and Edo periods.”¹⁴ She also mentions contemporary *kô* activity occurring in the Kantô district and Japan’s northeast, noting that the schedule for meetings is not regular.

Sakurai Tokutarô provides a close analysis of *kô* activities occurring in the Tôhoku region, stressing that although Jizô confraternities were most active in Japan’s northeast, their influence spread throughout the entire country.¹⁵ Evolving out of the custom where elder members of a village community spontaneously gathered at the house of a recently deceased person to chant Buddhist prayers (*nenbutsu*) to commemorate the departed soul, organizations of the elderly formed, affectionately called “ma and pa groups” (*jiji kô* and *baba kô*). These groups were loosely based on devotion to Jizô, and the activities primarily involved meeting friends and socializing. Another example of *kô* activity prevalent in some communities involved newly

¹³ *Ibid.*, 188.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Tokutarô Sakurai, “Honpô shamanizmu no henshitsu katei: toku ni Jizô shinkô to no shûgo ni tsuite,” in *Jizô shinkô*, ed. Tokutarô Sakurai (Tokyo: Yûzankaku Shuppan, 1983), 225.

married wives who gathered to perform devotions to Jizô in order to ensure the safe births of their children.

Without a doubt, though, the *kô* activity that has attracted the attention of scholars and Japanese takes place on Aomori prefecture's Mount Osore and in the village of Kawakura, where two temples to Jizô are located. Entsuji temple, also known as Bodaiji, is the more famous of the two. On the 24th day of June, both temples hold festivals to the bodhisattva (*ennichi*). During that time, *itako*, blind female spiritualists, gather together and perform services for people who come to the temples seeking communication with deceased loved ones.¹⁶

Shifting to the mundane, neighborhoods throughout Japan are dotted with small altars to the bodhisattva in which offerings of freshly cut flowers, water, and incense are placed daily. This type of activity, however, is more observable in Kyoto and in neighborhoods in Japan's Kansai region. The individuals responsible for the upkeep of the altars generally tend to be older women from the community. Whether they are part of a Jizô *kô* is difficult to ascertain. When I asked a neighbor whom I encountered changing the flowers at the altar of the image across the street from my apartment, she said she was simply a resident of the community and invited me to the community's Jizô *Bon* celebration in the summer.¹⁷ She lived in a well-appointed house and the altar was located along the concrete fence surrounding her dwelling, so it appeared that her household was responsible for the erection and maintenance of the

¹⁶ For further reading on *Itako*, please see Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing: Modernity, Phantasm, Japan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Ian Reader gives a broad description of the activities occurring on Osorezan in *Religion in Contemporary Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Miyao Shigeo lists Kyoto's Jizô *Bon* celebrations occurring between the twenty-second and twenty-fourth of August in temples throughout the city. According to Miyao, the main temples associated with *Bon* ceremonies are Daizen-ji and Rokuharamitsu-ji. During this time, he notes, pilgrimage to Jizô (*Jizô Meguri*) also takes place. Please see *Nihon sairei gyôji jiten* (Tokyo: Shûdôsha, 1968), 397.

altar. The individuals who pause in front of these curbside altars to perform simple devotions of bowing, hands held in *gasshō*, also tend to be older women.

How Jizō devotion became an integral part of the *mizuko kuyō* service is highly contested. His relationship to children is the first step in forging that link.

Jizō and Children: A Relationship Made in Japan

The bodhisattva's association with children did not occur in China, and is considered an indigenous construction.¹⁸ Wakamori Tarō in his article "Jizō shinko ni tsuite," finds it remarkable that the notion of Jizō, in addition to being depicted as a child, became the bodhisattva responsible for protecting children.¹⁹ Wakamori follows a few strands to demonstrate how this association developed in Japan. First, in the Middle Ages, esteemed religious institutions devoted to the protection of children, including Kyoto's Iwashimizu Shrine, Juzenji-sha of Hiko Shrine, Hachiōji of the Gion district, Komori shrine of Kumano, and Sakuraōji of Izu's Kengen, also displayed as their main image of worship, images of Jizō.²⁰ Second, *setsuwa* such as the Kamakura-period *Uji Shūi Monogatari*, *Hasshin-shū*, and *Kanbun goki* contain tales where the bodhisattva appears as a child.²¹ It is in the Kamakura period, however, where the basis of this conception of the bodhisattva took root. Wakamori points to the religious concept current in the period, a system he considers to be Japanese Shintō, where it was thought that *kami* borrowed children in order to convey their oracles, a concept stemming from a long history of religious practice.²² This understanding became grafted onto Jizō veneration.

¹⁸ Dykstra, "Jizō, the Most Merciful Tales from Jizō Bosatsu Reigenki," 188.

¹⁹ Tarō Wakamori, "Jizō Shinkō ni tsuite," in *Jizō shinkō*, ed. Tokutaro Sakurai (Tokyo: Yūzankaku, 1983).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

Many scholars, however, find the basis of this association to be expressed in the *setsuwa* genre of literature where Jizô is often depicted as a handsome priest, or young child. William LaFleur notes that in the *Konjaku Monogatari*, Jizô appears as a little monk, an identification with children not found in early Buddhist scriptures or in the Chinese understanding of Ti-tsang.²³ In another *setsuwa*, *Uji Shûi Monogatari*, Jizô appears as a 10-year-old boy playing with a stick and becomes associated with the child at play. Manabe Kôsai in his 1960 publication *Jizô Bosatsu no Kenkyû* notes that in the *Jûringyô* the deity transforms himself into either a young girl or boy.²⁴ Dykstra also confirms that tales in the *Konjaku* and *Reigenki* often depicted him as a child.

The strongest link holding together Jizô veneration and children is found in the story *Sai no Kawara* or *Nishiin no Kawara*. According to Hayami Tasuku, “Sai no kawara thought”²⁵ developed from such Muromachi period fairy tales (*Otogizôshi*) as *Gappi no Gohonchi* and *Fuji no Hito Rokuzôshi*.²⁶ In the latter tale, a story of a trip through the six hells, we visit one hell, the banks of the river Sai upon which a large crowd of crying children is gathered. The children are trying to build stone stupas, but an “evil wind” insists on toppling the structures. A fire erupts and the children attempt to flee but are unable and remain stranded at the banks of the river, piteously crying for their mothers and fathers. They are burned in the fire, which leaves nothing but their skeletons. Jizô appears, carrying a staff and says the following: “To all the people of this world and the world to come, all of you who are attached to these skeletons, one word from the Buddha: existing on the road of all evils causes you to

²³ LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, 158.

²⁴ This is taken from Manabe Kosai, *Jizo Bosatsu no kenkyû* (Kyoto: Shoten, 1960), 176-7.

²⁵ Hayami, *Jizô shinkô*, 152.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

descend to uncertainty.”²⁷ To all who received those words, they were restored to their original form. It is this type of story associated with Jizô, Hayami claims, that has been embedded in the Japanese consciousness and present-day Japanese still associate the bodhisattva as a savior of children.²⁸

Hayami invokes Edo-period scholars such as Amano Shinkei and Yamatô Kyôten to formulate impressions about “Sai no Kawara thought.” In one strand of thought, the *wasan* is based on an actual river, the Zai no Kawara. In a second strand, the story is based on an example of skilful means from the Lotus Sûtra, taken from the following passage: “As a form of play, children assemble stupas of sand. It is the same for many people, they have already attained Buddha's teachings.”²⁹

From the Meiji period, however, the analysis shifted from scripture to folklore, and ethnographers attempted to fuse “dôsojin” belief onto the story of *Sai no Kawara*.³⁰ Yanagida Kunio (1875-1962) is the main proponent of this theory, arguing that “sa-he” were locations found at village boundaries and mountain passes throughout the county. At these spots, small images of *kami* were enshrined and offerings of stones left before their altars by people passing by, a gesture that had nothing to do with Buddhism.³¹ Yanagida evokes several examples of small images of Jizô placed at village boundaries, roadsides, and crossroads, illustrating how local residents themselves grafted Buddhist symbols onto local practices. Within this framework, Jizô is considered the origin of *dôsojin*, however, each deity's

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 153.

²⁹ Ibid., 156. Hayami presents only this small segment of the text. Lafleur refers to Leon Hurvitz' translation that goes as follows: “Or there are those who in open fields, /Heaping up earth, make Buddha-shrines./ There are even children who in play/Gather sand and make it into Buddha-stupas./ Persons like these/Have all achieved the Buddha Path.” Please see *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sutra)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 38-39. .

³⁰ Ibid., 156.

³¹ Ibid.

responsibilities are circumscribed. For example, the activities of divining one's marriage partner or a deciding upon a child's fate came directly under the sphere of *dôsojin's* spiritual influence. In this reasoning, "Sai no kawara" is the ceremonial site of *dôsojin*.³²

To add to this fusion, Hayami emphasizes the connection between Jizô and children drawing on the work of Tamamura Taijô, who traced the shift in burial and mourning rituals for children who died before the age of seven. Up until the Kamakura period, children who died were not given Buddhist memorial and burial services; their corpses were simply discarded in remote areas.³³ The understanding of the soul was not unlike the unsophisticated attitude towards the soul expressed in the customs of the common people of the primitive period, where corpses were discarded at the boundaries of villages and along riverbanks. Hayami questions the logic of this practice, as children under seven were considered inhabitants of the other world and not yet part of this world; therefore, more effort should have been made to honor their otherworldly status. However, as we progressed into the fifteenth century, Buddhist mortuary tablets began appearing for children and infants and the notion that a Buddhist service should be held for the spirit endowed with even a fragment of a personality gained currency. On the basis of this swell in popularity of holding memorial services for babies, "sai no kawara belief" developed. This leads into the fusion of *dôsojin* and Jizô, as it was already thought that *dôsojin* was the type of *kami* best able to manage the spiritual care of dead children; at the same time, the image of Jizô as a young child was well-known throughout all levels of Japanese society.

While the origins and intentions of *Sai no Kawara* remain contested – Helen Hardacre, whose work on *mizuko kuyô* I shall discuss shortly, claims the *wasan* was

³² Ibid., 156. Hayami cites Yanagida Kunio, "Sai no kawara hanashi" in *Teihon Yanagida Kunio Shû*, 27.

³³ Ibid., 157.

appropriated and its meaning distorted by purveyors of the service – its effectiveness in creating a devotional cult around the bodhisattva Jizô as a protector of the souls of babies and children remains unchallenged. Yoshiko Dykstra views “skillful propagators and preachers”³⁴ as the main vehicles through which Jizô took on this role of protector of children. Keller Kimbrough, on the other hand, insists that a “ruthless form of preaching”³⁵ by itinerant preachers, primarily the traveling mountain monks known as Yamabushi, who capitalized on the grief of parents who had lost children, propagated the story. Upon hearing the story, parents would donate generous offerings to the itinerant priests, who would in turn look after the souls of their children.

Jizô and *Mizuko Kuyô*

Because of his reputation as a protector of children, Jizô became associated with *mizuko kuyô*, a rite performed by some Buddhist sects and numerous new religions to appease the spirits of aborted or miscarried fetuses and stillborn babies.³⁶ The Buddhist sects associated with *mizuko kuyô* are Shingon and Jôdo. The service reached the height of its popularity in the 1970’s when abortion rates rose to very high levels. For example, during the mid-1970’s 1000 people a month visited 500 branches of Bentenshû, a new religion using *mizuko kuyô* as the basis of its foundation, to have

³⁴ Dykstra, "Jizô, the Most Merciful Tales from Jizô Bosatsu Reigenki," 189.

³⁵ This is how R. Keller Kimbrough characterized the sermons of the story at a lecture given for the “Kyoto Lectures” series at the Italian School of East Asian Studies, Kyoto on July 7, 2006. In his article “Preaching the Animal Realm in Late Medieval Japan,” he attempts to discuss the narratives performed by itinerant preacher nuns during the Edo period and their methods based on the extant *etoki*, as the texts of their sermons do not exist. As he focuses on the animal realm depicted in the various hells of the *etoki*, he does not discuss *Sai no kawara*; however, this article is illustrative of the type of preaching experienced by Edo period commoners. Please see *Asian Folklore Studies* 65 (2006), 179-204.

³⁶ Nakayama-dera also has temples on its complex where individuals can receive *mizuko kuyo* services. It is an independent temple, as it is affiliated with no school of Buddhism; although, at one time it was affiliated with Ninna-ji, a Shingon temple located in the Arashiyama district of Tokyo. Ninna-ji is known throughout the country for its *mizuko kuyo* services. Also, Obitoke-dera performs these services.

the service performed.³⁷ The major question of how the ritual came to be, as it has no canonical basis, forms the basic research of *mizuko kuyô*, as does the concern of how Jizô was appropriated for the service.

Anne Page Brooks, who contextualizes the practice within traditional Japanese Buddhism, sees it as a reflection of the tendency among Japanese Buddhists to particularize historical practices to address their concerns and practices.³⁸ In her view, a process of absorption occurred where various Buddhist sects and new religions

³⁷ Anne Page Brooks, "Mizuko Kuyô and Japanese Buddhism," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 8, no. 3 - 4 (1981): 122.

³⁸ Brooks bases her ideas on ideas presented by Joseph M. Kitagawa in his essay "The Buddhist Transformation in Japan." In this work, he discusses how a tradition adapts to new conditions, using Japanese Buddhism as his case. He first begins with the dialectic between tradition and new conditions: the "weight of a given tradition" colors a new condition and the arrival of a new condition reshapes a given tradition. Often, a process of rationalization and authentication occurs where the new condition identifies with certain features of the tradition and aspects of the new condition are readily absorbed into the tradition. Kitagawa's definition of tradition involves "a nebulous body of beliefs, attitudes, customs and institutions, with some sort of internal coherence." Before beginning his argument, he pauses to discuss some matters pertaining to religion and religion in Asia. To begin, religion consists of both universal and particular features, drawing on the assertion of William Earnest Hocking that religion does not speak to "the man-within-the-nation but to the man-within-the-world." At the same time, in order for adherents to understand religion's universal elements, it must communicate within the same idiom. "In other words, the universal must be particularized and the particular must be universalized." Kitagawa uses Buddhism to reinforce this, with his observation that Buddhism spreads its universal element while at the same time addressing particular issues that are relevant to the various regions in Asia it has settled. Also, Buddhism has not attempted to eradicate local traditions as tolerance is part of its constitution and it "presents itself" as a supplementary practice rather than a "contestant" of existing traditions. In other words, it tends "to approximate" existing worldviews. He reinforces this by putting forth that Buddhism's development in Asia from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries, in contrast to the development of Christianity in the West, was very much like that of a local religion. The idea of a "continuous interpretation of the national cultures" is simply not present in Buddhism's development. And finally, Kitagawa contends that Buddhism "wrestles" with relating its tradition to the "living experiences of modern Buddhists." Please see Kitagawa, Joseph M. "The Buddhist Transformation in Japan." *History of Religions* 4, no. 2 (1965): 319-36.

influenced by Buddhism absorbed into their religious services localized devotional practices to Jizô. She draws on research performed in the Tôhoku region where roadside Jizô images dating from 1729 were discovered. The small statues had been dressed in robes, bibs, and caps, and passers-by had deposited stones by the images in acts appealing to the bodhisattvas to appease the souls of their miscarried or aborted babies.³⁹ As I have mentioned previously, these roadside Jizô are considered guardians for travellers and her work builds on that of Yanagida Kunio.

In the end, Brooks does not state her position as to whether or not the services are legitimate Buddhist activities, but they lean towards an authentic Japanese Buddhist approach to a human concern. In addressing the conundrum posited by the practice, as Buddhism does not support the taking of life, Brooks points out that in Japanese Buddhism, practices are not guided by “theory or doctrine”⁴⁰ and the Japanese have been adept at employing a religious framework in which to negotiate “the realities of life.” It can be considered a compassionate practice embracing “the human nexus”⁴¹ On the other hand, the practice can be viewed as a “bandage” solution to a social issue, with the underlying concern that families are exploited. It cannot be ignored, however, that institutions performing the service generate much revenue.

Fluidity, Ambiguity, and “Flexible Return”

William LaFleur wrote the first book on the subject. In his work, *Liquid Life: Buddhism and Abortion in Japan*⁴² LaFleur locates the practice in the larger realm of Buddhist understanding of the moral, physiological, and spiritual ambiguity the fetus presents. He argues how such a rite appeals to Japanese Buddhism’s “moral bricolage” and of the individual who must make the choice to abort her fetus even

³⁹ Brooks, "Mizuko Kuyô and Japanese Buddhism," 130.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 138.

⁴¹ Ibid., 139.

⁴² LaFleur, *Liquid Life*.

though Buddhism has a clear doctrinal stance on abortion. How this conflict is negotiated through ritual constitutes the basis of this work.

I have already discussed LaFleur's central query into the importance of water imagery in worldviews where ideas of rebirth are prevalent in the third chapter of this dissertation. Rebirth appears again in the service of *mizuko kuyô*. An idea pertinent to this chapter involves what LaFleur sees as the notion of "flexible return," a nuance Brooks fails to notice, where a family creates the narrative that its unwanted child will either be reborn at a time when the family can support its existence, or, if the family has achieved its reproductive quota, the child will be returned to the *kami* or limbo, and eventually make its way to the Pure Land. Water, again, is the essential ingredient that supports this justification. In essence, the *mizuko* (water child) travels from one state of liquidity to another, its life has never become solidified, but with the understanding that some form of rebirth will occur at a later time. For LaFleur, it is a Japanese way of embracing two truths: the fetus is dead, the fetus will come to life again and it is particularly the geographical orientation of the country that allows for the development of such a concept.

A small nation comprised of a cluster of islands can handily construct its cosmology around water imagery and employ the properties of water to support ontological concerns. Out of water, Izanagi and Izanami, the founding *kami* of the nation, create the archipelago, "the formedness of reality for humankind,"⁴³ by stirring the brine with a jewelled spear. LaFleur points out that the ambiguity of the sea as source of life and as "*receptacle*,"⁴⁴ an idea set out in the *Nihongi*, the eighth century compilation of the burgeoning nation's myths. In one episode, Hiko-hoko-demi observes the goddess Toyo-tama-hime in labor, a transgression of the highest order.

⁴³ LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, 25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 25. Author's italics.

Ashamed, the new mother wraps her infant in reeds and sends it away in a boat, “relinquish[ing]” the infant to the sea, the natural place where “life-forms” should be returned.⁴⁵

Streams of “fluidity” run through LaFleur’s work. In Japanese religious consciousness, the sacred and the profane operate in close proximity, in contrast to Islam, Christianity, or Judaism, where the image of an ultimate divine authority has been effectively disseminated, halting any human encroachment upon the sacred sphere protecting that image and all that it represents. In Japan, however, the dead and the newly-born are thought of as moving toward or away from the world of the *kami* and *hotoke*, the Buddhas – indeed, children are called *kami no ko*, children of the *kami* – and a series of rituals and rites in which the progress of these states is spurred along reinforces this notion. As I have discussed elsewhere in this work, symbols, rituals, and meanings often mirror each other in aspects of life and death. In the same vein, *rokudô*, the universe over which Jizô presides, is itself a fluid space, where souls move up and down its taxonomic divisions, their movement dependent on the consequences of their actions.

In Lafleur’s analysis of the *Sai no Kawara* story, he points out that many locations throughout Japan – rocky riverbanks and deserted coastlines – have been designated as “Sai no Kawara.” For the Japanese, these are undoubtedly places where this world and the other world meet, or in Lafleur’s words: they are “interstices between the physical and the metaphysical.”⁴⁶ What is especially interesting is that the Japanese who visit these places and erect shrines to Jizô and their lost children, unmediated by any religious authority, are profoundly aware that these are places where they can communicate with their ancestors and their loved ones – in particular,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 59.

the children they have lost – and that the boundary between this world and the other world is permeable.

The bodhisattva himself represents this fluidity and ambiguity. Ultimately, LaFleur suggests a figure like Jizô helps women navigate through the rough waters of reproduction, helping them address such issues as becoming pregnant when they are not ready, conceiving and bearing children when the time is right, and, protecting them when they were under government scrutiny for being perpetrators of *mabiki* (infanticide), especially during the Tokugawa period. Throughout Japan's history of devotion to Jizô, if a woman spent a lot of time praying to the bodhisattva, she aroused the suspicion of those around her in the tightly knit communities prevalent through the archipelago. LaFleur suggests that the “generic” Jizô that proliferated in the Meiji, Taishô, and early Shôwa eras, when *mabiki* and abortion were illegal, gave women the opportunity to perform publicly acceptable acts of devotion, such as visiting *koyasui* Jizô, the Jizô of easy-childbirth, with hidden motives. Their offerings of items suggesting they desired children actually disguised their prayers for the cessation of their pregnancies or forgiveness for the abortions or murders they committed. This type of idea points to an ambiguity of the image's religious functions and suggests women crafted their own devotional practices based on their particular circumstances, similar to the personally derived devotional practices I introduced this chapter with.⁴⁷ The shape-shifting bodhisattva, so endearing to the Japanese for exactly that reason, in addition to providing them with an array of “practical benefits,” allows them to confess their hidden concerns.

Entrepreneurial Spiritualists Wielding the “Ideology of Motherhood”

In *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, Helen Hardacre's decidedly feminist response to *Liquid Life*, the author sets the study in the center of feminist

⁴⁷ LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, 129.

research into abortion as a sexual practice – or as part of a continuum of sexual negotiations that occur in a heterosexual exchange – and as a practice the development of which depends greatly on historical circumstances.⁴⁸ Her concern involves how the practice fits into the sexual culture of Japan. Hardacre’s study was published at the end of the 1990’s; however, during the period in which she conducted research for her study, the practice of *mizuko kuyō* was quickly losing popularity.

Whereas Lafleur, working at the level of theology, sets the practice against the backdrop of Japanese Buddhism’s “moral bricolage,” Hardacre targets the level of practice, characterizing it as “a transectarian ritual style that draws selectively upon historical religious tradition.”⁴⁹ In her view, the practice also bends tradition, especially with the employment of “fetocentric rhetoric”⁵⁰ – something that is nowhere present in religious tradition and childbirth –where the fetus becomes a separate, humanized entity, removed from the mother. Development of ultrasound technology enabled ritualists to develop this rhetoric.

Hardacre argues that the ritualization of abortion overtook the ritualization of pregnancy and *mizuko kuyō* is the manifestation of this ritualization. As I discuss throughout this work, pregnancy and childbirth are supported by an elaborate material culture and rich, ritual universe. By the time the Japanese government established the Eugenics Protection Law in 1948, pregnancy was removed from the sphere of custom and tradition and viewed only as a medical issue, the occupying forces decrying superstitious and unhygienic practices. As I have demonstrated in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, from 1945 birth territory shifted completely from the home to medical institutions. Hardacre sees this change in birth territory as contributing to women’s alienation in pregnancy and childbirth which in turn forced a separation between the

⁴⁸ Hardacre, *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, xx.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

mother and the fetus, giving the fetus more agency, and consequently more humanness. It is this separateness that ritualists promoting their *mizuko kuyô* services exploit. “Entrepreneurial spiritualists”⁵¹ capitalized on the personhood of the fetus and geared the campaign, disseminated largely in magazines and tabloids using images of “menacing fetuses,” towards young women, whose “nonreproductive sexual activity”⁵² they considered immoral, not only because sex for pleasure fell outside the “ideology of motherhood” they espoused, but often culminated in abortion. Women nearing or at the end of their reproductive years also got caught up in the advertising blitz and flocked to *mizuko kuyô* services to help them deal with unresolved emotions of having terminated pregnancies.

While the ritualization of pregnancy and childbirth diminished, Hardacre considers *mizuko kuyô* “a ritualization of reproductive experience” the development of which is largely influenced by “changing constructions of pregnancy and childbirth” throughout Japan’s history and the meaning of which depends entirely on sexual relations.⁵³ She further emphasizes that by just focusing on how the bodhisattva Jizô came to be associated with the service, basically the analysis developed by Lafleur, or by treating only the history of abortion in Japan, more substantial issues, including where abortion is situated in Japan’s history of sexuality and reproduction, the “human relationships that lead to abortion” and “the range of cultural constructions of abortion” are overlooked. Hardacre stresses how “human relations” influence decisions to terminate pregnancies, but political, social, and economic factors are intrinsic to these decisions, issues she does flesh out her study.

⁵¹ Hardacre, *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan*.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 5-6. After I presented a lecture on Jizô and *mizuko kuyô*, a Japanese woman in her early 40’s approached me and told me her experience as a college student in Japan. A temple had sent her a pamphlet in the mail promoting its services. Apparently, all the women at her college received the brochure.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

Mizuko kuyô ritualists, according to Hardacre, appropriated *Jizô*; Buddhist scholars find no textual precedent for the relationship between the service and the bodhisattva. She identifies a process of selection occurring in this ritual, where both ritual specialist and subject choose which elements of Buddhist doctrine and practice they will use to practice this ritual, a form we can call “practical bricolage.”

Another aspect of this process of selection performed by ritualists of *mizuko kuyô* is how they manipulate tradition. As I have discussed, “Sai no kawara thought” figures prominently in *mizuko kuyô* services, but Hardacre notes that in the vast collection of variations of the *wasan*, only one hymn featured aborted fetuses.⁵⁴ Hardacre finds an occasional message to the dead children that their circumstances are the result of karma, but there is no mention whatsoever about vindictiveness or wrath of the fetus. The idea of “revengeful fetal spirits,” a feature of the service that precipitated Hardacre’s research into the subject, is nowhere present in the relationship between the bodhisattva *Jizô* and dead children. For Hardacre, this is another aspect of the service where she observes “a significant change from traditional understandings, rather than a continuity with the past.”⁵⁵

She supports her argument with case studies. One that is pertinent to this study is her analysis of the rites performed at Jionji, is a temple loosely affiliated with the Tendai school, run by Morita Guyô, an “independent Buddhist spiritualist,” who took the tonsure after a successful career as a social worker.⁵⁶ The temple is home to seventy-two *Jizô* statues for *mizuko kuyô* dotted along a path leading up to a hill behind the temple. Individuals or groups of people dedicated the statues, and although the temple did not disclose the fee for the dedication, Hardacre surmises it must be high because only fifteen images were attributed to individuals. In her estimation,

⁵⁴ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 160-70.

only people who had reached middle age could afford such a fee. One point that Hardacre stresses with these types of dedications, is that the relationship between the dedicators and the temple is expected to be long-term, as opposed to the types of *mizuko services* offered by some temples that attract from a large catchment area and cultivate only “sporadic ties.”

About fifty clients visited Jion-ji each day and of those, seven or eight consulted with Morita Guyô about *mizuko kuyô* services. It seems Morita shares Hardacre’s concern as the priest “...regards *mizuko* and abortion as serious social and religious problems, which she seeks to address on the basis of a correct understanding of the history of the cult of Jizô and the history and changing meaning of abortion and infanticide in Japan.” Before Hardacre visited Morita, the priest sent her copies of “the most thorough, scholarly, Buddhological studies of Jizô” and instructed her to study them carefully; furthermore, she stated to Hardacre in a letter that she considered the “many current appropriations” of the bodhisattva as “perversions of the cult in its classical form.”

Morita’s understanding of how Jizô became associated with *mizuko* developed during a trip to Osorezan. She saw this contemporary Sai no Kawara as a place where spirits of aborted fetuses, babies killed in infanticide, and abandoned elderly gathered, “full of bitter attachment (*shûnen*).” Morita imagined the scenario of a pregnant mother of a brood of twelve or thirteen children requesting the local midwife to kill the baby when it arrived and register it as stillborn. After giving birth, the mother would bury her baby in the gravel of Osorezan, cover the grave with stones, and pray to Jizô to protect her child. This relationship with her dead child would continue, because the mother’s breasts would fill with milk, a constant reminder of her decision and her loss. “She would visit Osorezan again and again, each time carrying with her a

small, red cloth bib drenched in her breast milk, to tie at the neck of statues of Jizō, praying again for the child's forgiveness and rebirth."

The northeast region of Japan where Osorezan stands is known for its long history of famine and abortion and infanticide were common methods of population control, performed out of economic necessity. However, the practices "were extensively ritualized and surrounded by a climate of prayer and repentance." In particular, Ennin (794-864), the third chief abbot of the Tendai sect, erected the temple Bodaijin for the sole purpose of memorializing the human remains he found.

Shifting to the present, an experience with a young mother shaped Morita's understanding of abortion and infanticide in urban, contemporary Japan. A college student contacted her temple to ask her to dispose of the remains of her baby, the result of sexual relations with her boyfriend. The student had killed the baby, either by neglect or by force, shortly after giving unassisted birth in her apartment. Morita contacted the student's mother, who arranged with her hometown temple to bury the baby and bypass birth and death certificates. This for Morita was the index of sexuality, reproduction, and abortion in contemporary Japan. What is more, the type of *mizuko kuyō* services offered by "some unscrupulous, self-styled religionists" gave the student the idea that she could simply deposit the baby she herself killed at a site that performs *mizuko kuyō*. This impression was deeply antagonistic to Morita's understanding of the service, and she saw how the "commercialization of the original ritualization of the spirits of the aborted, stillborn, and the victims of infanticide is no more than a crass and cynical perversion." Morita's services involved a reformation on the part of the petitioner, because she firmly believed that *mizuko* could only be comforted by "sincere repentance and a change of heart."

Hardacre's analysis of the services performed at Jioniji and Morita's understanding of the purpose of *mizuko kuyō* reveals concerns about aspects of

Japanese religions involving spirit attacks (*tatari*) and how one ritualist interprets them, falling outside the scope of my dissertation. For the purposes of this study, I want to emphasize an important point in *mizuko kuyô* concerning women's devotional activities identified by Hardacre. During her interactions with Morita, Hardacre observed the ritualist's narratives of the present and of the past contained no mention of men. On one hand, Hardacre interprets this as Morita's method of empowering women by teaching them how to "take charge" of their sexuality, and by extension their "spiritual state," with the message that their relationships with men have nothing to do with their current predicaments; rather, their "seriousness, self-respect, and purpose" are the only requirements for attaining spiritually healthy lives. On the other hand, when Hardacre casts Morita's omission against the wider relief of Buddhist misogyny and a broader discourse on sexuality running through Japan's history, she sees this rhetoric of "male invisibility" as merely a means of placing all moral responsibility for sexuality on women. Furthermore, the products of women's sexuality, in particular, infant loss, are events that Morita Guyô regards as the result of "women's karma."

What of *mizuko kuyô* in the Context of Reproductive Histories?

Clearly Hardacre sees *mizuko kuyô* as a practice rooted in misogyny and supported by "shock and awe" tactics that target women's guilt, fear, and shame. Not surprisingly, Japanese people and the religious world eventually rejected those tactics; even in a country where women are sometimes characterized as "birthing machines" and gender equality is admittedly lacking – topics I discuss extensively in Chapter 2 of this dissertation – the menacing fetus made little headway into women's reproductive lives. Hardacre focuses solely on the religious institutions providing *mizuko kuyô* and she writes a scathingly critical book on their strategies and techniques. She also shifts the focus from the devotional aspect of Jizô to abortion in

the context of reproductive history in Japan. What she fails to include in her study is a critique of the biomedical and social conditions under which abortions were performed.

In her third chapter, entitled “Abortion in Contemporary Sexual Culture,” she documents the narratives of four women and four men, outlining their experience with abortions and their reproductive histories.⁵⁷ Hardacre’s intention is to show how “fetocentric rhetoric” had no presence in their reflections on abortion and there is “no evidence of *mizuko kuyô*”’s influence,” and is in direct contrast in the following chapter “to examine the practice of ritualists and religious organizations purveying *mizuko kuyô* as their stock in trade.”⁵⁸ The women all volunteered their stories “in response to the legal challenges to the Eugenics Protection Law,”⁵⁹ meaning they were vocal in their support of abortion services for women in Japan. Hardacre highlights the women’s relationships to their families and the men who fathered their children and with whom they got pregnant, but in doing so, she misses the larger picture of the lack of social services, and even more disconcerting, the absence of basic human rights.

Yamada Makiko, a woman born before World War II, whose first husband died leaving her with one child, tells the story of her decision to terminate her third pregnancy, the result of a liaison with a married man.⁶⁰ Although she worked for a unionized company with a maternity leave program, a single mother was not eligible for maternity leave. Her story reflects social conditions for women at an earlier time, but the stories of the younger women reflect conditions in a relatively contemporary Japan. Koyama Chizuko, a dentist, got pregnant from “a failure at coitus interruptus”

⁵⁷ Ibid., 101-53.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 112-16.

but allowed a subsequent unplanned pregnancy to continue because she was financially secure at her job and able to take a break from her practice.⁶¹ Issues with contraception – she used IUD method of birth control but was uncomfortable with the method – led her to another pregnancy which she “[w]ith a grim resolution, as if grinding rocks with [her] teeth” also allowed to continue.⁶² Hardacre points out that “she could find no reliable form of contraception” that did not interfere with an “erotic flow” and did not compromise her health and that the woman’s “doctor warned her against the pill.”⁶³ Miyaguchi Takae, a married nurse, discusses living in an apartment that did not permit children and unable to afford one which did.⁶⁴ And then her experience seeking public daycare for her elder daughter was hampered because “[n]o place would admit a new child in the middle of the year unless another child left.” She attempted to persuade the union at the hospitable where she worked to advocate the opening of an on-site daycare for employees, but the hospital resisted.⁶⁵ Ôbata Kyôko had to care for her “handicapped child” on her own, with little support from her husband, and at a time when there was little government support for parents with special-needs children.⁶⁶ Although four examples is hardly a large sample from which to draw conclusions, the issues faced by these women – inadequate housing, lack of convenient daycare, few contraceptive alternatives – are issues faced by women even today and have contributed to Japan’s current crisis of low birthrate, issues I discuss in detail in my the third chapter of this work.

⁶¹ Ibid., 116-19.

⁶² Ibid., 117.

⁶³ Ibid., 118.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 120-21.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 122-23. A fifty-year old woman (at the time of writing) with a sixteen-year-old special needs child described the training she received at a hospital when her daughter was one-and-a-half years old, indicating that the public health care system has much better provisions for helping parents with challenged children than it did at the time when Ôbata Kyôko was looking after her child.

Hardacre, in dispelling the major claim of *mizuko kuyô* entrepreneurs that high rates of abortion were the result of a decline in morality amongst young women, contextualizes abortion “in relation to contraception and family planning” in the reproductive trajectories of women.⁶⁷ But she fails to widen the context to include economic, medical, and social conditions that paralyze women in the orbit of their reproductive lives. These courageous women, who attempted to change the system, eventually found that abortion was the only recourse to improve the lives of Japanese women. In the Eugenics Protection Law, the “economic hardship” clause considers women, like the four I have just discussed, candidates for legal abortion because of issues like limited financial resources, workplace stress, and work and home balance affect their ability to raise children. Basically, the only recourse these women had at their disposal was abortion. The broader social concerns that Japan is miserably failing to address –now, in 2008 – and which have led to a social crisis of low birthrate, cannot even be considered.

The other aspect Hardacre overlooks is the complete unavailability of social services and counselling about abortion for women and their partners. What about the medical professionals who performed these abortions? It seems the surgical aspect is the only concern of the professionals performing the procedures, and the counselling, social services network is not available. This lack of “emotional” care, coupled with abortion as the only available recourse in family planning, created the space in which “the practice of ritualists and religious organizations purveying *mizuko kuyô* as their stock in trade” could proliferate.⁶⁸ It points towards a severe social crisis, fomented by the perfect storm of bad governance, a disabled medical profession, and social inequities on many levels.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 125.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 153.

In Japan, religious institutions provide the front-line services for women to deal with their choices and circumstances regarding their reproductive health; *mizuko kuyô* is a type of service operating well-within Japan's idiom of bereavement for infant loss. The aggressive tactics of the purveyors of *mizuko kuyô* died down, but the services are still available in temples and well attended by women and their families. If, as LaFleur suggests, women are the creators and maintainers of the cult to Jizô throughout Japanese history, does this mean that the bodhisattva is best suited for issues pertaining to women's sexuality because devotion to Jizô gives women a way to deal with their choices, their circumstances, and their losses that no other bodhisattva in the pantheon can? LaFleur's analysis of "flexible return" suggests that women – and their families – have discovered a way to re-interpret the service and cast a new light on their actions, one that is free from the guilt and shame associated with the unsavory aspects of *mizuko kuyô* identified by Hardacre.

Mizuko Kuyô as a Life cycle Event

With the attention scholars have given *mizuko kuyô*, the service has become monolithic, to the point where it has become a defining feature of Japanese religions. Western scholars in particular have focused considerable attention on *mizuko kuyô*, due to the contested nature of abortion and the fact that the pro-life versus pro-choice debate never attained the high level of public discourse in Japan, as it did in the United States, Canada, and England. Setting that issue to the side, infant loss – whether spontaneous, natural, or induced – is part of a spectrum of life cycle events women, and their families, experience over the course of their lives.

Placing *mizuko kuyô* in the context of religious rituals of safe childbirth, we can see a similar process of absorption and appropriation occurring, where religious institutions address concerns about childbirth and pregnancy, issues outside the sphere of Buddhist doctrine and in conflict with Shintô's concern about blood pollution. In

my chapter on the *hara-obi* I have illustrated how an item related to pregnancy has become a major marketing feature for two Buddhist temples and the self-conscious attempts of the temples to integrate the sash into their origins and menu of services. This requires incredible doctrinal gymnastics as first mention of the pregnancy belt appears in the *Nihongi*, a founding myth that cemented the development of the Shintô tradition in Japan. Additionally, the item's usefulness and its very safety have been questioned by the medical establishment.

Several issues are evoked with the practice of religious institutions taking on the more mundane concerns of human existence. First, Japanese religions and human concerns are intricately tied together, something I have explicated throughout this chapter. "Particularization," the process explored by Anne Brooks Page, is something any religious tradition has to do in order to bring members into its fold. Buddhist scholars might consider rituals of safe childbirth and services for aborted fetuses and stillborn children as spurious traditions; scientists and doctors might consider them rooted in superstition and paganism (although, as I have demonstrated, some patients have been sent to Nakayama-dera by their obstetricians); many Japanese people might disregard them as moneymaking enterprises for greedy priests. Yet, why do they draw so many people? What is their significance?

Another issue is that Japanese religions have developed by accretion. When I interviewed Rôshi Imai Jôen, a priest at Nakayama-dera, I asked how the item and ritual services around it became part of the temple's menu of ritual services. He was not sure when rituals of safe childbirth and things to do with *hara-obi* were added into the temple's calendar of events. But he did discuss how these practices were derived from customs – the term he used was *shûzoku*. He could not think of a period in the temple's history when *inu no hi* became a concern but he did not find it surprising that it did and definitely did not think my scholarly inquiry into syncretism

was particularly astute. He explained that religious activity in Japan came in all varieties of belief and practice and were not distinguished by rigid categories. Scholars divide and separate, people just practice.

Another issue to keep in mind is that the height of popularity of the ritual was reached at a time of economic prosperity for the nation when all features of Japanese life were commodified. People paid hundreds of dollars for melons; would they not throw in a few hundred dollars for the chance of having their problems reduced? The central debate around *mizuko kuyô* has eclipsed the important issue of how women draw on religious symbols and practices to make sense of their decisions and circumstances, especially, in the case of *mizuko kuyô*, when a lack of biomedical and social resources gives them no other options.

Kishimojin: Cannibal *Kami* as Protector of Children?

This hybrid deity – also known in Japan as Kariteimo – finds her origins in Hāritī, the Indian goddess characterized by Bernard Faure as a “motherly ogre.”⁶⁹ Her consort is Panchika and the couple became apotheosized as deities overseeing health issues in children; parents prayed to them for conception, safe childbirth, and the recovery of their ill toddlers and children.⁷⁰ The rich folklore surrounding the deity suggests Hāritī’s roots lay in the soil of local mythologies and she slowly became absorbed into the Buddhist pantheon of deities as the tradition travelled from India to China. Her entry into Buddhism – from the Japanese perspective – was cemented in the *Taishô shinshû daizô kyô*,⁷¹ where the famous story of Kishimojin’s beginnings

⁶⁹ Faure, *The Power of Denial*, 147.

⁷⁰ Chiko Mizuno, "Kishimojin shinkô ni tsuite" (Master's Thesis, Bukkyo University, 2006), 3.

⁷¹ This is a complete translation of the entire Buddhist canon (Tripitika) translated from the Chinese into Japanese between Taisho 13 (1924) and Showa 9 (1934). See *Taishô shinshû daizo kyô*, reprint edn., Tokyo, 1962 - 1979.

are recorded in the *Busetsu Kishimo Kyô (Sūtra of the Mother of Demons)*, composed sometime during the third century.⁷²

One tale from the *Taishô* takes place in the time of the Buddha when he lived in a mountainous forest of the country Ôsajô, where there also dwelled a yakushi who protected the people of that country. In the north part of Magada, there dwelled another yakushi who protected the people of that country.⁷³ The two yakushis married and had children. Their daughter decided one day she wanted to eat the people of Ôsajô, but realized her father was a protective deity of these people, and wondered why she harbored such malevolent thoughts. She felt the urge again, but resisted. After that she bore 500 children and she then succumbed to her desires; she made her way to Ôsajô and began devouring children. The distraught parents went to the king of Ôsajo and asked why their children were victims of this demon's ravenous hunger and the king prepared offerings for the yakushi.

One day, the protective deity of Ôsajô appeared in the dreams of the people and said "Your children are being eaten by demon. Go to the place of the honored one and request salvation." Heeding his advice, an entourage traveled to seek the Buddha's counsel. The Gautama listened to their pleas and then went to the house of the demon. When he arrived, he found her young son, alone and took the child. When the demon mother returned, she realized her son was missing, so she set out to find him. She traveled to the Sixteen Great Hells but to no avail. She then went to the King of Ôsajô to tell him of her loss and he in turn went to the Buddha. She followed and upon arriving at the honored one's door, she told him of her loss. The Buddha asked her how many children she had. "Five hundred" was her response. He then asked her to reflect on the loss of the one child – one of five hundred – and the sadness she felt.

⁷² See *Taishô shinshû daizo kyô*, reprint edn. Tokyo, 1962 - 1979, XXI 1262.

⁷³ Mizuno, "Kishimojin shinkô ni tsuite", 5-7.

Such a loss brought her unbearable sadness. When he asked her to reflect on the parents' sadness of losing their only child, she realized how much suffering they experienced. She promised to stop eating the children of Ôsajô. And then she became a great supporter of the Buddha.

Another tale from the *Taishô* explains her origins differently. The story relayed by the Buddha tells about a time before the Buddha existed, there was a pregnant woman who ate meat. She met upon a group of traveling people adorned in costumes and making music and on their way to Ôsajô. Along the way they met the meat-eating pregnant woman and invited her to dance. While she was dancing with them, she suffered a miscarriage. She was incredibly distraught, however, the dancing people left her and continued their journey to Ôsajô. The saint from Ôsajô came to the meat-eating woman and consoled her, speaking to her of the law. In response, the woman performed an incense offering to the saint (*kôbi no ka*). Then, the saint showed his supernatural powers (*jinsû riki*). The woman proclaimed that her urge to eat the people of Ôsajô was over. At that point she transformed into the yakusa Karite. Through stories like this, Hāritī became absorbed into Buddhism.

Cannibal Mother as Deity of Fertility?

According to Julia K. Murray the various stories that I have just relayed are thought to have been composed around the second century, during the time Buddhism travelled from India to China.⁷⁴ The earliest images of Hāritī, stone sculptures created between the second and the fourth century, are from Gandharan region of Pakistan. She is plump, surrounded by children and seated next to Pancika. Murray iterates that these images tend to be folk depictions rather than specimens of Buddhist iconography.

⁷⁴ Julia K. Murray, "Representations of Hariti, the Mother of Demons, and the Theme of "Raising the Alms-Bowl" in Chinese Painting," *Artibus Asiae* 43, no. 4 (1981): 253.

In her article Murray focuses on the development of depictions of the deity in the Chinese tradition spurred by one version of the story where the Buddha hid Hāritī's child under an alms bowl. Murray identifies depictions of the scene of an army of demons helping recover the child as well as the grieving mother being consoled by other mothers. This particular genre had a limited lifespan, as only a few depictions exist, her point, however, is that a particular scene, a biographical element, had "narrative potential"⁷⁵ appealing to the love of story telling in China and had a fairly long narrative scope. Eventually, though, the "raising the alms-bowl theme" played itself out.

Murray's work is framed by the research of Noel Peri who determined Hāritī was a folk deity, the characteristics of which depended on the geographic location in which tales about the demon-deity were told. Murray stresses that her association as a Buddhist deity of fertility is an example of how the tradition supplemented the services provided by local religions in their attempt to address pragmatic concerns, very similar to the idea of "particularization" Anne Page Brooks develops in her analysis of Jizō worship in Japan.⁷⁶ As an example, a stupa to Hāritī exists in Gandara, and is said to be the place where Yakushi Nyorai converted her.⁷⁷ Couples desiring children prayed at the site. And from there she became associated with fertility, especially amongst Tantric cults.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 266.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 254. She also exists in Tibetan Buddhism. In *The Sutra of the Recollection of the Noble Three Jewels*, a sūtra recited in Tibetan monasteries around meal rituals, a tantric ceremony involves the blessing of food and here is with an offering to Hāritī. She is considered a "mother spirit" living during Buddha's time, who had five hundred children, whom she fed by killing animals. The Buddha kidnapped her youngest son, whom he held ransom while negotiating with her to stop the killing. She agreed to cease killing animals; in turn, the Buddha had his community feed her and her children for the rest of their lives. Please see Donald Lopez, ed. *The Religions of Tibet in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 412.

⁷⁷ Mizuno, "Kishimojin shinkō ni tsuite", 6-12.

Her association with children, and her conversion from a cannibalistic demon with a predilection for other parents' children to devout follower of the Buddha makes her a suitable candidate as a protector of children and a deity who oversees issues of fertility and childbirth – it is not hard to form this connection. Her maternal instincts to which the Buddha appeals brought about her conversion. What is problematic, however, is as we turn to Kishimojin devotion in Japan, we discover that her popularity as a deity for fertility and protector of children has a relatively short lifespan.

Kishimojin Devotion in Japan

In their ethnography of the women of Suye Village in prewar Japan, Ella Lury Wiswell and Robert J. Smith relay the story of Kishimojin that circulated in the region. The deity was mother to a brood of five hundred to one thousand children and her appetite could only be satiated with babies.⁷⁸ Mothers of children whom she had eaten implored the Buddha to stop the rapacious deity, so he took her younger son. Kishimojin's grief led her to the Buddha, who had her reflect on her actions and on the sorrow she caused other mothers. She was remorseful and asked for the Buddha's help. Convinced of her remorse, the Buddha returned her child. The Japanese version also has the Buddha giving Kishimojin pomegranates to eat. The symbolism behind this is, as Wiswell and Smith report, the fruit resembles raw meat and was a substitute for flesh. The pomegranate itself is a symbol of fertility with its numerous seeds, and is metonymic for Kishimojin, to whom women pray to for children. The women of Suye village also considered venerated the deity as a protector of children.

⁷⁸ Smith, *The Women of Suye Mura*, 93.

Kishimojin Cult for Commoners

Kishimojin worship reached its peak in the Edo period.⁷⁹ The peculiar characteristic of the image of Kishimojin is that she is represented as a mother and also as a demon, often at the same time. The representation of the deity in demonic form that became popular from the Edo period stems from her cannibalistic past. Also, this type of representation is associated with a deity who can bestow worldly benefits upon devotees.⁸⁰ The image of Kishimojin as mother holding children figured heavily in devotion for the birth and rearing of children, and this representation of the deity was inserted into devotional practice. According to the *Dairakusha jōkan kibo hei itoshigo jōshuhō*, upon conversion, the deity's image changed to the shape of a joyous mother (*tenyo*).⁸¹ The one curious aspect about Kishimojin devotion noted by Mizuno Chiko is that no records of examples of Kishimojin are present in the *Kokubungaku shiryōkan Nihon Kotenbungaku Honbun de-tabe-su*.⁸² Documents like the *Edo meisho zukai* and *Tōto saiji ki*, however, report that image unveiling ceremonies and numerous events related to Kishimojin occurred, precisely the types of events that drew in large crowds of merchants in that period.

Uchino Kumiko, in her article that focuses on Kishimojin as a cult deity for the common folk of the period, notes that the deity rose through the ranks of guardian deities (*jugojin*) of the Lotus Sūtra to become the most popular deity prayed to by the common folk.⁸³ The focus of her article is on the distinction between popular religious practice in the urban center of Edo and practice occurring in farming communities in the northwest area of Chiba prefecture.

⁷⁹ Mizuno, "Kishimojin shinkō ni tsuite", 16.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 18. Mizuno Chiko discusses her methodology in footnote 9, p. 52.

⁸³ Kumiko Uchino, "Kishimojin shinkō ni miru minshū no inori to sugata," in *Kishimojin shinkō*, ed. Eishū Miyazaki (Tokyo: Yūzankaku Shuppan, 1985), 183.

In the Nara period, the name of the deity Kariteimo appears in the *Konkomyōsaishōkyō*, the *Golden Light of the Most Victorious Kings Sūtra*, displayed at Kokubun-ji/ Kokubuni-ji, the national religious center for Buddhism. The sūtra was written for the preservation of peace and tranquility for the nation. At this point in the deity's evolution, she was not associated with childbirth and childrearing. As time progressed – “from the Heian period to the Kamakura period,”⁸⁴ common time frames Japanese scholars often evoke – she became a main image of worship for the longevity, happiness, and prosperity of children in the esoteric Tendai and Shingon sects and was generally venerated by members of the nobility.⁸⁵ She possessed about twenty-five powers, including the abilities to confer conception; facilitate safe childbirth; garner respect for women; bring about peace in difficult marriages; and, resolve marital conflict.⁸⁶ It was during this period that Kariteimo transformed into Kishimojin.

Her first appearance in the Nichiren sect came in the *Myōhōrengekyō*, the Lotus Sūtra, where the deity repents her evil deeds in front of Shakyamuni. Slowly, her presence expanded throughout Western Japan, the Kantō region, where the Nichiren tradition was rooted. Moving through time and geography, she became firmly embedded in the pantheon of deities Japanese worshipped seeping into the commoners systems of practice and belief during the Edo period.

Uchino Kumiko demonstrates how Kishimojin veneration spread during the Edo period, using the example of the Chiba clan, an important daimyō family.⁸⁷ At the beginning of the Edo period, bodhisattva devotion in the Kantō region centered around the deity Jurasetsuan. However, at the beginning of the fifteenth century,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 185.

around the time Nichiren's proselytizing base expanded, the image of Kishimojin was the main image of worship at Nakayama Hokekyô-ji, the clan temple of the Chiba family. With the influence of the family, Hokekyô-ji belief (Hokekyô-ji *shinkô*) absorbed other local forms of popular religion. In particular, it spread to the farming class, which in turn developed *kô* that promoted ritual activities centered around Kishimojin devotion.

This cult also spread to the merchant classes in Tokyo, where the expansion of *kô* activity increased from 41 *kô* in Bunsei 7 (1824) to 46 organizations in Tenpô 1 (1830). By the beginning of the Meiji period (1868), however, Nichiren sect *kô* were estimated at 400 and within these organizations, groups venerating Kishimojin as the main image of worship existed, although Uchino does not state specific numbers.⁸⁸

With the Meiji period came the persecution of popular religious practices as they were considered pagan. The state forced the separation of Buddhism and Shintô (*shinbutsu bunri*) and also prohibited "faith-healing" incantations, regardless of the religious sect to which they belonged.⁸⁹ The Meiji *haibutsu kishaku* policy to eliminate Buddhist practice and other practices considered superstitious had a damaging effect on Kishimojin worship, because, Uchino notes, by Meiji 16, prayer services were halted at Enjû-in, a temple with Kishimojin as its main image of worship made popular by Edo commoners. A religious revival did occur during the Taishô period, with services returning at temples, including services for safe childbirth (*anzan*), raising children (*saniku*), and household safety (*ienai anzen*).⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid., 186.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 187.

⁹⁰ Services to treat neurological problems (*okomori*) at temples with Kishimojin as the main image of worship also became popular during the Taishô period. These types of services drew a lot of "patients" eager to recite sūtras and pray to the deity. Shamanistic healings began occurring with patients of these afflictions undergoing shamanic experiences under the directions of priests presiding at these types of temples. In particular, as early on as in the Edo period, Nakayama Hokekyô-ji was

To return to Uchino's premise, she distinguishes between the veneration of Kishimojin practiced in urban areas, where people driven by "crisis consciousness"⁹¹ (*kiki ishiki*) appealed to the magical properties of the deity and prayed for miracles (*goriyaku*), and the devotional activities of people in villages, where participation in *kô* under the auspices of Nakayama Hokkekyô-ji constituted the main form of devotional activity. Safe childbirth associations (*koan kô*) comprised the bulk of rural religious activity and much of the activity in these organizations emphasized community relations and communal values of people bound together by a village framework.⁹² Important to our consideration of women's devotional practices, membership to these *kô*, also called "women's associations" (*fujinkai*), was restricted to women. Uchino reports that about twelve temples had *kô* activity that comprised members who were brides but not mother-in-laws and that membership was based on age.⁹³ She refers to the practice of *inu kuyô* at Honrai-ji but does not elaborate.⁹⁴ Unlike the regular meetings of the Jizô *kô*, members of the Kishimojin *kô* would meet only on rainy days when no farming work could be done. The age of the members ranged from 20 to 35 years and the purpose of the associations, similar to that of the Jizô *kô* involving elderly people, was to socialize. Even if pregnant or menstruating

known as a temple for people with spiritual disorders to visit for cures. Incidentally, at the beginning of the Shôwa period, a hospital for people with spiritual disorders was built in the vicinity of Hokkekyô-ji and the incidents of people afflicted by *okomori* decreased. Please see Uchino, "Kishimojin shinkô ni miru minshû no inori to sugata," 188.

⁹¹ Uchino, "Kishimojin shinkô ni miru minshû no inori to sugata," 189.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid., 192.

⁹⁴ While Uchino does not discuss the practice of *inu kuyô*, Steven Covell, Associate Professor of Japanese Religions at the Department of Comparative Religion at Western Michigan University has encountered this practice in his fieldwork in Chiba prefecture. Pregnant women try to walk past urinating dogs as this is considered auspicious for the births of their children. Personal communication, April 2008.

women were present, the members did not perform prayers or recitations of the Lotus Sūtra.⁹⁵

One theme that emerges is a competition between the bodisattvas Jizō and Kishimojin, which might explain why Kishimojin devotional cults eventually died out. For example, although an image of Kishimojin, the dual image of mother and demon, is displayed in Zaisanmyōfuku-ji, the main ritual activity related to safe childbirth involves chanting the Lotus Sūtra before an image of *Koan Jizō*.⁹⁶ The temple also hosted an organization for safe childbirth (*koan kō*), yet, safe childbirth devotions continued at the foot of Jizō, a popular ritual since the Tenpō period (1830-1843). The main point Uchino makes is that many different types of local customs were absorbed into Kishimojin worship, which Nakayama Hokkekyō-ji attempted to establish as the official devotional image in the region. While this temple rooted worship in the image, it failed to change local customs and rituals of safe childbirth.⁹⁷

Kishimojin *shinkō* spread throughout the Edo period through the proselytizing of the Nichiren sect.⁹⁸ Uchino argues that the use of the image as a fearsome demon reinforced the efficacy of practical benefits (*genze riyaku*) of the deity; but, with the activity of the Nichiren sect, the image of the demon, as represented in the image of Jurastestuan, eventually became transformed into Kishimojin. At the same time, with the increase of priests of the merchant class in the Edo period, the births of many types of *kami* as also having abilities to confer *genze riyaku* occurred with the proliferation of personal belief systems (*shinkō*). With the increasing complexities of urban life, temporary problems and one-shot crises were managed by these deities, with Kishimojin being this one type of deity who could attend to the needs of both

⁹⁵ Uchino, "Kishimojin shinkō ni miru minshū no inori to sugata," 192.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 196.

men and women of the merchant classes. A very different characterization of rural gods, the veneration around which involved more the expression of group solidarity rather than individual crises, is present in the countryside. In the case of rural *kô* activity towards Kishimojin, it tended to be women's groups and age and gender determined the groups' membership. But, these groups did not restrict themselves to veneration of just one deity – *koan Kannon* and *Koan Jizô* were venerated along with Kishimojin especially concerning issues relating to the birth and subsequent rearing of children (*saniku*). *Ujigami* veneration, that is, ancestor devotion, and various local customs also found their way into Kishimojin *kô* activity.

Custom and the Localization of Devotion

Turning to the *Nihon Saniku Shûzoku Shiryô Shûsei*, the primary devotional activity to Kishimojin women engage in involves prayers for the conception of children. In Shiozawamachi of Niigata prefecture, women visit Kishimojin, Jizô, and Fudô.⁹⁹ In the area around the town of Fukumitsu in Toyama prefecture, women visit the Kishimojin image of Namimoto temple.¹⁰⁰ In Kanazawa city of Ishikawa prefecture, women who offer a ladle to the image of Kishimojin enshrined in Kôtoku temple will be rewarded with children. The ladle is a common ritual offering, and it must have either a bottom or to be bottomless. There are instances where bottomless sacks are used as offerings. William LaFleur refers to women who performed coded acts of devotion to both Kishimojin and Jizô, such as bringing offerings symbolizing a barren uterus but the offerings were quietly altered to represent their true desire for the cessation of the pregnancy.”¹⁰¹ The difference between a bottomless sack and a complete sack could possibly indicate the true wishes of the petitioner.

⁹⁹ Onshi zaidan boshi aiiku kai, *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ LaFleur, *Liquid Life*, 129-30.

In Yamanashi prefecture, in the southern part of Koma district, women pray to Dôsojin, a god of travellers, and Kishimojin.¹⁰² In Inba of Tottori prefecture, women pray to either Kishimojin or the Jizô of safe childbirth (*koan Jizô*).¹⁰³ Women in various regions of Fukuoka prefecture, including the Tagawa district pray to Kishimojin.¹⁰⁴ Kishimojin faith is also prevalent in Miyazaki prefecture.¹⁰⁵ In the entry for safe childbirth practices of Okayama city, Okayama prefecture, Kishimojin is the main image of worship enshrined at Shôju-ji, a Buddhist temple. This is one entry where the Nichiren tradition is clearly specified. The temple was a popular place for women desiring children; however, since the publication of the *Nihon Saniku*, the number of women visiting the site to participate in a custom where they pass through a natural opening of a large Japanese pagoda tree declined dramatically.¹⁰⁶

Kishimojin veneration took place in the Tendai school, however the bodhisattva's trail runs quickly dry. The *Tendaishû daikan*, a general guide to the Tendai sect published in Taishô 10 (1921) lists three sites – the famous Sensô-ji of Asakusa in Tokyo and two lesser known sites in Shiga prefecture – that displayed images of Kishimojin. The hall housing the image in Sensô-ji was destroyed during the Tokyo fire-bombings and never rebuilt.¹⁰⁷ No documents exist about the Kishimojin image of Mizuguchi city's Eishô-ji in Gumma prefecture, and no particularly strong cult built up around the image; however, it is said that people desiring children would present offerings of food to the image.¹⁰⁸ The other site,

¹⁰² Onshi zaidan boshi aiiku kai, *Nihon saniku shûzoku shiryô shûsei*, 24.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Miyazaki Eishû, *Kishimojin shinkô* (Tokyo: Yûzankaku Shuppan, 1985), 63. Also, see Amino Aritoshi, ed. *Sensôji shi gekan* (Tokyo: Heibunsha, 1976), 109 and *Sensôji shi jôkan* (Tokyo: Heibunsha, 1976), 302.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Chizen-in of the same city in Shiga housed an 80-centimetre image called “Jûra sama” in reference to the deity’s ogre-like qualities, with the character for “ra” referring to the demonic Rākshasa. No records pertaining to this image exist. In what would seem like a competition, both of these temples possess as their main objects of devotion images of the bodhisattva Jizô that have been protected as Important National Treasures (*jûyô bunkazai*).¹⁰⁹

Syncretic Deity Who Got Lost in the Shuffle

From this overview of Kishimojin devotion in Japan, we first see how suitable she was as a deity overseeing the concerns of safe childbirth and protection of children. Her malleability is fascinating, as Mizuno Chiko draws to our attention the fact that while Kishimojin was a protective deity of the Lotus Sûtra, she was also venerated as a localized Shintô deity to whom women prayed for safe childbirth and the production of a lineage. But, it seems clear that Jizô became the main devotional image for women to take their concerns about pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing, even though the transformation of Jizô as a devotional image offering practical benefits and escape from the torments of hell to a bodhisattva overseeing the concerns of childbirth and attending to the souls of dead children remains contested. Why the cult to Kishimojin was not sustained to the present reveals more about entrepreneurship and successful marketing techniques than about the nature of popular religious practices.

The only of image of Kishimojin to be viewed in the Kansai region is displayed at Jôkô-ji, a private temple on the outskirts of Nara accessible by public transportation only through an obscure bus route. The day I attempted to visit the temple, garnered no results. Mizuno Chiko, a graduate student at Bukkyo University also had little success in her desire to perform interviews at temples displaying the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 64.

image of Kishimojin in the Kantô region and only received permission from one temple, Homyô-ji in Toshima-ku, Tokyo, an area that is considered “downtown” Tokyo (*shitamachi*).¹¹⁰ This temple promotes itself on the Internet with a website listing its yearly events and the history of Kishimojin devotion. It is well known in the region for its major festival (*Taisai*) in October from the 16th to the 18th and an *Obon* festival that centers around Kishimojin on July 18th. The temple claims its image of the bodhisattva was excavated in the Muromachi period and placed on display at the temple site in Tenshō 6 (1578).¹¹¹ Mizuno Chiko discovers though that while the history of the bodhisattva suggests people turned to her to pray for safe childbirths, for fertility concerns, and for lactation, starting from the Edo period, she attracted devotees praying for such things as large families, the recovery from illness, and household safety, and this type of devotion to her continues into the present.¹¹² It appears that in the tension between popular religion in the countryside and in urban centers that Uchino Kumiko identifies, the one-shot crises that bring urbanites to pray to Kishimojin overtakes the community-centered devotional cults that sprung up in rural districts, reflective of religious conditions in a hyper-modern country where urban centers are continually absorbing rural regions, taking along their customs, practices, and traditions.

Kannon: The Question of Gender and Pilgrimage for Women

How is Women’s Devotion Implicated in the Feminization of a “Supreme Deity?”

Kannon (“Regarder of Sounds”), known as Avalokiteśvara in India, achieved the rank of “Great Beings” along with Maitreya and Mañjuśrī, who had also reached the “elevated tenth stage of the bodhisattva path.”¹¹³ In the Mahāyāna tradition,

¹¹⁰ Mizuno, “Kishimojin shinkô ni tsuite”, 45.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 49-50.

¹¹³ Chun-fang Yu, *Kuan-Yin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 7.

bodhisattvas, unlike Arhats, are beings who, having taken the bodhisattva vow, choose a long career of many incarnations on earth so they can save all beings. This development of *bodhicitta* (the thought of enlightenment) separates the bodhisattva from the Arhat, a being who progresses directly to enlightenment. Of all the bodhisattvas, though, devotional cults to Avalokiteśvara spread widely throughout Asia and South East Asia and he was considered “the perfect embodiment of compassion,” and venerated as a “supreme deity.”¹¹⁴

Chüing-Fang Yü links the confusion about the dates of the bodhisattva’s origins with the ongoing debate about the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism.¹¹⁵ According to Therese de Mallmann and Gregory Schopen, the cult began in the fifth century.¹¹⁶ However, Nandana Chutiwongs points to an earlier development of the cult in the second century in north and northwest India.¹¹⁷ Having said this, Chüing-Fang Yü iterates that the earliest textual references to the bodhisattva remain unclear; however, he appears in the following texts that are considered to have been composed before the fourth century: the *Sukhāvātīvyūha Sūtra*, the *Mahāvastu*, the *Cheng-chü kuang-ming ting-i ching*, the *Druma-kinnara-rāja-paripṛcchā Sūtra*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the *Heart Sūtra*.

The transformation the bodhisattva underwent when he reached China, where he is known as Kuan-yin, is important to this study. Chüing-Fang Yü considers a process of feminization occurred with the sinicization of the deity, where the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 7. The references are Marie-Therese Mallmann, *Introduction a l’Etude d’Avalokitesvara* (Paris: Annales du Musée Guimet, 1948) and Gregory Schopen, “The Inscription on the Kusan Image of Amitabha and the Character of the Early Mahayana in India,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 10:99-138).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 7. The reference is Nandana Chutiwongs, *The Iconography of Avalokitesvara in Mainland Southeast Asia* (Ph.D. dissertation, Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden, 1984).

bodhisattva became venerated throughout the country as the “Goddess of Mercy.”¹¹⁸ How women’s devotion is implicated by the feminization of Kuan-yin is important to consider. First, however, we will begin with a brief history of Kuan-yin’s bodhisattva career in China.

Kuan-yin entered China in sūtras in around the second century, the majority accessible only to monastics and the educated, but through a process of “reception, assimilation, and modification,” the bodhisattva’s powers filtered down to the general population through “[a]rt, miracle stories, indigenous scriptures, precious scrolls, and so on...”¹¹⁹ Then, through “indigenous sūtras” that “deliberately particularized, localized, and individualized the universal truths of Buddhism,”¹²⁰ the cult to Kuan-yin flourished, particularly as the deity became a familiar numinous presence, in contrast to the remote, foreign Buddha, through whom the tradition could be particularized to the Chinese cultural context.

The cult to Kuan-yin was made accessible to all levels of Chinese society through miracle tales and pilgrimage. Chüing-Fang Yü contends that the cult opened to women through the medium of the miracle tale, which spurred along the feminization of the deity and its domestication.¹²¹ The tales began to proliferate in the fifth and sixth centuries and new ones are still being produced today.¹²² The process of feminization, Chüing-Fang Yü argues, has a canonical basis, because in the *Lotus Sūtra*, the bodhisattva appears in thirty-three different manifestations, seven of which are female. The manifestations are “nun, lay woman, wife of an elder,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 91.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 194.

¹²² Ibid., 193.

householder, official, Brahmin, and girl.”¹²³ In explaining how the universal bodhisattva is particularized, Chüing-Fang Yü evokes the miracle tale of Princess Miao-shan who performed a major act of compassion by giving her eyes to her blind father and who is characterized as the embodiment of Kuan-yin.¹²⁴ The miracle tale reached a large popular audience of women as it was translated into prosimetric literature, the narrative outline of the tale transformed onto picture scroll and performed to audiences of women and children at nunneries, temples, and homes.¹²⁵ Even those these gatherings were organized by religious and lay organizations alike, they combined a religious message punctuated with plenty of intermissions where the participants were treated to entertainment and refreshments.

In the tenth century, P’u-t’o, emerged as a national and international pilgrimage centre to Kuan-yin because of a successful anchoring of the site to a passage in the *Jua-yen ching*, where Potalaka, the island home of the bodhisattva, is mentioned.¹²⁶ The developers of the pilgrimage site skilfully “incorporated mythical and iconographical elements of Kuan-yin” from other pilgrimage sites and were able to transform the mountain into the most important pilgrimage site for the deity, however, the transformation took centuries, as the significance of the site as a major pilgrimage centre was not fully recognized until the eighteenth century. Chüing-Fang Yü argues that pilgrimage was the most important vehicle for cementing the popularity of the cult.¹²⁷ Incidentally, the name of the site is P’u-t’o Shan, translated as Mt. P’u-t’o, but the name refers to a small island 70 miles west of Ningpo: the developers of the site were able to recreate the importance of mountain pilgrimage site

¹²³ Ibid., 194. This is based on Leon Harvitz’s translation of the *Lotus Sutra in Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, 314-315.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 299.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 299-347.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 354.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 355.

in the religious imagination of the Chinese onto an island.¹²⁸ Importantly, this site brought about a transformation in the iconography of the deity, which spurred along the feminization process.

The final stage of the domestication of the bodhisattva, and the concomitant feminization, occurred in Late Imperial China through such legendary female characters of the “Fish-basket Kuan-yin” and the “Wife of Mr. Ma.” The depiction of Kuan-yin as an “old mother” also proliferated at this time.

This transformation raises the question of how women, sharing the same sex as such a potent religious symbol, are affected and if their daily lives receive a boon. Also, what characteristics of the feminine and womanhood are used to create a religious image that has qualities with which a large population can identify? Were Chinese women empowered by a feminine supreme deity? While this query tells us about perceptions of femininity in the Chinese cultural context and through certain periods in the country’s historical development, many of the issues translate into the Japanese context; however, what is interesting is that Kannon, the Japanese interpretation of Avalokiteśvara, while it shares many of the features of the Chinese domestication process, did not undergo a process of feminization.

With regards to perceptions of the feminine in China, the predominant understanding of the feminine revolved around a ritual purity system that held women as sources of pollution. Also, “women in Chinese domestic groups function as divisive as well as unifying forces.”¹²⁹ And the problem Chüing-Fang Yü identifies is the difficulty reconciling the fact the women possess both negative and positive qualities; whereas, deities are perfected beings possessing only positive qualities. She

¹²⁸ Ibid., 369. A complete description of the formation of this pilgrimage site can be found in Susan Naquin and Chung Fang-Yu, editors. *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

¹²⁹ Ibid., 414.

turns to the work of Stephen Sangren to demonstrate how female deities in China must override the associations of imperfection and pollution with which their sexuality identifies them.¹³⁰

In Sangren's view, deities are "idealizations of womanhood"¹³¹ and a process must occur whereby the identification of the deity as "wife" is negated, but the "affirmation of her role as mother (if not childbearer)"¹³² is implemented. Mothers – and by extension, deities – are construed as "unifying symbols." Chüing-Fang Yü develops this by stressing the devotees of a female deity, in effect, her children, respond to her qualities of "inclusivity, mediation, and alliance,"¹³³ – all can access her power and her grace. Stephen Sangren points out that the main devotees of the Kuan-yin cult include post-menopausal women, prostitutes, social outcasts, and members of other marginalized groups.¹³⁴ For Chüing-Fang Yü this quality of "inclusivity" explains why Kuan-yin transformed into a female deity.

She points out that Chinese scholars equated compassion with "maternal virtue in the Chinese cultural context," although Buddhist scholars tend to disagree with this assessment, as in the Mahāyāna context wisdom is identified as a female trait and compassion as a masculine quality.¹³⁵ Ultimately, drawing on the work of Jose Ignacio Cabezón, Chüing-Fang Yü ascertains "[t]here is no necessary correlation between the veneration of goddesses and the status of women in societies that

¹³⁰ Steven P. Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the "Eternal Mother"," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9, no. 1 (1983).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³³ Yu, *Kuan-Yin*, 414.

¹³⁴ Sangren, "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the "Eternal Mother"," 15-22.

¹³⁵ Yu, *Kuan-Yin*, 414.

venerate goddesses.”¹³⁶ The examples of Kālī and Durgā venerated by men in India, or the Tao, in China, considered to have feminine qualities, but a religious school where few women have a presence, underscore this point.¹³⁷ In fact, Chüing-Fang Yü argues, again drawing on the work of Stephen Sangren, that for outsiders, the Buddhist tradition and its use of “women as symbols of wisdom” appears to honor women; however, what really occurs, on the ground, is “both a downgrading of wisdom as well as a denigration of real women.”¹³⁸

Chüing-Fang Yü also pulls back the reins on a strain of feminist scholarship that attributes women artists in the Ming for creating the iconography for Kuan-yin as a female deity.¹³⁹ She points out that while women expressed their devotion to the deity through paintings and embroideries, the feminine iconography had been well established by male artists and religious figures. One such example exists in the Daitoku-ji complex of Kyoto of a White-robed Kuan-yin painted by the Ch’an monk Mu’ch’i (ca. 1210-1275). She concludes her argument with the observation that the bodhisattva “is worshipped by all classes and by both genders. She is gracious to all and, in turn, possessed by none. This is the real reason and the real secret for her success in China.”

Kannon Devotion in Japan: Lotus Sūtra and Pilgrimage

Kannon’s capital as an efficacious bodhisattva is generated in the Lotus Sūtra, a Mahāyāna text widely read throughout East Asia. According to Yoshiko Dykstra, authorship of the sūtra is unknown; however, Kumarajīva (350 - 409) is credited with

¹³⁶ Ibid., 415. This argument is developed in Jose Ignacio Cabezón, “Mother Wisdom, Father Love” Gender-Based Imagery in Mahayana Buddhist thought,” in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. by Jose Ignacio Cabezón, 181-99 (Albany: State of New York University Press, 1992).

¹³⁷ Ibid., 415.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 418.

the most popular Chinese translation.¹⁴⁰ The text became an object of “popular devotion” in the T'ang dynasty when texts stating the biographies of devotees were written.¹⁴¹ In Japan, devotion to the sūtra, called the *Hokkekyō*, began with Prince Shōtoku (573-621), the figure largely responsible for bringing Buddhism to the archipelago. Dykstra maintains his “desire to establish a united nation under the Buddhist law with salvation for all sentient beings” was based on the teachings of the sūtra.¹⁴²

A main feature of Nara period Buddhism involved institutionalizing the *Hokkekyō*.¹⁴³ Laws promulgating provinces to preserve copies and monks and nuns obtain mastery of the text in order to be officially ordained embedded Buddhist doctrinal premises outlined in the *Hokkekyō* into the governance of the nation. Saichō further embedded the text in Japanese Buddhism when he imported Chinese Tendai Buddhism to Japan – the *Lotus Sūtra* was the sect’s principle text.¹⁴⁴ At the level of popular devotion, individuals attempted to gain merit by reciting the *Hokkekyō* and copying it by hand. Once again, as in the case of Jizō bodhisattva, various setsuwa collections proliferated the sūtra’s popularity by encouraging its recitation and copying in order to gain merit.¹⁴⁵ Lectures, called *kō*, the same Chinese ideogram that describes “organization” but in this case reads as “lecture,” also contributed to the accretion of merit and teachings on the sūtra were attended by nobility. Eventually the teachings spread to local temples giving access to commoners.

¹⁴⁰ Yoshiko K. Dykstra, "Miraculous Tales of the Lotus Sutra. The Dainihonkoku Hokkegenki," *Monumenta Nipponica* 32, no. 2 (1977): 189.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

These *kô* meetings are very similar to the *kô* activity I discuss in the section on Jizô, although in the case of Kannon, the emphasis is on “lecturing,” a distinction Dykstra does not mention. Like the regular dates mentioned about Jizô *kô*, *kô* organized for worship to Kannon were held on the eighteenth day of the month.¹⁴⁶ Kannon *kô* attracted devotees because of the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Hokkekyô*, where her efficacy is laid out. Dykstra describes an example of Kannon *kô* activity at Kinsen temple at Nakayama in Sanuki documented in the *Genpei Seisuiki*, where over one hundred people attended. The participants included men and women from the peasant and farming class; their ages ranged from the young to the elderly. Young girls and nuns served food and *sake*.¹⁴⁷

Kannon did not undergo a process of feminization in Japan; furthermore, her domesticization has garnered less attention than that of Jizô. Similar to China, though, pilgrimage was a popular way for the Japanese to express their devotion. The inclusivity Guan-yin afforded the Chinese is also similarly expressed in Japan, primarily due to the teachings of the *Hokkekyô* where Kannon assumes various manifestations in order to help those in need. These manifestations are the basis for the thirty-three temples of the Saikoku pilgrimage route dedicated to the bodhisattva. Pilgrimage in Japan is generally thought of as a masculine pursuit, but Barbara Ambros’ research into the activity has revealed that women also undertook pilgrimages and were especially drawn to temples displaying Kannon as their main devotional image. We might call this the link to the feminization process the bodhisattva underwent in China.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Please refer to Ôhashi Shintarô, *Kôtei genpei seisuiki* (Tokyo: Hakubunken, 1908), pp. 108-09.

Heian Pilgrimage to Kannon

Barbara Ambros explores the gendered nature of Heian noblewomen's pilgrimages (*monomōde*) to Tendai, Shingon, and Hossō temples, all of which displayed Kannon as their primary devotional image, primarily drawing on fictive works such as *Genji Monogatari*, and diaries, such as *Kagerō Nikki*.¹⁴⁸ Her methodology is problematic as she extracts data from fiction in an attempt to reconstruct history; however, her study merits attention for its insight into women's devotional activities in Japan's premodern period. While picture scrolls (*emaki*) of the period depict women as sedentary and immobile, travel diaries reveal Heian women took strenuous, long-distance journeys. Furthermore, the routes they travelled were often even more exhausting than the routes travelled by men because their polluted status barred them access to sacred mountains and monasteries. Their traveling costume included a red sash (*kakeobi*) draped around their shoulders signifying their pollution.

Sometimes a woman appointed a substitute (*daisan*) to take the pilgrimage in her place. On arrival at the temple, pilgrims performed ablutions. They also abstained from food and drink, interpreted dreams for oracles, and observed menstrual abstinence. In general, they did not sleep during their stay at the temple and spent the time reciting sūtras, praying, and burning incense. Of course the pilgrim made elaborate offerings to the temple in accordance with her social station. The return home was a festive affair – the pilgrim broke her fast and engaged in much revelry, hosted by the gentry of the estate (*shōen*) to which she belonged. This “ludic” element is considered an integral part of the pilgrimage.

¹⁴⁸ Barbara Ambros, "Liminal Journeys: Pilgrimages of Noblewomen in Mid-Heian Japan," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24, no. 3-4 (1997).

Victor Turner would explain the revelry associated with a religious enterprise as an example of “anti-structure,” where the quotidian is turned on its head. For Turner, pilgrimage epitomizes his idea of liminality, where individuals are removed from their normal spheres of existence and separated from the “familiar and habitual.”¹⁴⁹ In their “betwixt and between” states, they are psychologically ripe to undergo transformation, both spiritually and physically. Outward appearances and inward processes contribute to this “threshold state.” The Heian noblewoman’s traveling costume, with its red sash, marked her liminality. Furthermore, this separation “...may, in various cultures, have punitive, purificatory, expiatory, cognitive, instructional, therapeutic, transformative, and many other facets, aspects, and functions.”

Pilgrimage is a “connected network of processes”¹⁵⁰ or “processual units”: each step along the way, each temple visited, every ritual participated in, combines to create an integrated unit of spiritual experience. Turner summarizes the process of pilgrimage:

As the pilgrim moves away from his structural involvements at home his route becomes increasingly sacralized at one level and increasingly secularized at another. He meets with more shrines and sacred objects as he advances, but he also encounters more real dangers such as bandits and robbers, he has to pay attention to the need to survive and often to earn money for transportation, and he comes across markets and fairs, especially [sic] at the end of his quest, where the shrine is flanked by the bazaar and by the fun fair. But all these things are more contractual, and more associational, more volitional, more replete with the novel and the unexpected, fuller of possibilities of *communitas*, as secular fellowship and comradeship and sacred communion, than anything he has known at home. And the world becomes a bigger place.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Victor Turner, ed. “Pilgrimages as Social Processes,” *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 197. The following two references to Turner on this page are from the same citation.

¹⁵⁰ Victor Turner, *Pilgrimages as Social Processes*, 189.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

Ambros rejects Turner's notion of *communitas*, observing a distinct division between the upper and lower classes in Heian Japan; furthermore, the mingling of the two was not viewed favorably by the upper class, a point they note in their diaries. But, pilgrimage did present an opportunity for social boundaries to be permeated and Ambros shows evidence in the *Tale of Genji* to demonstrate this. In another challenge to Turner's idea of *communitas*, however, Heian nobility flaunted their wealth during a pilgrimage and their attempts to clearly distinguish themselves from other pilgrims did not go unnoticed.

Ambros then delineates the reasons why women set out on pilgrimages: "bestowal of wealth and success, granting the desired birth of a child, cure of illness, and gaining salvation."¹⁵² Women often embarked on pilgrimages out of a desire for a husband or to try to cure an illness. Exorcism often occurred during these types of pilgrimages as illness was thought to be the product of spirit possession. Marriage problems brought on by inattentive husbands propelled women to seek miraculous help at temples. Sometimes, by asserting their independence they motivated their husbands to pay more attention to them.

The onus of producing children lay solely on women so they often went on pilgrimages to pray for successful childbirth. Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sūtra, entitled the *Kannon-gyo*, concentrates on the bodhisattva's powers to bring about desired births. While sons were most desired, daughters also held bargaining value: "On the one hand, it was important for women to produce a son and thus a potential heir for their husband. On the other hand, daughters were equally important since they could assure the husband political leverage once his daughter was married."¹⁵³ After women

¹⁵² Ambros, "Liminal Journeys: Pilgrimages of Noblewomen in Mid-Heian Japan," 328.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 334.

reached the end of their reproductive lives, they embarked on pilgrimages to pray for their soteriological needs.

The main point I want to extract from Ambros' article is how life cycle stages and events influenced women's devotional activities; furthermore, these life cycle events were tightly intertwined with their reproductive lives: a woman's success in life throughout Japanese history – regardless of her class – was hinged on her reproductive capacity, as it is today. It was only after taking care of her families' needs could she work towards her own salvation.

From the life histories of these three deities, we see the tension between *tarikī* and *jirikī* is expressed in women's devotional practices. While devotees put their faith in a deity by praying for practical benefits, the *kō* that sprang up, especially in the countryside, involved a form of self-reliance, where members loosely organized themselves around a bodhisattva in order to engage in activities that served their own needs. Also, the notion of the generic Jizō mentioned by William LaFleur suggests a form of *jirikī* taking place where a woman appeals to the deity following an acceptable devotional protocol, while beneath that public declaration, she voices her private concern. A very recent example of *jirikī* devotion, though, can be found in the secular setting of the hospital in the natural childbirth method called Sophrology developed by an obstetrician who incorporated *zazen* and yoga postures into a European relaxation method, which I discussed in the second chapter of this dissertation. The Zen tradition, considered the major proponent of *jirikī* practice, the methods of which were employed by warriors on the battlefield, finds a curious expression in the labor room where mother and baby become one.

Sophrology: A Contemporary Life Cycle Ritual

While it is a valuable study to explore Sophrology in the context of secularization and commodification in Japan and in a broader global context, as I did earlier, it is also worthwhile to consider Sophrology as a devotional practice in the same secular setting contemporary Japan finds itself. As I have discussed, Matsunaga Akira employed techniques from “Asian wisdom traditions” to repackage a natural birth method developed in Europe. He included the *zazen* meditation pose and yogic postures in a series of stretching techniques pregnant women practiced in their daily training to prepare for childbirth. He developed Sophrology to replace the Lamaze method, the primary natural birth method employed in Japanese obstetrics wards and maternity clinics. In essence, Matsunaga Akira sought to insert Japaneseness back into labor and delivery.

While I argue that the “New Age Melting Pot” Jeremy Carrette and Richard King identify in the West is also present in Japan, illustrating my point with the childbirth method which employs “New Age” techniques to attract pregnant women, Sophrology can also be considered Matsunaga Akira’s attempt to bring childbirth back into the sphere of life cycle ritual activity associated with Japanese traditional ritual behavior. The Lamaze technique had managed to not only insinuate itself into the labor and delivery in Japan’s maternity industry, it also became synonymous with childbirth in Japan.

Matsuoka Etsuko, in her book *Shûssan no Bunka Jinruigaku (The Cultural Anthropology of Childbirth)*, characterizes Lamaze as the cutting edge phenomena of the incorporation of traditional birthing in a medical setting.¹⁵⁴ She likens the rituals associated with the technique – midwife or husband leading the birthing woman much

¹⁵⁴ Etsuko Matsuoka, *Shûssan no bunka jinruigaku zôhokaiteban- girei to sanba* (Tokyo: Kaimei sha, 1991), 1.

like a ritual officiant leads practitioners through the steps of a ritual; the woman following a specific breathing pattern; the father's role in cutting the umbilical cord – as ritualistic (and “primitive” (*mikai*)) as the shaman reciting a formula to help a woman through a difficult birth – a story she read about in an article on the Lamaze technique.¹⁵⁵ Matsuoka emphasizes that the Lamaze technique, is as much a life cycle event ritual in the life of Japanese women today as are the rituals that are considered more traditional and that originated on Japanese soil.¹⁵⁶ Matsunaga disagreed with the technique's claims that an “on/off” switch in the brain controls labor pain and it appears that he also wanted to replace this foreign method of pain management that had become associated with the life cycle ritual activity of pregnancy and childbirth with a domestic product.

The religious imagery Matsunaga drew upon did not come from the type of devotional activity that we have seen occurring around the deities Jizō, Kishimojin, and Kannon; rather, he employed a method from the Japanese Zen tradition, a strong

¹⁵⁵ This story comes from Claude Lévy-Strauss' analysis of a South American magico-religious text the purpose of which instructed shamans how to facilitate a difficult childbirth. Through the invocation of guiding spirits, recitation, and manipulation of ritual objects, the shaman made concrete the patient's emotional experience, allowing her to accept the pain tormenting her body. What is really at stake here, however, is the power of the human imagination and creative capacity, for as much as the shaman delves deep into his imagination and creative resources to re-enact a mythical journey (a metaphor of the passage through the female patient's birth canal) to confront a wayward spirit, the patient too must meet the creative challenge and envision the “battle” being waged in her birth canal. The power of imagination also elevates her suffering to a cosmic level, which presumably gives her the strength to overcome the difficult labor. This method is known to modern science - it is the technique of abreaction used by the psychoanalyst. As the modern patient confronts the source of her emotional suffering through the performance of her medical practitioner recreating the conditions that produced the crisis, so does the woman experiencing a difficult labor overcome a physiological obstruction “by identifying with a “mythically transmuted” shaman.” Please see “The Effectiveness of Symbols” in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf. (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 187-201.

¹⁵⁶ Matsuoka, *Shussan no bunka jinruigaku zōhokaiteban- girei to sanba*, 2.

statement that reveals much about his faith in the power of women to cultivate spiritual fortitude to deal with the discomfort, pain, and uncertainty of pregnancy and childbirth. His choices also reflect an awareness of the state of religion and religious practice in a secular society, where people drew on a bricolage of religious-inspired techniques to express their personal systems of belief and practice. As I mentioned previously, Sophrology achieved nation-wide popularity throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's, but its popularity died down by the twenty-first century, with women turning to prenatal Yoga and maternity swimming classes as their techniques for preparing for labor and delivery. Self-styled and personal devotional practices, practices that remain on the fringes, do not make much headway in the world of rituals of safe childbirth in Japan. Conventional approaches trotted out by powerful, wealthy religious centers effectively define women's devotional practice. The ambitious, unconventional approach by this forward-thinking obstetrician also met the same fate. Japan's maternity industry is highly regulated and very powerful.

Conclusion: Seeking Help and Finding it Within

At the beginning of this chapter, I elicited examples of women's devotional practices during pregnancy documented in a popular pregnancy magazine to illustrate how women in Japan followed a devotional script laid out for them by major religious institutions that marketed religious rituals of safe childbirth and dispensed pregnancy-related goods. The devotional narrative for prayers for a safe birth have largely been scripted by the religious sites dispensing the goods, eclipsing personal devotional practices. However, through a survey of bodhisattva devotion in Japan, we see that the tradition of appealing to a deity for help extends far back in Japan's history, although, local practices, such as the local cults to Jizô mentioned by Uchino Kumiko and those to Kishimojin I identified in the *Nihon Saniku* provided stiff competition against forces that attempted to impose a devotional practice onto a region where local

customs were firmly entrenched. This could explain why Kishimojin devotion, although in my estimation a far more suitable bodhisattva for issues related to motherhood, never overtook devotion to *koyasu Jizō*, as considerable effort was made in fusing local custom with the imported bodhisattva whereas Kishimojin always remained on the fringes. Also, instances of appropriation and reinterpretation have occurred, as in the cases of *mizuko kuyō* and in the dispensation of the *hara obi*. Japanese popular religious practice eventually resisted the aggressive tactics of *mizuko kuyō* ritualists, but the *hara obi* has become a necessary devotional *gudzu* for pregnancy in Japan.

The debate between *jiriki* and *tariki* is also played out in women's devotional practices and in the experience of pregnancy and childbirth. Japan is one of the safest countries in the world to give birth, a point I flesh out in an earlier chapter, yet, women and their families flock to temples and shrines for safe childbirth to have prayers recited and to purchase *hara-obi*. Drawing on the "powers of the *kami*," as one new mother I interviewed at Nakayama-dera put it, helps a woman deal with the uncertainties of pregnancy and face her fears of childbirth. Ultimately though, a woman has only her own powers to access when she finally enters the delivery room. This is something obstetrician Matsunaga Akira attempted to address, employing the *jiriki* technique of *zazen* into a natural childbirth technique; however, Sophrologic training never attained a high level of popularity even though he drew on religious imagery from a Japanese context. It would seem, then, that the devotional tradition laid out by temples and shrines is the default method women rely on during childbirth and pregnancy.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I present a brief summarization of this dissertation and indicate areas for further research.

Summary: Discordance, Disjuncture, and Reconciliation

The dissertation begins at the intersection of body, experience, and knowledge to illustrate how I as a pregnant field researcher capitalize on the advantages and work through the obstacles afforded in this unique hermeneutical position. Barbara Duden illuminates the challenges the body brings to her work as an historian of the body: her contemporary body obstructs her from understanding the experiences of bodies of the past. While a field researcher working in the present does not face this challenge, different cultural expectations and culturally based approaches to pregnancy and childbirth create a barrier between the researcher and her subjects and experiences.

Experience and knowledge and, more importantly, how the researcher draws upon experience to gain knowledge, resolves this conflict. In this regard, in what might be considered an “anthropology of experience,” Dilthey’s distinction between experience and “an experience” is useful in determining how the researcher reaches beyond the confines of the body and deals with issues of the past. Victor W. Turner draws on this distinction to form his idea of how individuals process past events and transform them into present understanding. Gadamer focuses on the epistemological implications of experience, where we exist in “living historical processes” drawing understanding and knowledge from them. Victor Turner’s understanding of “lifeways” also supports the notion that knowledge is gained through life transitions.

Next, I revisit two themes in Japanese religions: systems of ritual purity and processes of commodification and secularization. The story of Tōyō-tama-hime, a

paradigmatic expression of proper behavior during childbirth laid out in Japan's earliest oral literature, opens this chapter. I draw on James Frazer, Emile Durkheim, and Mary Douglas to comment on premodern and modern gendered attitudes in Japan. James Frazer's conceptualization of "taboo" is based on principles of contagion and reflects "primitive logic." Durkheim constructs the dualism of sacred and profane, emphasizing how systems of interdiction form the basis of ritual activity to separate the two. Mary Douglas, although disagreeing with Frazer and Durkheim's characterization of early society as "primitive," bases her theories of systems of ritual purity on their ideas that societies develop elaborate sets of rules to separate the pure from the polluted to maintain moral and social equilibrium and to respond to the dangers of childbirth. I emphasize that the uncertainties of pregnancy and childbirth require ritual attention. Douglas' discussion of the body as microcosm of society supports gendered attitudes towards the birthing female in Japan.

The symbolic collapse that occurs when a mother dies in childbirth energizes a ritual world and poses a dilemma for society and religious structures. Ideologies of sexuality and gender flare up when this occurs and ultimately society blames the woman. This is one aspect of the double standard faced by women who are revered for their abilities to create life and subordinated for the effluvia that emanates from their bodies.

I then examine post-War and contemporary gendered attitudes towards the body and, using my experiences in a maternity clinic, explain how *kegare* is a category Japanese draw on to manage their concerns about pregnancy and childbirth. In particular, the secular ritual in the maternity clinic and the attitudes and behaviors around blood point towards the treatment of the pregnant and birthing woman as a sacred force because of her ability to generate life.

The second issue I revisit is the secularization of religion and the implications of this in Japan's maternity industry. I focus on a natural childbirth technique called Sophrology developed by a Japanese obstetrician to take the place of the Lamaze method, an imported method the Japanese consider to epitomize North American feminism. I demonstrate how Matsunaga Akira plunders elements of the Zen religious tradition to create a uniquely Japanese birthing method in a process I consider to be a reclamation of a traditional birthing experience. I then broaden the discussion to explore rituals of safe childbirth in the context of religion and healing and religious tourism in Japan, asking if the same cynical rebranding of spirituality done by corporations is present in the organizations administering prayers for safe childbirth.

In the second chapter, I examine the disjuncture between governmental policy and practice in dealing with the demographic crisis of the nation's low birthrate. Basically, women in Japan today must choose between family and career and the limitations they face are deeply rooted in a traditional miasma of gender expectations and attitudes towards women. I argue contemporary gendered attitudes, such as that of a government official calling Japanese women "birthing machines," have their roots in the premodern period. I trace ideologies of sexuality and reproduction starting from the Tokugawa period, to illustrate how government policy has worked its way into the reproductive lives of the Japanese and the implications of this for Japanese women. In particular, I point out the discordant elements between policy and practice and focus on the government's inability to deal with the nation's low birthrate, a trend government officials first noticed in the 1960's.

In the third chapter, I demonstrate how the *hara-obi* is an artifact of the material culture of pregnancy and childbirth in Japan that ties together the worlds of religion, tradition, history, commerce, and medicine. I demonstrate how the various organizations of Japan's maternity industry "loot" the item from the nation's matrix of

myth, history, and custom to create a nomenclature for pregnancy that does little to serve the health interests of the pregnant woman but rather supports their agendas, which, for the most part, concern generating profits. I do, however, highlight the benefits pregnant women in Japan receive from these services.

In this chapter, I highlight how the maternity industry in Japan kicks into full gear to activate the processes of commoditization when a woman becomes pregnant – she is a valuable commodity in a nation that desperately needs children. The *hara-obi* becomes a metonym for pregnancy, indicating the ways in which society overlays culture atop natural processes. Another facet involves the ways in which Japan's maternity industry has reconstituted the item as a uniquely Japanese artifact that makes pregnancy and childbirth a unique cultural experience. The concern this chapter raises is how an item held meaning for women and local regions but the forces of the maternity industry has stripped away that value and brought about a flattening of variegated religious experience, contributing to the alienation in Japanese society. Basically, religious experience is transformed into cultural trend with the sacred and secular activities revolving around the *hara-obi*.

Next, I discuss customs of parturition in Japan, focusing on the case of Ôbara shrine's parturition hut. The confinement hut raises issues in Japanese religions concerning cosmology and the uncomfortably close relationship of life and death. The practices associated with Ôbara's *ubuya* also reveal how a community locates itself in time and space. Jonathan Z. Smith's notion of a locative view of the world is enacted in the custom of a new family making their way over a river on a makeshift bridge so the emerging life is brought from *ano yo* to *kono yo*. Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the Berber hut provides a useful conceptual tool to explore how a community plays out its understanding of cosmology. I introduce the *toriagebaasan* in this discussion, the

ritual figure who some communities consider capable of bridging the gap between the world of the gods and ancestors and the world of the living.

The chapter then reviews customs of parturition throughout Japan based on the ethnographic data presented in the *Nihon Saniku*. For my theoretical framework, I draw upon the notion of “birth territory,” a concept developed by Brigitte Jordan. This idea addresses the simple fact that while every birth takes place somewhere, every birth takes place “on somebody’s territory.” I argue that “birth territory” involves not only issues of space and place; rather, its application is broadened to encompass a network of praxis, ritual, and attitudes towards the triangulated concerns of the gendered body, childbirth, and ideologies of reproduction.

Finally, I address how the community of Ôbara presents itself in the effort to place its *ubuya* on the map of religious tourism. In essence, the community refurbishes traditional practices of confinement to appeal to modern sensibilities and understandings of childbirth practices. The notion that the confinement hut offered new mothers a place to recover from childbirth and bond with their babies constitutes a rhetoric of reproduction that proliferates even in feminist circles. That is to say, reframing customs of confinement as beneficial to the health of mother and newborn requires adherents to that perspective to overlook texts and doctrines where the blood of menstruation and childbirth are defiling and birthing women and newborns must be separated from society because of this pollution.

In the last chapter, I present an overview of gendered devotional practices to Jizô, Kishimojin, and Kannon, deities visited by women and families in Japan faced with issues tied to reproduction. I consider how life cycle stages and events influence women’s these devotional activities. The issue at stake here is the fact that throughout Japanese history, a woman’s identity is hinged to her reproductive capacity.

Each of the deities evoke uniquely different concerns. Jizô, the most approachable deity in the Buddhist pantheon, takes on a new job in Japan as caretaker of children. This reincarnation of Jizô in Japan concerns scholars, because it supports the practice of *mizuku kuyô*, a contentious ritual service to commemorate the souls of aborted fetuses. Nevertheless, Jizô provides an important source of miracle and succour for the Japanese concerning life cycle issues. I demonstrate how a gap in the medical industry allows for a service like *mizuko kuyô* to flourish, as women undergo abortions without professional counsel to help them handle the emotional and psychological side of their decisions.

Kishimojin, a deity with a carnivorous past becomes an unlikely synthesized kami and bodhisattva of fertility and other reproductive issues in the Tokugawa period. The conversion of Hāritī, mother to a brood of five hundred, from a ravenous ogre who devours other parents' children to a devout follower of the Buddha elevates her as a prime deity for gendered concerns of reproduction; however, the deity's arc in Japan diminishes and devotion to Jizô eclipses veneration of the motherly deity. This suggests successful marketing techniques on the part of temples that housed images of Jizô as their *gohonzon* and speaks more to entrepreneurial concerns rather than issues of efficacy and suitability in Japanese religions.

Kannon, a bodhisattva whom women in Japan have visited on pilgrimage circuits at varying junctures along their life cycle trajectories, also has a conflicted relationship with the deity's counterpart in China. Kuan Yin underwent a process of feminization. While the Japanese generally regard the Bodhisattva as masculine, the fact that women partook in pilgrimages to Kannon suggests a feminine appeal. Ultimately, a deity able to confer children becomes very important in a culture where women are held solely responsible for producing children.

The debate between *jiriki* and *tariki* is activated with gendered devotional practices as women have available to them a world of divinity and miracle to which they can appeal. Sophrology, the natural birthing technique shows the other side of devotional practice put into practice, where women draw on their own powers to manage the challenges of pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Ultimately, this chapter asks if women in Japan develop their own narratives of pregnancy and childbirth or if temples and shrines force narratives on them.

Areas for Further Research

The first area for further research is situated at the intersection of science and technology and religion. The demographic crisis of low birthrate faced by the Japan frames this dissertation. This social issue deserves further consideration, especially in relation to customs and religious rituals concerning fertility. First, an exploration of governmental policy concerning assisted reproductive technologies would be beneficial, as this is one approach employed by governmental bodies at the national and prefectural levels. For example, couples with fertility issues receive governmental financial support to pursue medical options in South Korea and the province of Quebec; at the time of writing, couples in Japan do not receive governmental subsidies for treatments.

Then, how these medical concerns are implicated in contemporary religious services for fertility is the subject of further investigation. Queries include the following issues: What are the barriers from the perspective of medicine and science to using assisted reproductive technologies? What are the obstacles at the level of policy and governance? What are the cultural obstacles? Do couples facing fertility issues consider fertility treatments or do they have other ways of handling their childlessness? To what extent do they turn to religious means?

A second area of study concerns gendered *kô* activity and the extent to which it occurs today. I have discussed at length in this dissertation gender based religious confraternities throughout the history of Japanese religions. What issues bring women to join confraternities and how is membership determined? Can we consider the activities occurring around the nation in new religious movements an extension of traditional religious confraternities? If so, how are issues of modernity implicated in the activities that occur in these associations? How have issues of secularization changed the constitution of confraternal activity?

APPENDIX

Questionnaire for Kyoto Lion's Club Meeting, June 6, 2007

| Are you familiar with the custom of the <i>hara-obi</i> ? | | | |
|---|--------|----|------|
| Metal Worker | Male | 71 | Yes. |
| Koto Player | Female | 69 | Yes. |
| Company Management | Male | 42 | Yes. |
| Kyoto City Councillor | Male | 55 | Yes. |
| Company Management | Male | 68 | Yes. |
| | Male | 52 | Yes. |
| Doctor | Male | 84 | No. |
| Officer of an Organization | Male | 73 | Yes. |
| | Male | 73 | Yes. |
| Company Employee | Male | 38 | Yes. |
| Nursery school Principal | Female | 57 | Yes. |
| Alcohol Beverages Industry | Male | 67 | Yes. |
| Insurance Industry | Male | 61 | Yes. |
| Food Production | Male | 70 | Yes. |
| | Male | 69 | Yes. |
| Image Production | Female | 40 | Yes. |
| Architect | Male | 48 | Yes. |
| Construction | Male | 46 | Yes. |
| Engineering | Female | 44 | Yes. |
| Doctor | Male | 72 | Yes. |
| Service Industry | Male | 36 | Yes. |
| Textile Industry | Male | | Yes. |

| Has someone you known, for example, your wife, yourself, a family member, worn the <i>hara-obi</i> ? | | | |
|--|--------|----|---------------|
| Metal Worker | Male | 71 | Yes. |
| Koto Player | Female | 69 | Yes. |
| Company Management | Male | 42 | Yes. My wife. |
| Kyoto City Councillor | Male | 55 | Yes. |
| Company Management | Male | 68 | Yes. |
| | Male | 52 | Yes. |
| Doctor | Male | 84 | No. |
| Officer in a government Organization | Male | 73 | Yes. |
| | Male | 73 | Yes. |
| Company Employee | Male | 38 | No. |
| Nursery school Principal | Female | 57 | Yes. |
| Alcohol Beverages Industry | Male | 67 | Yes. |
| Insurance Industry | Male | 61 | Yes. |
| Food Production | Male | 70 | Yes. |
| | Male | 69 | Yes. |
| Image Production | Female | 40 | Yes. |
| Architect | Male | 48 | Yes. |
| Construction | Male | 46 | Yes. |
| Engineering | Female | 44 | Yes. |
| Doctor | Male | 72 | Yes. |
| Service Industry | Male | 36 | Yes. |
| Textile Industry | Male | 63 | Yes. |

| Are you familiar with the custom of <i>Inu no Hi</i> ? How did you learn about it? | | | |
|--|--------|----|--|
| Metal Worker | Male | 71 | Yes. |
| Koto Player | Female | 69 | Yes. |
| Company Management | Male | 42 | Yes. |
| Kyoto City Councillor | Male | 55 | No, |
| Company Management | Male | 68 | Yes. It is a family custom that I have known about since childhood. |
| | Male | 52 | No. |
| Doctor | Male | 84 | I found out about the custom today. |
| Officer | Male | 73 | Yes. |
| | Male | 73 | Yes. |
| Company Employee | Male | 38 | Yes. Family (mother) |
| Nursery school Principal | Female | 57 | Yes. I learned from my grandmother and my mother. The custom is passed down through family and region. |
| Alcohol Beverages Industry | Male | 67 | Yes. Grandmothers told their children. |
| Insurance Industry | Male | 61 | No. |
| Food Production | Male | 70 | Yes. Family (grandmother, mother) |
| | Male | 69 | Yes. |
| Image Production | Female | 40 | Yes. Grandmother. |
| Architect | Male | 48 | No. |
| Construction | Male | 46 | Yes. |
| Engineering | Female | 44 | No. |
| Doctor | Male | 72 | Yes. |
| Service Industry | Male | 36 | No. |
| Textile Industry | Male | 63 | Yes. |

| What are your thoughts concerning the crisis of Japan's low birth rate? | | | |
|---|--------|----|--|
| Metal Worker | Male | 71 | I would like the government to think about the financial capabilities of young people. |
| Koto Player | Female | 69 | I think what is important is the mindset of the parents, rather than the economic aspects. |
| Company Management | Male | 42 | Work (from farming / industrial to office) Decrease in physical strength / stamina (this is also evident in elementary school children). |
| Kyoto City Councillor | Male | 55 | I think it is a problem. Many reasons have been identified, but I think that we should implement different policies to find a solution for this problem. |
| Company Management | Male | 68 | At minimum, each family must have 3 children |
| | Male | 52 | More and more the greying of the population unfolds, and the vitality / energy of the whole Japanese society decreases. |
| Doctor | Male | 84 | I think it is because of the decrease in the number of childbirths. |
| Officer of an Organization | Male | 73 | With the increasing tendency of the decline in population, it is not good to continue with the status quo. A minimum of 2.0 [children] is desirable. |
| | Male | 73 | I am worried about the future of Japan. |
| Company Employee | Male | 38 | It is troubling because the strength of the nation will weaken. However still, it is unlikely the government is able to exert a big influence on this. |

What are your thoughts concerning the crisis of Japan's low birth rate (continued)?

| | | | |
|----------------------------|--------|----|--|
| Nursery school Principal | Female | 57 | I think it is regretful. I think fertility rate is a reflection of national policy. Taking into account the steps taken by Japan after the Second World War it is no surprise at all this has unfolded. However, if we are able to bring back a society that respects the maternity of the female population, I think it may still change. |
| Alcohol Beverages Industry | Male | 67 | A decrease in population will lead to disorder in the fundamentals of the nation, thus measures must be however it goes. The nation must put more effort in creating an environment that is conducive to raising children. |
| Insurance Industry | Male | 61 | I think this is a serious problem as it leads to a decline in the strength of the nation. |
| Food Production | Male | 70 | The change in perception of young people towards marriage. The environment at home, financial / economic conditions contribute to decline in childbirth. |
| | Male | 69 | I think there will be a slight increase this fiscal year. |
| Image Production | Female | 40 | I regret this is happening. |
| Architect | Male | 48 | From the perspective of an empire, a population of about 70,000,000 is perfectly acceptable. |
| Construction | Male | 46 | |
| Engineering | Female | 44 | |
| Doctor | Male | 72 | |
| Service Industry | Male | 36 | Production decreases and instability occurs. |
| Textile Industry | Male | 63 | Social structure is bad |

| Please write down any opinions or impressions you have about today's talk. | | | |
|--|--------|----|---|
| Metal Worker | Male | 71 | |
| Koto Player | Female | 69 | I think it is really marvellous that a foreigner is carrying out research on the maternity belt. |
| Company Management | Male | 42 | |
| Kyoto City Councillor | Male | 55 | Nothing in particular. |
| Company Management | Male | 68 | |
| | Male | 52 | No. |
| Doctor | Male | 84 | The [<i>hara-obi</i>] most probably reduces Metabolic Syndrome. |
| Officer of a Government Organization | Male | 73 | The custom of the maternity belt can be considered in some way a mere custom; however, I think because of its real beneficial effect the general public accepted it. In other words, it is a good custom I think. |
| | Male | 73 | I wish there could be an increase in assistance in e.g., the national child birth allowance, etc. |
| Company Employee | Male | 38 | |
| Nursery school Principal | Female | 57 | It enabled me to realize once again the importance of childbirth and raising children as human beings. |
| Alcohol Beverages Industry | Male | 67 | Today I am very happy to learn about an old custom which Japanese people have forgotten. |
| Insurance Industry | Male | 61 | Any topic can be made a subject for research indeed. |
| Food Production | Male | 70 | The environment at home, financial / economic conditions contribute to decline in childbirth. |
| | Male | 69 | |
| Image Production | Female | 40 | |
| Architect | Male | 48 | |
| Construction | Male | 46 | |

| | | | |
|------------------|--------|----|---|
| Engineering | Female | 44 | |
| Doctor | Male | 72 | |
| Service Industry | Male | 36 | Are you interested in the <i>Kojiki</i> ? |
| Textile Industry | Male | 63 | |

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GLOSSARY

| | |
|---|--------------|
| ano yo | あの世 |
| anzan | 安産 |
| <i>Anzan tebiki Kishimojin ryaku engi</i> | 安産手引鬼子母神略縁起 |
| Benesse Ko-pore-shon | ベネッセコーポレーション |
| boshi kenkôho | 母子保健法 |
| boshi kenkô techô | 母子健康手帳 |
| Buzen no kuni | 豊前国 |
| <i>Busetsu Kishimo kyô</i> | 仏説鬼子母経 |
| butsudhan | 仏壇 |
| Chakutai kichinichi | 着帯吉日 |
| Chikumurasaki no kashihenomiya | 筑紫香椎宮 |
| Chûai Tennô | 君仲哀天皇 |
| Daihonzan | 大本山 |
| <i>Daishô shinshû daizô kyô</i> | 大正新脩大蔵経 |
| Dôsojin | 道祖神 |
| <i>Edo Meisho Zue</i> | 江戸名所図会 |
| eki san obi | 易産帯 |
| emaki | 絵巻 |
| ena | イナ |
| engi | 縁起 |
| ennichi | 縁日 |
| fûshû | 風習 |
| fujinkai | 婦人会 |
| <i>Fuji no rokunin zôshi</i> | 富士の人六草子 |
| fundoshi | ふんどし |
| fushigi | 不思議 |
| Gappi no gohonchi | 月日の御本地 |
| gasshō | 合掌 |
| goriyaku | 御利益 |
| gosonaemono | 御供物 |
| gûji | 宮司 |
| Hachiman Daibosatsu | 八幡大菩薩 |
| haibutsu kishaku | 排仏毀釈 |
| hara-obi/ fukutai | 腹帯 |
| haramaki | 腹巻き |
| hariko inu | 張り子戌 |
| Hatsumôde | 初詣 |

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|
| hikiagebaba | ヒキアゲババ |
| honden | 本殿 |
| Hokenjo | 保健所 |
| <i>Hokkekyô</i> | 法華教 |
| <i>Hongankyô</i> | 本願經 |
| Inu no hi | 戌の日 |
| inu kuyô | 犬供養 |
| <i>Ishinpô</i> | 医心方 |
| Iwata obi | 岩田帯 |
| Jingu kôgô | 神功皇后 |
| Jizô | 地藏 |
| Jûshoku | 住職 |
| Jûra sama | 十羅さま |
| Jûrasetsuan | 十羅刹安 |
| jikka | 実家 |
| Jimintô | 自民党 |
| <i>Jizô hôgyoku toku</i> | 地藏法玉牘 |
| Jôkô-ji | 常光時 |
| Jugojin | 守護神 |
| <i>Jûrinkyô</i> | 十輪經 |
| Jûroku daijigoku | 十六大地獄 |
| Juyôbunkazai | 重要文化財 |
| juyômingei bunkazai | 重要民芸文化財 |
| kamidana | 神棚 |
| Kanbun era (1661-1673) | 寛文 |
| Kannon | 観音 |
| Karite | 訶利底 |
| Kariteimo | 訶梨帝母 |
| kariya | 仮親 |
| Kegon-shû | 華嚴宗 |
| kichinichi | 吉日 |
| Kitaamabegun | 北海部郡町 |
| kitô | 祈祷 |
| Kishimojin | 鬼子母神 |
| <i>Kishisonkami Yuen Ryakuki</i> | 鬼子母尊神由縁畧記 |
| kô | 講 |
| Koan Jizô | 子安地藏 |
| Koankô | 子安講 |
| Kôbô Daishi | 弘法大師 |

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Kodomo no hi | 子どもの日 |
| kôdoseichô | 高度成長 |
| Kokugaku | 国学 |
| Kokumenkenkôhoken | 国民健康保険 |
| konashiya | コナシヤ |
| Kongô ôkami | 金剛大神 |
| <i>Konkô myô saishô-ô kyô</i> | 金光明最勝王経 |
| kono yo | この世 |
| <i>Konponsetsu issai yûbu bina ya zôji</i> | 根本説一切有部毘奈耶雜事 |
| Kosekihô | 戸籍法 |
| Kôseirôdôshô | 厚生労働省 |
| Koyasui Jizô | 子安い地藏 |
| kuchiyose | 口寄せ |
| Kuiwakare | クイワカレ |
| Kumaso | 熊襲 |
| Kuramoto Gyôkei | 倉本堯慧 |
| Kuyakusho | 区役所 |
| Mappô | 末法 |
| matanitei sangyô | マタニテイ産業 |
| mayoke | まよけ |
| Meiji Nyûgyô | 明治乳業 |
| mikai | 未開 |
| Mikura | 御蔵島 |
| Mizuko kuyô | 水子供養 |
| Môko | 蒙古 |
| <i>Myôhôngrengekyô</i> | 妙法蓮華経 |
| Nakayama-dera | 中山寺 |
| nanzan | 難産 |
| Nenbutsu | 念仏 |
| Niwa | ニワ |
| Norito | 祝詞 |
| Ôbara jinja | 大原神社 |
| Obi-iwai | 帯祝い |
| Obitoke-dera | 帯解寺 |
| ofuda | お札 |
| Okinagatarashi hime | 気長足姫 |
| omamori | お守り |
| omamori wanchan | お守りワンちゃん |
| Omiyamairi | お宮参り |
| Ôsajô chikirinen | 王舎城 竹林園 |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Otogizôshi | 御伽草子 |
| <i>Rishukyô</i> | 理趣経 |
| Ryôseikenbo | 良正賢母 |
| sa-he | サへ |
| Sai no kawara | 賽の河原 |
| Saiin no kawara | 西院の河原 |
| sanba | 産婆 |
| <i>Sanba kisoku</i> | 産婆規則 |
| saniku | 産育 |
| <i>Sanshûokugun saniku fûzoku zue</i> | 三州奥郡産育風俗図絵 |
| Sarashi no obi | 晒の帯 |
| satogaeri | 里帰り |
| seishin yobôshô mutsû bunben | 精神予防性無痛分娩 |
| seiza | 正坐 |
| sekihan | 赤飯 |
| Setsubun | 節分 |
| shinbutsu bunri | 神仏分離 |
| shinbutsu shûgô | 神仏習合 |
| Shingon | 真言 |
| Shiragi no Kuni | 新羅の国 |
| shiryôkan | 資料館 |
| shôkoka | 小子化 |
| shosan/ hatsuzan | 初産 |
| shôshika ・ danjokyôdô sankaku tantô | 少子化 ・ 男女共同参画担当 |
| shûzoku | 習俗 |
| Sôda Ishi | 荘田医師 |
| Sokushin jôbutsu | 促進成仏 |
| Suiten-gu | 水天宮 |
| Sumiyoshi Shrine | 住吉三神 |
| sutego | 捨て子 |
| Taian | 大安 |
| taikyô | 胎教 |
| <i>Tamago Kurabu</i> | たまごクラブ |
| tenyo | 天女 |
| tokonoma | 床の間, |
| toriagebaba | トリアゲババ |
| Toshitokujin/tondosan | 歳徳神 |
| tsûka girei | 通過儀礼 |
| ubumeshi | 産飯 |
| ubutate | 産立 |

| | |
|------------------------|---------|
| Ubushi kami san | 産土神様 |
| Ubusunakami | 産土神 |
| ubuya | 産屋 |
| ujigami | 氏神 |
| Umi | 宇美 |
| usugurai | 薄暗 |
| Utomiya Teikô | 宇都宮定綱 |
| Uwazôri | 上草履 |
| yakudoshi | 厄年 |
| yukan | 湯灌 |
| Yûkei minzoku bunkazai | 有形民俗文化財 |
| yûsenseki | 優先席 |
| zabuton | 座布団 |
| zen | 膳 |