

**MOURNING THE UNBORN DEAD:
AMERICAN USES OF JAPANESE BUDDHIST POST-ABORTION RITUALS**

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ABSTRACT

JEFFREY TOWNSEND WILSON. Mourning the Unborn Dead: American Uses of Japanese Buddhist Post-Abortion Rituals
(Under the direction of Thomas A. Tweed)

Among the most common rituals in Japan, the Buddhist post-pregnancy loss ritual *mizuko kuyō* has come to America. *Mizuko kuyō* first arrived in Japanese-American Buddhist communities. Temples of various denominations demonstrate a range of attitudes and practices related to *mizuko kuyō*. The ritual is particularly sought out by new Japanese immigrants, and is largely contextualized by Japanese Buddhist notions of the spirit world and clear distinctions between priests and laypeople. What changes occur in *mizuko kuyō* are generally the result of indirect forces, such as lack of space.

Convert Zen practitioners in America also practice a form of *mizuko kuyō*, often called “water baby ceremonies.” Despite their depiction as unritualistic, since the early 1990s these new Buddhist groups have increasingly taken up *mizuko kuyō* as a practice to help members deal with pregnancy losses. Women have been the pioneers of this practice, which is buttressed by the rise of bodhisattva-oriented movements. Numerous alterations can be seen in the process of recreating *mizuko kuyō* as water baby ceremonies. Among the most important is the re-orientation from placating the spirit to psychologically healing the parent. The rise of *mizuko kuyō* demonstrates that convert Zen has reached a new stage which pays greater attention to ritual and other elements of the tradition left out by earlier American converts. Thus *mizuko kuyō* pushes these groups closer to Asian models.

Buddhists are not the only Americans with an interest in *mizuko kuyō*. Pro-life and pro-choice proponents rhetorically appropriate *mizuko kuyō* in ways designed to bolster their political positions. Pro-life adherents use *mizuko kuyō* to prove that they care about women, and that their convictions arise from objective psychological phenomena. Pro-choice proponents use it to show that they care about families, and that they are sensitive to the religious aspects of abortion. More surprising, some American Christians and others seek healing after pregnancy losses through *mizuko kuyō*. These ritual appropriations come in many forms, from discussing Buddhism in online forums to performing *mizuko kuyō*. Buddhism may be becoming the specialist religion that ministers to post-pregnancy loss grief for many Americans, regardless of their personal religious affiliation.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the many consultants, in both the United States and Japan, who so generously shared with me their time and insights; and to the memory of my grandmother, Mattie Sue Whatley Wilson, without whom this project never would have been begun.

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INTRODUCTION: “DIFFERENT MEANINGS, DIFFERENT ENDS”

Historian of American religion Robert Orsi has noted that “it is one of the peculiarities of an international and transhistorical system of signs such as Catholicism that signifiers rooted in one place and time may detach from the specific historical and cultural ground on which they arose and circulate freely, becoming available in very different cultural environments, sometimes acquiring different meanings in the process of translation, sometimes acquiring different ends.”¹ The underlying thesis of this dissertation is that Orsi’s statement applies just as fully to Buddhism as to Catholicism, and that Buddhism’s movement into the United States is one of the best contemporary examples we have of this phenomenon.

For evidence, this project draws on fieldwork conducted in the United States and Japan and analysis of American writings on the Buddhist post-pregnancy loss ritual known as *mizuko kuyō*. Among the most common rituals in Japan, over the past four decades *mizuko kuyō* has gradually come to the United States. In the process it has acquired some very different meanings and been put to use for ends that readers may find quite unexpected. This study examines how and why Americans of different backgrounds—Buddhist and otherwise—have brought knowledge and performance of this popular Japanese ceremony to the U.S. In following the American journeys of the

¹Orsi, Robert A. *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005: 130.

bodhisattva Jizō, chief figure of the *mizuko kuyō* ritual and the patron of travelers (through this world and the next), I seek to provide a new window into the life of multiple religious groups, from Japanese-American Buddhists to European-American Evangelicals. Particular attention will be focused on obscured pathways of emotions, artifacts, and rituals in this trans-Pacific story of international networks and adaptive processes. As well as the more obvious contributions to Buddhist Studies and American religious history, I hope to contribute to women's studies, ritual studies, and the study of Christian practice in an ever-globalizing and pluralizing American society.

This introduction gives an overview of *mizuko kuyō* in Japan, provides historical information about abortion practices in the United States, and describes the methods used to conduct this study. Our exploration of *mizuko kuyō* in America begins with Japanese-American temples, particularly those of the adjacent Little Tokyo and Boyle Heights neighborhoods of Los Angeles, one of the richest historical sites for Buddhism in North America. Chapter two describes the *mizuko kuyō* practices of these temples, focusing especially on the Sōtō Zen, Nichiren Shōshū, Nichiren Shū, Jōdo Shū, Shingon Shū, and Risshō Kōsei-kai traditions. In doing so we not only learn about the many ways *mizuko kuyō* is performed but encounter the diversity of these Buddhist traditions in America. I will consider the theological positions, immigration patterns, economic forces, generational divides, and other factors that help shape the frequency and manner in which these rituals are conducted. I will also consider whether the narrative of Japanese acculturation to American religious patterns is altered by attention to rites such as *mizuko kuyō*.

Chapter three moves from the Japanese-American Buddhist community to that of European-American converts to Zen. Despite their popular depiction as unritualistic, these new Buddhist groups have increasingly taken up *mizuko kuyō* as a practice to help women and their partners deal with pregnancy losses, in some cases losses that occurred thirty or more years earlier. I will explore the channels that have brought information about *mizuko kuyō* to these converts, paying particular attention to the female priests and laywomen who have pioneered the practice. An important piece of this puzzle is the rise of bodhisattva-oriented movements in convert American Buddhism, a phenomenon that has not received scholarly attention. The chapter concludes with a participant-observer description of a *mizuko kuyō* performed at a Zen monastery in Oregon, setting the stage for a detailed analysis of the ritual in the next chapter.

Chapter four considers how and why American Zen converts have changed *mizuko kuyō* from the ritual's typical practice in Japan. Among the most important alterations to be observed is the re-orientation from placating the *mizuko* spirit to psychologically healing the mother. A major concern of this chapter is accounting for the lack of attention to ritual in previous accounts of American Zen and speculation on why this religious subculture seems increasingly willing to incorporate new ceremonial forms. Places, artifacts, bodies, and emotions will provide particular sites of investigation for *mizuko kuyō* and convert Zen Buddhism.

From Buddhist communities we next move to the wider American culture to examine how and why Christians, feminists, and others have appropriated discussion of *mizuko kuyō* to suit their political and religious agendas. How do non-Buddhists learn about Buddhist practices and in what forums do they rhetorically apply this knowledge?

What strategic ammunition do abortion opponents, women's rights advocates, bioethicists, and others believe *mizuko kuyō* provides them in their struggles with American culture war adversaries? And how do these appropriations change our understandings of both Buddhism and larger American religious and cultural groups?

Chapter six examines the surprising phenomenon of non-Buddhist Americans seeking cultural and personal healing around issues of pregnancy loss through the imaginative and actual uses of *mizuko kuyō*. I consider how foreign practices are used to critique American society, why Americans might turn to unfamiliar religions to address such intimate pains, and how this unexpected strategy may hold implications for the development of new trends in American religious pluralism. In the postscript, lessons learned from these various wanderings are reconsidered, and I propose new models for writing the history of American religion, especially American Buddhism.

Japanese Background of Mizuko Kuyō

Mizuko kuyō is a practice primarily devoted to the bodhisattva known in Japan as Jizō.² Never a particularly popular figure in India, his cult gained status in China, where through his role as a patron of travelers he became associated with the journeys taken through the afterlife.³ In *The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva*, a Chinese text from the Tang Period, he acquires a new status as the savior who ventures into the Buddhist hells to rescue beings trapped there by evil karma.⁴ After Jizō was

²The Sanskrit name for Jizō is Kshitigarbha (Earth Womb/Store).

³Zhiru Ng. "The Formation and Development of the Dizang Cult in Medieval China" (PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 2000).

⁴Hsuan Hua. *The Sutra of the Past Vows of Earth Store Bodhisattva*. New York: Buddhist Text Translation Society, 1974.

introduced to Japan from China in the Heian Era, he acquired a reputation as the guardian of children and childbirth. As all of these various ideas gradually coalesced, Jizō finally took on a distinctly Japanese form as the bodhisattva who watches over children, especially those who die young, ensuring that they will be freed from a suffering rebirth and led to a better place in the afterlife.⁵ It is from this role that he was marshaled to preside over *mizuko kuyō* in the latter half of the twentieth century.

In the post-WWII era Japan underwent massive social and political changes. Among them was a tremendous increase in abortion rates, resulting from a number of factors. Japan faced a sudden population boom as defeated soldiers and colonialists throughout Asia were forcibly repatriated to a country with severe food shortages and a decimated economy; this was conjoined with a baby boom brought on by the end of the war. Contraception was generally unavailable, unreliable, or expensive, a problem compounded by Japanese society's unwillingness to induce men to take responsibility for their role in conception. The result was a huge increase in unwanted pregnancies. After the fall of the aggressively pro-natalist Shōwa regime to American forces, abortion was decriminalized, and it rapidly became the most common form of "birth control."⁶

With the dramatic rise in abortions eventually came the creation of *mizuko kuyō*. *Mizuko* (literally "water baby") is an alternate term for a fetus, though it has largely taken on the meaning of a fetus lost through miscarriage, stillbirth, or, especially, abortion. *Kuyō* is a memorial rite, derived from the verb "to offer," as in to offer prayers and apologies. The actual practice of *mizuko kuyō* differs according to the particular priest or

⁵Patricia Yamada. "A Friend in Need: The Bodhisattva Jizo." *Japanese Religions*, vol. 16 (1991): 83.

⁶Helen Hardacre. *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997: 52-54.

spiritualist performing the rite, but falls into several general patterns. Typically a woman approaches a Buddhist priest and requests the service. The ceremony will be held in the main worship hall of the temple or a special shrine specifically for *mizuko kuyō* (a *mizuko jizōdō*), where the priest chants sutras, expresses the wish that the *mizuko* will become a Buddha, and prompts the layperson to make offerings of incense, toys, and food (figure 1.1). Often the woman will purchase a small, childlike statue of Jizō, dress it with bibs, and pray to it for forgiveness; in some temples an *ihai*—a plaque normally used to enshrine ancestors—takes the place of the statue. Alternately, she may place bibs or other objects associated with infancy on a larger temple statue of *mizuko* Jizō (or in some cases *mizuko* Kannon, a female bodhisattva), depicted holding a baby and with children plaintively clutching at his robes (figure 1.2). This latter activity may or may not take place after a full *kuyō* has been performed by a priest, and represents a more informal, personal approach to *mizuko kuyō* on the part of the laity. Another way in which laypeople ritualize pregnancy losses that is partially outside the aegis of priests is by purchasing votive tablets (*ema*) and writing messages to the spirits or Jizō (figure 1.3). Money may be exchanged at many points in these practices, such as to induce the priest to pray for the *mizuko*, to buy offerings to present to Jizō, or to purchase statues (one per abortion). Many temples post set fees for *mizuko kuyō*, while others merely rely on the common Japanese practice of slipping some money to the priest in an envelope (figure 1.4).

Researchers have suggested multiple reasons for why women and their family members practice *mizuko kuyō*. For instance, Meredith Underwood has argued that it offers women a way to represent themselves as caring mothers, and Elizabeth Harrison

points out how *mizuko kuyō* enables people to re-establish family ties with beings now in the spirit world.⁷ A chief concern of *mizuko kuyō*, one represented in both the primary sources and much scholarly work on the ritual, is to prevent spirit attacks (*tatari*). According to many proponents of *mizuko kuyō*, an aborted fetus doesn't just cease to exist—it passes into a sort of nether-existence as a ghost and may cause harm to the living, especially its mother or her family. The logic of *mizuko* is explained by a brochure produced by a temple specializing in these rites:

The *mizuko* resulting from a terminated pregnancy is a child existing in the realm of darkness. The principal things that have to be done for its sake are the making of a full apology and the making of amends to such a child.

In contrast to the child in darkness because of an ordinary miscarriage or by natural death after being born, the child here discussed is in its present location because its parents took active steps to prevent it from being born alive in our world. If the parents merely carry out ordinary memorial rites but fail to make a full apology to their child, their *mizuko* will never be able to accept their act.⁸

Common alleged symptoms of *mizuko tatari* are sickness, accidents, loss of a spouse's affections, frigidity, disobedience by one's children, loss of business, and mysterious pains. Over time, this symptomology has expanded to encompass virtually any and every misfortune—even a person who had never had an abortion could be haunted by random *mizuko* generated by the millions of abortions in Japan's post-war

⁷Meredith Underwood. "Strategies of Survival: Women, Abortion, and Popular Religion in Contemporary Japan." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, volume 67, no. 4 (1999): 758-766; Elizabeth Harrison. "Mizuko Kuyō: the Re-production of the Dead in Contemporary Japan." *Religion in Japan: Arrows to Heaven and Earth*. Edited by P.F. Kornicki and I.J. McMullen. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

⁸William R. LaFleur. "Buddhism and Abortion: The Way to Memorialize One's Mizuko." *Religions of Japan in Practice*. Edited by George J. Tanabe, Jr. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999: 194 (italics in original).

era.⁹ No matter what problems one experiences, it might be suggested that they resulted from *tatari*, necessitating *mizuko kuyō* to correct the situation. Siblings of a *mizuko* are particularly singled out as vulnerable to distraught or angry spirits:

It often happens that the living children of persons who have repeatedly had abortions will in the middle of the night cry out “Father, help!” or “Help me, Mommy!” because of nightmares. Uncontrollable weeping or cries of “I’m scared! I’m scared!” on the part of children are really caused by dreams through which their aborted siblings deep in the realm of darkness give expression to their own distress and anger.¹⁰

Contrary to the marketing rhetoric produced around *mizuko kuyō*, the practice in its current form appears to be of very recent origin. No direct precedent exists in Japanese Buddhism; prior to the twentieth century there are few records of memorial rites of any kind conducted for aborted fetuses, even though abortion was certainly carried out.¹¹ Not surprisingly, *mizuko kuyō* shares many similarities with the so-called New Religions of Japan, such as a concern with spirits, this worldly benefits, and rapid spread based on active proselytization.¹² Furthermore, the atmosphere of the *mizuko kuyō* frequently has a hard, judgmental tone absent from pre-modern Jizō-related motifs: Jizō

⁹Hardacre 1997: 81-91; 166.

¹⁰LaFleur 1999: 194.

¹¹William LaFleur, a leading scholar of *mizuko kuyō*, believes that the practice dates back much further into the Japanese past. He suggests that historical data is lacking because it was not a formal tradition and tended to be more spontaneous actions of grieving women, akin to the current practice of dressing Jizo statues. I find his account plausible, yet the lack of hard evidence makes it difficult to draw a definitive conclusion. On the other hand, Helen Hardacre’s study of how *mizuko kuyō* came to occupy the prominent public position it has enjoyed over the past several decades is meticulously documented. Ultimately, the exact origin of *mizuko kuyō* is relatively immaterial for this study: what matters is that the ritual eventually “went public” in a major way following the legalization of abortion in Japan in 1948, a fact of no real scholarly dispute.

¹²Jamie Hubbard. “Embarrassing Superstition, Doctrine, and the Study of New Religious Movements.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, volume 66, no. 1 (1998): 63.

in pre-modern Japan was the caring protector who sprung people from hell and healed their illnesses without comment on possibly karmic causes for their suffering. Helen Hardacre, in her study *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, has shown that *mizuko kuyō* was disseminated to the masses via lurid articles in tabloids created in the 1970s. Their partners were spiritual entrepreneurs, temple priests or sometimes independent faith-healers, who proclaimed that virtually any problem in one's life was likely due to angry *mizuko* exacting revenge. The targets for this rhetoric were mainly young women, who were characterized as immoral, sexually depraved, and immature, bringing about trouble not only for themselves but others through the consequences of their selfish, thoughtless actions (especially sexual ones).¹³ As Hardacre points out:

Mizuko kuyō, especially in its tabloid advertising campaigns, regularly invokes fetocentric rhetoric, framing abortion as a moral violation of the fetus's personhood and predicting that the wronged fetus will exact revenge on the mother. . . *Mizuko kuyō* selectively applies fetocentric rhetoric, usually to young, unmarried women, using an ideology of motherhood to stigmatize nonreproductive sexual activity in them, but not their male partners, and casting much greater moral opprobrium upon single women than upon married women who have abortions. It seeks to motivate young, unmarried women to pay for rituals to appease wrathful fetuses.¹⁴

The creation of *mizuko* rhetoric was made possible in part by the introduction of new medical technologies that allowed pictures to be taken of the fetus in the womb. Suddenly, the woman dropped out of the picture and the fetus could be portrayed as a viable, independent being, implicitly a fully human and autonomous one. Tabloids took up these evocative new images, publishing doctored pictures of young women cowering

¹³Hardacre 1997: 63-65; 166-167

¹⁴Hardacre 1997: 5-6 (italics in original).

under the sheets as disembodied fetuses floated threatening above the bed—these pictures appeared alongside stories about the spirit attacks resulting from young women’s selfish sexual actions and abortions, often with directions on how to reach people and temples providing *mizuko kuyō* and sample prices.¹⁵

Often the staunchest advocates of the need for *mizuko kuyō* were right-wing thinkers and politicians, some of whom formed ties with new temples established solely to perform *mizuko kuyō*. All of this flowed from a general ideology that was reactionary toward the modern Japanese state; it viewed the present day as spiritually corrupt, overly influenced by foreign (mainly American) culture, drifting away from the purity and strength of Japan’s ancient allegiance to the emperor and to strict social mores. Japan’s soaring abortion rate was seen by such people as the clearest sign of this alleged moral rot, and women were blamed as the downfall of Japanese virility, independence, and social values. Deeply guilty for their sexual profligacy, their murderous abortions, their implied rejection of their naturally ordained status as mothers, and the damage all of this would surely do to the family—the bedrock of Japanese society—women were seen by these social commentators as hopelessly sinful, in dire need of atonement through *mizuko kuyō*, which humbled them and put them back into the proper position of submission.¹⁶

Despite the sometimes rancorous rhetoric of *mizuko kuyō* proponents, no strong push has been made to outlaw abortion. Japanese society seems to have accepted the need for access to abortion, and resorts to ritual rather than legal avenues for managing the procedure’s potentially corrosive effects. This contrast to the situation in the United

¹⁵Hardacre 1997: 78-80. In a twist on Hardacre’s allegations, I found that sonograms of fetuses are now left by some women in places designated for *mizuko kuyō*.

¹⁶Underwood 1999.

States, where abortion is among the most contentious modern social issues—a strong stimulus for interest in *mizuko kuyō* among Americans.

Religion and Abortion in America

As in Japan, abortion only emerged as a religious issue of major importance in the twentieth century, especially in the last quarter of the century. Since the introduction of European colonies in North America, abortion was widely available via traditional practices of herbology. Abortion took place at home and was presided over by the woman herself or a female midwife. The practice was private, outside of the legal system, and was not discussed by religious writers.

Beginning in the middle nineteenth century there was a push to criminalize abortion. However, it took place almost entirely within the purview of the emergent professional medical establishment. Ostensibly, the issue was not the humanity of the fetus but rather the health of the mother—herbs and primitive surgeries were widely considered dangerous, and unlicensed medical practitioners were the target of the anti-abortion movement. On another level, this was really a front in the battle against quacks and midwives by doctors, who sought to rationalize, professionalize, and centralize medical techniques (not incidentally, this allowed them to become the sole legitimate providers of medical care).¹⁷ In an era of great Protestant crusades on public issues, the religious establishment was nearly silent on abortion. Working with the states, doctors gradually managed to criminalize abortion throughout the USA before the end of the century. To the extent that religion entered into these debates, it was typically the scientific community railing against the intrusion of “fringe” religionists, such as

¹⁷Brief of 281 American Historians as Amici Curiae, Supporting Appellees. *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services*, No. 88-605, Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1988.

Christian Scientists or other New Thought communities, who sought to offer alternative (untested and unsafe, to the minds of the doctors) approaches to healthcare. It also played a somewhat subliminal role because one of the arguments was that abortion reduced the number of native-born American births, especially among wealthy, educated, white Protestants (and this during a time of tremendous immigration from mostly Catholic countries).

For the first five decades of the twentieth century, abortion remained a very minor issue in American religion.¹⁸ When it appeared, it was typically on stereotyped lists of various “crimes” of sexuality railed against by Catholic priests and Protestant ministers. In the meantime, new generations grew up for the first time in an America where abortion had always been criminalized.

The change began in the 1960s. A new generation of progressive Protestant ministers began to receive visits from frightened pregnant women, sometimes young girls, sometimes married women of their own congregations. In previous decades such women were usually met with stern lectures. But as ministers in the liberal and mainline denominations began to feel the influence of the growing women’s movement and the cultural push of liberation movements more broadly, they reacted in new ways to the situation. Clergy began to obtain the names of doctors who were willing to provide

¹⁸Before abortion developed into a major twentieth century religious issue, it was prefigured in some ways by the furor over birth control. Leslie Tentler in her book *Catholics and Contraception* describes how beginning around 1875, but especially accelerating in the 1920s, Catholic priests in America used birth control as a litmus test of differentiation from and superiority to Protestants. This was also the period when modern forms of birth control were being developed and disseminated in the USA. For these Catholic priests, birth control was one of the most monstrous of sins, a crime against God both because it was a direct repudiation of Divine will and for some because it resulted in the non-birth of additional Catholics (this non-birth was even rhetorically transformed into murder by some particularly righteous firebrands). Branded “race suicide,” birth control became the paradigmatic reproductive issue for American Catholics, through which the abortion debate would eventually be approached later in the century. It should be mentioned here that abortion too sometimes appeared alongside birth control in the sermons of these mission priests. Leslie Tentler. *Catholics and Contraception: An American History*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

secret abortions and pass them on to women in need; others learned how to send women to Japan or England, where abortion procedures were legal. Many ministers were influenced by studies which showed that women who sought abortions would obtain them regardless of their legality, and that making abortion illegal merely drove women to unlicensed and unsafe abortionists, sometimes with fatal results. Abortion began to emerge as an issue of medical responsibility and women's rights, and progressive Protestant clergy helped to argue cases which led to the relaxation of abortion restrictions in many states. The groundwork was laid for the 1973 Supreme Court decisions (especially *Roe vs. Wade*) that decisively legalized abortion throughout the country; clergy alliances were an instrumental part of bringing these cases to trial.¹⁹

The seemingly sudden reversal of American abortion policy shocked conservative American Christians. Previously, they had been nearly uninvolved in the building debate over legalized abortion, which was seen as a peripheral issue unlikely to become a reality. Along with the profound shock came almost instantaneous and even greater anger. Conservative Christians rightly saw abortion as the newest battleground over the role and privileges of women in American culture. Within days of the *Roe* decision Protestant and Catholic leaders were petitioning Congress to re-criminalize abortion, calling it murder of unborn babies. These leaders represented their religions as always having been explicitly opposed to abortion, declared abortion as being against fundamental American values, criticized the procedure as unsafe for women and degrading of their natural roles

¹⁹Tom Davis. *Sacred Work: Planned Parenthood and Its Clergy Alliances*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

as mothers, and suggested it was something more fit for Communist and atheist Russia or China than for godly America.²⁰

What had changed between 1900 and 1973? One factor—that generations of Americans had come to see abortion as naturally and historically illegal—has already been mentioned. But more important are religious shifts that had occurred in the meantime. The twentieth century saw impressive gains by women: suffrage, the birth control pill, greater access to education and employment, liberalized divorce laws, and other developments left American women in a far stronger position than they enjoyed at the century's inception. Many of these gains had been made by activists who identified religion, especially Christianity, as one of the main causes of women's oppression in America. Conservative Christians, both Catholic and Protestant alike, often saw these gains by women as directly deleterious to American culture (virtually a sacred entity in itself) and to churches that thrived on male authority on the one hand and massive lay and (in the case of Catholics) religious female participation on the other. Conservative Christianity tended to idealize a sort of Victorian model of American religion and culture, where women were meekly and happily subservient to husband (and minister), and saw their main role as raising future generations of Christians in the home and nurturing Christian institutions and movements in the public sphere (without becoming "prideful" about such activities). This conservative Christianity was itself a product of the acrimonious debates over modernism that occurred within American Christianity during the two or three decades on either side of the turn of the century, and which produced first the Fundamentalists in the 1910s and 20s and then the neo-evangelicals in the 1940s and 50s. Especially in its neo-evangelical form, this new old-time Christianity was

²⁰Eva R. Ruben, ed. *The Abortion Controversy: A Documentary History*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994.

aggressive, reactionary, well-organized, and prepared to exert political and social power to contain the liberation movements, new religious diversity, and liberal Christianities that so disturbed it in the 1960s and 70s.²¹ Thus just as abortion was legalized in America, an American Christianity had developed that was naturally predisposed to oppose it and efficient enough to do so on a large scale.

Anti-abortion groups quickly appeared in the mid-1970s, most having some religious connection. When it became clear that the Supreme Court was unwilling for the time being to rescind its legalization of abortion, these groups developed a three-pronged strategy. First, they worked to restrict abortion on the state level, pushing local authorities to introduce ever stricter controls over how, when, and by whom an abortion could be procured. Second, they sought to promote anti-abortion political candidates at all levels of government, but especially for the presidency in an eventual bid to change the tone of the Supreme Court and rescind *Roe vs. Wade*. Third, they sought to directly prevent abortions from occurring by blocking access to clinics and intimidating doctors and clinicians such that they would find another line of work.²²

Religion was almost always explicitly at the heart of these newly organized movements to restrict abortion. The American Catholic hierarchy required every Catholic church in the USA to host a chapter of an anti-abortion organization, and priests made sure their parishioners heard about the evils of abortion consistently during their sermons. Catholics were the first to organize clinic-blocking operations, often drawing on their experience with the Civil Rights movement and couching their new struggle as

²¹Christian Smith. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

²²Ruben 1994.

one for the rights of unborn children and women forced into abortion.²³ Early Catholic participation was soon overshadowed by neo-evangelical Christian movements such as Operation Rescue, which took an even more militant (and often less female-positive) stance, regarding women who had abortions as heinously sinful wretches rather than as confused co-victims. For such groups opposition to abortion became the defining characteristic of a righteous Christian, and the further one went in preventing abortion, the more righteous one was. Such attitudes eventually led to acts of violence, at first of acts meant to terrorize clinic personnel and damage clinic facilities, and by the early 1990s actual murders of clinic doctors, security guards, and receptionists. Such attacks can be seen not only as resulting from the ever increasing vehemence of anti-abortion rhetoric but also as a response to the perception that actual results were slow in arriving: to Christians opposed to abortion it was self-evidently evil, and it was expected that God would not allow such a practice to continue. With God's Providence slow to manifest itself and other Americans slow to wake up to the horror of abortion, conservative Christians involved in the anti-abortion movement grew both more frustrated, and more fearful that divine judgment might burst in to ravage America as a whole.

Yet progress was being made, primarily because of the remarkable network of anti-abortion groups that had been created. Like neo-evangelicalism itself, these networks tended to be para-church operations, which defied strict denominational boundaries and drew on sophisticated use of various media (especially anti-abortion journals in the earlier phases and religious anti-abortion websites since the mid-1990s). The anti-abortion movement was at once part of the rising conservative Christian tide and

²³Indeed, many Catholics refused to believe that a woman would willingly choose to have an abortion, preferring instead to represent it as something her father, husband, or boyfriend pressured her into against her natural instincts.

partially responsible for it: it benefited from other gains made by the expanding evangelical Protestantism and anti-Vatican II Catholicism, and at the same time gave conservative Christians a common, visceral core issue to organize around.

Liberal religionists, meanwhile, largely lost ground to their conservative counterparts on abortion. While many mainline denominations officially proclaimed that individual women must make their own choices on abortion, or even came out in explicit support of abortion rights, the public sphere was increasingly polarized along lines of “values” vs. “rights,” and liberal Christians remain largely caught on the horns of this dilemma, wanting to affirm both but often unable to do so in a concise way.

For our purposes, one of the most important aspects of the abortion phenomenon in America is that historically abortion has not been an object of ritualized religious recognition, either during the long early period when it was legal but unacknowledged, or during the shorter period when it was illegal but often secretly available. Beginning in the 1980s, there has been a certain amount of Christian ritual recognition of abortion, much of it seemingly aimed as much at political as religious ends. Thus there have been in some places mass Christian memorial services for “all the victims of abortion in America” and abortion memorials erected as monuments akin to Holocaust memorials.²⁴ Prayer vigils outside abortion clinics were common in the 1980s and 1990s, but have decreased somewhat since the beginning of the Bush administration, perhaps in response to perceived progress in political circles on the anti-abortion issue. And some new organizations established in the wake of the Roe decision, such as Rachel’s Vineyard (founded in 1993), seek to provide a degree of counseling or prayer for people who feel

²⁴See for instance the National Memorial for the Unborn, in Chattanooga, TN. (www.memorialfortheunborn.org)

wounded by abortion.²⁵ Overall, however, as will become especially clear in chapters five and six, many Americans feel religiously left out in dealing with their pregnancy losses, either because they do not have access to such services or find them inadequate for their needs.

Sources and Approach

The research that informs this dissertation began around Mother's Day in 2002 during a research visit at the Rochester Zen Center for an unrelated project. Combing through the temple's archives in their library, I wondered absentmindedly about the small Jizō statues arranged on a nearby table, each wearing little red hats, bibs, or cloaks. In asking a female priest about them, I discovered that the temple had just held a "water baby ceremony," their rather literal term for *mizuko kuyō*. I was surprised by this revelation: the historiography on American Zen I had read presented it as a rather unritualistic spin on the Asian tradition, and Rochester Zen Center in particular has always been fiercely proud of its emphasis on strenuous meditation practice and powerful personal breakthrough to enlightened mental states, largely without the "trappings" of Japanese Zen. Hitting the books, I could find no works about the presence of *mizuko kuyō* in convert Buddhism; in fact, precious little seemed to have been said about ritualism in general among this rapidly growing population. The incongruity of those little statues was still nagging at me when I matriculated at UNC that fall, and though I didn't know it then, Jizō was going to lead me on a journey around the country and across the world to Japan in search of answers.

²⁵Emily Bazelon. "Is There a Post-Abortion Syndrome?" *The New York Times Magazine*, 1/21/07.

A primary source for this dissertation is a series of telephone and face-to-face interviews conducted with more than thirty priests and laywomen who have participated in American *mizuko kuyō* rites.²⁶ These were supplemented with published accounts of *mizuko kuyō* by Americans and on-site fieldwork at over a dozen American Buddhist temples, especially Rochester Zen Center, the Zen Center of Los Angeles, Zenshuji Soto Mission, and Great Vow Monastery in Clatskanie, Oregon, where I collected orders of service, newsletters, minutes, memorial books, inter-temple correspondence, photographs, and other archival sources that related to the ritual. Great Vow in particular proved to be a rich source of data, and it was there that I was allowed to directly participate in two “water baby” ceremonies and question other attendees afterwards. For my research on *mizuko kuyō* among non-Buddhists, I identified well over 100 written works that discussed the ritual in some fashion, from articles in major pro-life magazines to online forums devoted to pregnancy loss. The sheer abundance of these materials came as a surprise and required considerable time to work through and understand. I also spent three months in Japan researching *mizuko kuyō* in its native land, talking with priests and scholars alike about the ritual, observing its practice at many sites, and learning the intricacies of *mizuko kuyō* performance, material culture, and economic situation. Although direct reference to that Japanese fieldwork is sparse in this project dedicated to tracing the ritual in America, it was in fact one of the most influential experiences in shaping my understanding of how *mizuko kuyō* operates on both sides of the Pacific. And of course I draw explicitly and implicitly on the work of scholars of

²⁶Many of these consultants were interviewed multiple times for this project. Additionally, several key interviews were conducted by email exchange or fax when other methods could not be arranged.

Japanese religion, particularly those who have written about *mizuko kuyō*, historians of American religion and culture (such as Orsi and others), and ritual theorists.

Finally, following the lead of such scholars as Karen McCarthy Brown, Robert Orsi, and Thomas Tweed, I feel that a moment of reflexivity is useful for revealing some of my positionality amidst all these sources. In addition to being a researcher I am also a practicing Buddhist, albeit one affiliated with a tradition that does not perform *mizuko kuyō*. I have also experienced pregnancy loss indirectly, when my wife had an ectopic pregnancy in late 2002. However, I was already engaged in the research for this project and do not feel that this experience was a strong contributing factor to my investigations or conclusions. On a happier note, this dissertation concludes just after the birth of our son, making a rather nice bookend to the project. And I should mention political orientation, an inescapable factor when discussing abortion and other fraught bioethical matters in America. I am unaffiliated with any particular political party but do support most abortion rights as part of my general concern over governmental intrusion into private medical decisions of all types.

All of this is not to say that I was consciously driven by religious or political impulses in pursuing this project. Rather, it was the curious dissonance between how I had been taught Zen in the United States operates and the reality of those bib-bedecked Jizōs in Rochester that pulled me back to the project time and again. And in pursuing Jizō's footprints through the convert Zen centers of America, I began to perceive and wonder at the other trails that he took through Christian churches and Japanese-American Buddhist temples. It is within the latter community that our story really begins in the next chapter.

“CARRIED WITH JIZŌ BOSATSU:”

MIZUKO KUYŌ IN JAPANESE-AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

The Reverend Kanai Shokai, head priest of Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple, was almost never born. His mother was in poor health, and the doctor gave her a stark choice: she could terminate the pregnancy, or she could deliver and die, leaving the newborn and her other two children motherless. She put his life before her own and passed away a few days after his birth, unsure of what the future held for him.

As it turned out, the motherless baby followed in the path of the Buddha, who lost his own mother when he was just seven days old. Rev. Kanai’s parents had lived in a Japan at war with the United States, but he grew up to become one of the few Nichiren Shū Buddhist priests to spend his life ministering to Americans. As we sat in the pews of his temple in Boyle Heights, beneath a vibrantly-colored stained glass window of the Japanese saint Nichiren, I thought of all the turns that a life takes from conception to death. Among his many duties as a messenger of the Dharma, Rev. Kanai now finds himself called upon by women to help them deal with the abortions that, unlike his mother, they have elected to receive.

With the late winter’s light filling the worship hall, we discussed the rituals that he conducts for these women. At a certain point in each ceremony, he gives a short talk to the attendees. “I also encourage them to understand what a *mizuko* is,” he said. I glanced at my recorder to make sure it was still taping. “How do you explain *mizuko* to

them?” I asked. He paused, and his eyes unfocused a bit as he looked through me toward a memory from many years ago:

I had an experience of a *mizuko*. You saw the article I wrote. And also I had an experience, a very, very strange experience. One day a person I knew called me, actually this is from Japan. This was the mother of a teenager. Only one daughter she had. One day the daughter asked the mother, “Is there any sister? My sister? Elder sister?” And the mother was shocked and asked why. According to her daughter, she dreamed that one day she passed through the temple gate and there was a girl walking toward the temple ahead of her. Suddenly the girl turned back and saw her face to face. And in the dream, that girl in front of her said, “I am your sister.” So that’s why the daughter asked her mother if there was a sister. Of course, the mother said, “No, that’s a dream.” But actually, she had an abortion when she was high-school age. The mother called me and asked if she should tell her the reality or not. But I told her that she had better tell her the reality of what she did when she was high school age. Because the daughter may make the same mistake. Usually, Buddhism says that we repeat, not only abortion, but many criminal cases, we repeat. Therefore, I encouraged her to tell her. But when she asked her husband, the husband knew the incident but it was with a different man, the father of the abortion was a different boy, the husband said “Don’t tell.”

He shook his head slightly, with the hint of a frown. Then he took a deeper breath and continued:

Anyway, I believe it is very important to realize even a baby, an aborted baby, will be growing and you should treat it, do the memorial service, and appreciate it. The husband and mother or whoever, because of financial reasons or whatever the reason for abortion, she or husband are still alive because of that abortion. Therefore they must appreciate that. Memorial service means attending the spirits of the Buddha Land, and also appreciating what I am now. If the baby was supposed to be born when she was high school age, she would have had lots of turmoil going to school and getting a job, but by doing abortion she was able to finish school and get a job or whatever. So what she is now is because of her abortion. Therefore, she must appreciate by offering so many memorial services again and again. The spirit of the aborted baby will help and support the sibling. That’s what I explain.¹

¹Kanai Shokai. Personal interview with Los Angeles Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple bishop. 13 February 2007, Los Angeles Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple.

Mizuko kuyō, the practice of offering special memorial services for abortions and other pregnancy losses, has come to America. Our journey through the landscape touched by this popular Japanese ritual begins in the most logical place, with the Japanese-American temples that have nurtured Buddhism in the United States for more than a century. In particular, this chapter describes *mizuko kuyō* practices among the Japanese-American Buddhist temples of Los Angeles. L.A. offers one of the largest and oldest populations of Japanese-Americans in the USA, with temples representing a wide range of Japanese Buddhist denominations.

First, I describe Buddhist traditions that oppose the performance of *mizuko kuyō*: Jōdo Shinshū and Sōka Gakkai. It is important to take the attitudes of these schools into account, as they represent a significant proportion of the Japanese-American Buddhist community and show that *mizuko kuyō* is not an uncontested rite in these circles. From there I move to examine temples that do perform *mizuko kuyō*. I look at differing approaches in two separate strains of Nichiren Buddhism, followed by a look at *mizuko kuyō* in an American Pure Land temple. Then I turn to pregnancy-loss rituals in a tantric tradition before investigating their performance in a Buddhist New Religious Movement. These descriptions allow me to consider the similarities and differences apparent in the diversity of Japanese-American Buddhist institutions. This is one of the principal functions of this opening chapter: *mizuko kuyō* as a spotlight on the variety beneath the surface of Japanese-American Buddhism, which is otherwise often treated as a relatively homogenous and static phenomenon. And before closing I give particular attention to the question of acculturation in the process of recreating *mizuko kuyō* in the United States.

Mizuko Kuyō Opponents in America

Mizuko kuyō is not as common in Japanese-American Buddhist temples as one might imagine. A primary reason for this is that two of the largest representatives of Japanese-based Buddhism in America—Jōdo Shinshū and Sōka Gakkai—are opposed to observance of *mizuko kuyō*. Jōdo Shinshū (also known as Shin Buddhism) is mainly represented in the United States by two organizations affiliated with the Nishi Honganji (Honganji-ha) branch of Shin: the Buddhist Churches of America and the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawaii. If people come to a BCA or Hongwanji Mission temple asking for *mizuko kuyō*, they are told that Shin considers such rituals superstitious and does not perform them. When there is a temple nearby that performs *mizuko kuyō*, such as Koyasan Buddhist Temple (a Shingon temple near the Los Angeles Honpa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple), then ministers will sometimes refer the seeker there. People who are insistent that they are Jōdo Shinshū members and want a service done for their aborted or miscarried fetus do sometimes receive additional help.² In such uncommon cases, the ministers explain that they do not believe in *mizuko kuyō* but are willing to do a regular memorial service for an abortion or miscarriage. They then use this as an opportunity to teach orthodox Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism and stress that they do not believe in spirits or bad luck. These services are basically identical to those performed for children or adults who have died; it is worth noting that in the Shin perspective funeral and memorial rituals are performed for the benefit of the living as a way to expose them to the Buddhist teaching, rather than for the benefit of the dead as in many other Japanese Buddhist

²William Briones. Telephone interview with Los Angeles Honpa Hongwanji Buddhist Temple priest. 23 January 2007.

traditions.³ This same approach is maintained by American temples of the Higashi Honganji (Otani-ha) branch of Jōdo Shinshū.⁴ Shin Buddhism in Japan displays the same attitude: doctrinal opposition to *mizuko kuyō*, but a degree of flexibility toward memorials for pregnancy losses as a way to minister to and instruct those who are unsatisfied with the official policy.

Sōka Gakkai, a large Buddhist New Religious Movement with roots in the Nichiren Shōshū sect, disclaims *mizuko kuyō* as well. It is not performed in Japan, where followers see the practice as overly exploitative of vulnerable women and basically a money-making scheme by priests.⁵ In America, Japanese-Americans make up a minority of Sōka Gakkai practitioners—approximately 22% in David Machacek and Kerry Mitchell’s 2001 study.⁶ As in Japan, *mizuko kuyō* is not practiced by Sōka Gakkai in America.⁷ Sōka Gakkai, an entirely lay-led organization, has no special memorial services for pregnancy losses or the deaths of children or adults. If someone wishes to

³In Jōdo Shinshū doctrine the dead have already passed on to the Pure Land and require no further ritualization. In orthodox Shin thought, therefore, funerals only serve the purpose of comforting and instructing those who knew the deceased. See the discussion in *Jodo Shinshu: A Guide* (page 137), produced by the Hongwanji International Center, an official wing of the largest Jōdo Shinshū denomination. Naturally, there are alternate opinions on these matters held by individual Jōdo Shinshū practitioners. Most non-Shin Buddhist funerals in Japan, meanwhile, are designed to bring benefit to the deceased through posthumous ordination and merit transference.

⁴Miyoshi Nobuko. Personal interview with Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple priest. 10 January 2007, Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles, CA.

⁵Kira Ryōichi. Personal interview with Sōka Gakkai Kyōto International Culture Center manager. 25 February 2006, Sōka Gakkai Kyōto International Culture Center.

⁶David Machacek and Kerry Mitchell. “Immigrant Buddhists in America.” *Global Citizens: The Soka Gakkai Buddhist Movement in the World*. Edited by David Machacek and Bryan Wilson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 261. Note that Machacek and Mitchell consider 22% to be a rough number, because their English-language questionnaire surely missed some Japanese-speaking informants.

⁷Clark, Edward. Personal interview with SGI Plaza Visitor’s Center coordinator. 21 February 2007, SGI Plaza, Santa Monica, CA. Despite his rather unassuming current title, Edward Clark is one of the most important figures in SGI-USA history. A Japanese immigrant who changed his name, Clark was instrumental in bringing Sōka Gakkai to the West and has played an important role in its development over more than four decades. SGI Plaza is the American headquarters of Sōka Gakkai.

remember a deceased person they may gather a group of friends and relatives, but the actual practice will be identical to that of a normal daily service (*daimoku*, chapters two and sixteen of the *Lotus Sutra*, and silent prayers).⁸ No *tōba* or *ihai* are used by Sōka Gakkai in either Japan or the United States, since they are seen as little more than devices for Japanese priests to squeeze money from lay believers.⁹ Given that Sōka Gakkai endured a rancorous split from the priestly Nichiren Shōshū tradition in 1991, this anti-clerical attitude is perhaps less than surprising.

Mizuko Kuyō in Japanese-American Zen

Jōdo Shinshū and Sōka Gakkai are not the only Japanese Buddhisms operating in America, however. One of the largest is Zen. The historiography of Buddhism in America often stresses a split between practitioners with a cultural connection to Buddhism—often labeled “ethnic” Buddhists—and those who have converted to Buddhism.¹⁰ In other places I have argued that this distinction can obscure as much or more than it reveals, and tends to eclipse Asian-American Buddhism (by far the numerically larger side of American Buddhism) in favor of the stories of Euro-American pioneers in Buddhism.¹¹ In examining the practice of *mizuko kuyō*, however, Zen Buddhism in America does seem to differ substantially along these lines. Therefore, this

⁸*Daimoku* is chanting of the title of the *Lotus Sutra*, a practice that will be discussed in further detail below.

⁹*Tōba* and *ihai* are Buddhist mortuary items that will be discussed below.

¹⁰For a good exploration of this subject by scholar Charles Prebish, who coined the interpretive term “two Buddhisms,” see Charles Prebish. “Two Buddhisms Reconsidered.” *Buddhist Studies Review*, vol. 10, no. 2 (1993).

¹¹See Jeff Wilson. “‘There's No Such Thing as Not My Buddhism:’ Cross-Sectarian Buddhist Hybridity in the American South.” Presentation to the Asian North American Religion, Culture, and Society Group, American Academy of Religion annual meeting, 2004.

chapter includes an examination of *mizuko kuyō* at a Zen temple founded to minister to the Japanese-American population, while chapters three and four will look at *mizuko kuyō*-derived rituals in convert Zen temples.

Japanese-American Zen finds itself the ironic victim of a double-eclipse. On the one hand, a disproportionate amount of scholarly and popular media attention is given to white converts to Buddhism in America, among whom Zen is the most popular tradition. This tends to obscure not only the practices and perspectives but even the very presence of non-white cultural Buddhists. On the other hand, when attention is directed away from converts toward Buddhists of Japanese descent, the large majority of investigators focus on Jōdo Shinshū Buddhism, which is the preferred denomination of most Japanese-American Buddhists.¹² Studies of Shin Buddhism far outnumber those of any other type of “ethnic” Buddhism, making Jōdo Shinshū into the paradigm for the Japanese-American Buddhist experience and thereby further obscuring the presence of Japanese-American Zen.

I have attempted to counter this phenomenon by providing particular attention to *mizuko kuyō* at one of the few Zen temples in America that is not oriented toward the convert community: Zenshuji Soto Mission, in downtown Los Angeles.¹³ Founded in 1922, Zenshuji is the headquarters for the Sōtō Shū sect in North America. It is one of the pillars of a Southern California network of Japanese-American Buddhism that dates back to the first half of the twentieth century, which also includes nearby Jōdo Shinshū,

¹² Duncan Williams. “Asian-American Buddhism Bibliography.” Cambridge, MA: The Pluralism Project, 2004. Available online at http://www.pluralism.org/resources/biblio/as-am_buddhism.php.

¹³ I have decided not to use diacritics in the names of American temples if they do not use them in their official printed materials. Thus, even though Zenshuji Soto Mission technically should be written as Zenshūji Sōtō Mission based on the kanji used for its name, I do not use the macrons over the u or o’s because they are not utilized by the temple itself in English publications.

Jōdo Shū, Shingon Shū, and Nichiren Shū temples. The primary members and attendees of Zenshuji are Japanese-Americans or Japanese citizens living or working in Los Angeles, although a smaller number of people from non-Japanese backgrounds also attend, and the temple has recently acquired a European-American priest to assist the two Japanese priests.

Whereas the nearby Jōdo Shinshū temples actively try to dissuade Buddhists from seeking *mizuko kuyō*, Zenshuji, like many Sōtō Zen temples in Japan, is willing to perform the ceremony upon request. The primary priest who performs such services is the Reverend Kojima Shūmyō, a Japanese immigrant who has served at Zenshuji since 1995. He holds *mizuko kuyō* on average four or five times a year upon request from laypersons. A full description of the actual process of performing *mizuko kuyō* at Zenshuji will help illuminate important aspects of the ritual.

Mizuko kuyō at Zenshuji begins with the arrival of the attendees—in most cases, a young Japanese couple—at the temple, where they are met by Rev. Kojima. He leads them into the *hondō*, the main worship hall. This space is separated into two areas: the pews, where laypeople sit, and the stage, an altar area that includes holy images and seats for the priests. The arrangement of the room is a mix of traditional Japanese and American sacred spaces. The pew area, by far the larger space, is identical to most mainline Protestant churches' seating arrangements. Entering the *hondō* by the double doors in the back (along one of the short sides) of the hall, one finds a long space that slopes slightly downwards toward the altar (figure 2.1). An aisle separates thirteen rows of wooden pews, with service books containing chants and hymns tucked into shelves along their backs. This contrasts with Zen and other temples in Japan, which utilize no

seats for laypeople, who sit on a level, not sloped, floor. Another Americanization is the placement of the altar area along one of the short ends of the hall—in Japan the altar would be along a long side of the room.

The stage, on the other hand, is closer to being an import directly from a Japanese Buddhist temple. This raised area has a large central altar with offerings and many hanging golden adornments that symbolize the heavenly realms (this area is known as the *naijin*). A statue of Shaka Nyorai (Shakyamuni Buddha) is seated in the center, flanked by images of the bodhisattvas Monju (Manjushri) and Fugen (Samantabhadra). On either side sit a row of low chairs for priests—facing inward toward the Buddha image, at a ninety degree angle to the congregation—and secondary altars, one with a statue of Dogen and one with Keizan, the two revered founders of Sōtō Zen. Various-sized bells and drums to accompany the rituals are also scattered about the stage. However, while more similar to a Japanese temple than the space for pews, this area has also been adapted to American realities. A Japanese Zen temple would have a larger altar area divided into *naijin* (main altar), *daima* (ritual space in front of the *naijin* for priests), *seijo* and *tojo* (seating areas flanking the *daima*), and *nishi* and *higashi shicchu* (subsidiary altars flanking the *naijin*). Zenshuji lacks the sort of space available to Japanese temples of comparable status and thus has squeezed these elements together, eliminating some outright, with implications for the performance of rituals that will be explored below.

The bifurcation between the sacred space of the stage and the profane area of the pews is slightly mediated by incense burners, lanterns, and two lecterns, one on the stage and one to the side at ground level. But the separation is nonetheless absolute: laypeople cannot enter the stage and no one is allowed to wear shoes into the altar area. Therefore,

the *mizuko kuyō* attendees are directed to a pew while the priest goes onto the stage to prepare the altar for the ritual. The priest intentionally takes his time lighting the candles, preparing the incense offering, and so on, in order to give the attendees some time to quietly reflect as they sit in the “spiritually peaceful place” of the *hondō*. Rev. Kojima explicitly stated that this is not *zazen* (formal seated meditation); rather, it is simply ten minutes or so of consideration of the actions that led to the ceremony and preparation for saying goodbye to the being who was never born.¹⁴

Before the couple arrived, the priest will have already made some preparations. He folds a piece of paper into an origami representation of a baby, since there are no physical remains available from abortion. He also makes a wooden plaque known as an *ihai*, inscribing it with the name “*mizuko no rei*”—mizuko spirit (figure 2.2). This is a rough *ihai* (*shiraki no ihai*); if the attendees wish to have a more permanent black lacquer *ihai* (*urushi ihai*) made for enshrining in the home altar, the priest will order one from a Buddhist supply service in Torrance, California. As the attendee sits waiting, the priest places the *ihai* before the statue of the Buddha (figure 2.3).

The ritual begins when the priest strikes a bell and strides onto the stage to make an offering of incense to the Buddha, followed by three bows. Another incense offering is made and then the priest takes his seat near the *naijin* to begin the sutra chanting.¹⁵ First he chants the *Sankiraimon* (Three Refuges Prayer), declaring his faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha:

Ji kie butsu

¹⁴Kojima Shūmyō. Personal interview with Zenshuji Soto Mission priest. 18 January 2007, Zenshuji Soto Mission, Los Angeles, CA.

¹⁵Sutras are the central holy texts of Buddhism, typically believed to record the sermons of the Buddha.

to gan shujō
tai ge dai do
hotsu mujōi
Ji kie ho
to gan shujō
jin nyu kyo zo
chie nyo kai
Ji kie so
to gan shujō
tōri daishu
is-sai mu ge

Next he chants the *Hannya Shingyō* (*Heart Sutra*), followed by a dedication of the merit of the sutra chanting. This three-part set of the refuge chant, *Heart Sutra*, and dedication forms the opening of many Sōtō rituals and is not unique to the *mizuko kuyō* or memorial services in general. As Rev. Kojima explained, it serves as “a kind of greeting to Shakyamuni Buddha” before the main service gets underway.¹⁶

The specifically *mizuko*-oriented portion of the service begins with another chant by the priest. Usually it is the *Daihishin Darani*, an untranslatable mantric text that embodies the compassion of Kannon bodhisattva:

Namu kara tan no
tora ya ya
namu ori ya
boryo ki chi shifu ra ya
fuji sato bo ya
moko sato bo ya
mo ko kya runi kya ya. . .¹⁷

Less often, the priest selects a portion of the *Jizō Bosatsu Hongan Kyō* (*Sutra of the Bodhisattva Jizō's Vows*), providing the attendees with a longer ritual experience. During

¹⁶Kojima Shūmyō. Personal interview with Zenshuji Soto Mission priest. 18 January 2007, Zenshuji Soto Mission, Los Angeles, CA.

¹⁷This text is also known by the name *Daihi Shu*.

the chanting the priest will indicate that the attendees should approach and make a quick incense offering in the large burner set before the stage. At the same time, he will set the origami baby alight with one of the altar candles, reducing it to ash. After the sutra, the priest chants the Jizō mantra, which is performed twenty-seven times: “Om Ka Ka Ka Bi San Ma E Soha Ka.” This is followed by a dedication of the sutra-chanting merit and a more general dedication. The priest makes three bows and finishes the formal portion of the service by reciting the four bodhisattva vows:

Shujō muhen sei gan do
Bon-no mujin sei gan dan
Ho mon muryō sei gan gaku
Butsu do mujō sei gan jo.

The total length for all the chanting is approximately twenty-five minutes. It is important to note that the priest is the only participant who chants and performs the ritual actions—the lay person or people who initiated the *mizuko kuyō* watch passively from their seat in the pews as the action of the ceremony takes place on the stage. All chants are done in Japanese or Sino-Japanese, and many are incomprehensible to the laity.

After chanting, the priest will deliver a short sermon to the attendees. These talks tend to focus on Jizō’s role in taking care of the unborn spirit and the universality of loss, as Rev. Kojima explained to me in his office at Zenshuji:

Kojima Shūmyō: Even if we just see the faces of the people in the company or the market, even those people, many people lost their child, not only you. Jizō Bosatsu is the guardian of the baby who passed away, so we visit and offer the incense to O-Jizō-san for taking care of the child. So that’s why we have to offer the incense.

Jeff Wilson: So that’s what you explain to the people?

Kojima: Yes.

Wilson: It's interesting when you say that many other people have experienced it. I assume you are doing that so they will realize it is not just themselves, but others also experience loss. It is part of human life. Is that why you explain that?

Kojima: Yes. Not simple, but each time I pick up some stories. I did this many times. One of the fathers, he was really in pain and cannot forget. So he made an angel figure, like a pin. And always he put it here [gestures to his lapel] to keep remembering the baby. Because of his work, he meets many people. And many people ask him, "Oh, what is that cute angel?" And each time he explains, "It is because my baby died." So to keep reminding him. Then he saw many people who responded, "Oh really? Me too." So then he made the same pin and give it to him [that is, the father made duplicate pins and gave them out to other mourners]. Then he calculated so many pins he made to share it. And at the next memorial service, he took off the pin and put it with the ashes. "I realized it was not only me. I could share the pain with so many people. [speaking to the spirit of the baby:] 'I am lucky that I could meet you. Even without this pin, I will always be with you. You are always part of my family.'" So he would not need the pin. "I cannot be with you right now because I have many things to do before I die. The next generation, your brother, and my wife. So instead of me, I put this pin with you. You are with me, my baby. But now I be with you." So he put the pin with the dead ashes.

Wilson: He didn't need it as a symbol anymore.

Kojima: Yes. He can feel the baby always.

Wilson: Is this a story that you might tell after *mizuko kuyō*?

Kojima: Yes, that is one of the sample stories. So I believe that to talk to them, to share this experience with others, that is part of the ceremony.¹⁸

The final part of the ritual involves making incense offerings to all of the Jizō figures in the temple. First, the priest and the attendees enter the *nokutsudō*, the columbarium off of the *hondō*, where an image of Jizō is enshrined among many boxes containing the ashes of past parishioners (figure 2.4). The priest offers incense, passes a little to the attendees to offer, and recites the Jizō mantra. Next, they go into the hall by the front door, where a small Jizō stands atop a table in the reception area, in front of a plaque with donors' names. Again the priest offers incense, invites the attendees to offer incense, and chants. Finally, they process outside, where six large Jizō statues stand in a

¹⁸Kojima Shūmyō. Personal interview with Zenshuji Soto Mission priest. 18 January 2007, Zenshuji Soto Mission, Los Angeles, CA.

covered shelter by the parking lot (figure 2.5).¹⁹ Once again incense is offered by priest and laypeople, and the Jizō mantra chanted. The priest then scatters the ashes of the origami baby in the wind. If he senses that an attendee is feeling sad and needs to remain a little longer at the temple, he will offer her tea inside and perhaps chat with her for a few minutes. Most people, however, leave immediately after the ceremony ends. In total, the *mizuko kuyō* takes about forty minutes at Zenshuji.

Mizuko Kuyō at Nichiren Temples in America

While Japanese-American Zen temples tend to be partially obscured by convert Zen and Japanese-American Jōdo Shinshū groups, other Japanese forms of Buddhism in the United States are more or less completely invisible to both the scholarly and popular media communities. There are almost no studies of American Shingon, Jōdo Shū, Nichiren Shū, or temple-based Nichiren Shōshū (as opposed to Sōka Gakkai) Buddhist institutions, despite the presence of some of these organizations in major metropolitan areas for close to a century. Even survey works on American Buddhism rarely discuss these schools.²⁰ It seems that new approaches to the study of Buddhism in the United States are needed that allow these smaller but historically significant communities to be

¹⁹This motif is known as Roku Jizō, literally “six Jizos.” They symbolize the six realms of existence as well as the six directions, indicating Jizō’s roles as the guardian of beings trapped in samsara after the Buddha’s death and his stewardship of travelers. Roku Jizō is a very common motif at temples and along roadsides in Japan. At Zenshuji the Roku Jizō have been given the title Omoi Yari Jizō, meaning Sympathy for Others Jizō.

²⁰For instance, Richard Seager’s *Buddhism in America* (Columbia University Press, 1999) contains no information about Shingon, Jōdo Shū, or Nichiren Shū Buddhism in either Asia or America. Likewise Tendai and Risshō Kōsei-kai, two other forms of Buddhism that receive some mention in this dissertation, are nowhere discussed in *Buddhism in America*. Nichiren Shōshū appears more or less only as a foil for Sōka Gakkai. Japanese-American Zen receives almost no attention except when it briefly interacts with convert Zen: for instance, not a single Japanese-American temple is considered worthy of Seager’s term “Zen Flagship Institutions.” Zen Center of Los Angeles, with a membership perhaps 1/10th of Zenshuji’s, does receive inclusion in this group; Zenshuji, meanwhile, appears only as one line in a profile of the founder of ZCLA.

included in the realm of acceptable subject material. Projects such as this one, which track a particular ritual across denominational and racial lines, are one possible answer to this tendency to overlook certain forms of Buddhism in America.

Among these other schools a variety of *mizuko kuyō* practices can be found. We will first consider *mizuko kuyō* in Nichirenist temples. While Sōka Gakkai does not perform *mizuko kuyō*, Nichiren Shōshū, the temple tradition that Sōka Gakkai emerged from, does include a very basic form of *mizuko kuyō* within its repertoire of rituals. The sect has six temples in the United States that together serve the entire country, which is divided into six large geographic parishes. Nichiren Shoshu Myohoji Temple of Los Angeles, located in West Hollywood, just below Sunset Boulevard, is the head temple for Nichiren Shōshū in America. Myohoji's parish has about 400-500 regional members from a wide variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds; the largest group, however, are Japanese or Japanese-descendants.²¹ It was founded in San Bernardino County well to the east of Los Angeles in 1967 and moved to its more central location in West Hollywood in 1996.²²

Myohoji includes a rite that it calls *mizuko kuyō*, which is done in the same manner as at Nichiren Shōshū temples in Japan.²³ However, this *mizuko kuyō* is essentially subsumed into regular memorial rites and does not carry a special character as a separate ceremony. It is a frequently requested service, asked for by members of all

²¹Satō Shinryo. Personal interview with Nichiren Shoshu Myohoji Temple of Los Angeles priest. 24 January 2007, Nichiren Shoshu Myohoji Temple of Los Angeles.

²²Nikken. "Earthly Desires Are In Themselves Enlightenment." Nichiren Shoshu Globalnet, 2003, http://www.nsglobalnet.jp/page/collected_sermons/32.htm.

²³Satō Shinryo. Telephone interview with Nichiren Shoshu Myohoji Temple of Los Angeles priest. 23 January 2007.

racial backgrounds.²⁴ However, only Japanese members use the term “*mizuko*,” so it seems likely that the Americans are simply asking for memorial rites for their abortions and other pregnancy losses without necessarily being aware of their precedent in Japanese Buddhism.

The process of *mizuko kuyō* at Myohoji is quite simple. The layperson requests that her *mizuko* be remembered during the regular evening service (*gongyō*). A priest prepares a *tōba*, a thin tablet with the shape of a stupa on top.²⁵ These *tōba* are one of the most common pieces of Buddhist material culture in Japan, where they are typically made from sheets of wood and have the names of the dead written on them with a brush. The priests at Myohoji write on the *tōba* “Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō [family name] *ke no suishi rei*”—Homage to the *Mystic Dharma Lotus Sutra*; *mizuko* spirit of the [family name] household.²⁶ A \$10 donation is requested to cover the costs of the *tōba*.

The *tōba* is then put on a rack in the *hondō* next to the altar area. The *hondō* itself is divided into altar and seating areas like the sanctuary of Zenshuji, though it is significantly larger and has a stadium-style sloped audience area that boasts seats rather than pews. Evening *gongyō* consists of chanting chapters two and sixteen of the *Lotus Sutra*, followed by *daimoku* (rapid chanting of “Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō”) and silent prayers; this is virtually the same as morning *gongyō*. The head priest then addresses the calligraphic mandala that serves as the central object of devotion in Nichiren Shōshū, reading aloud a list of names of people to be remembered, including any *mizuko* who

²⁴Satō Shinryo. Personal interview with Nichiren Shoshu Myohoji Temple of Los Angeles priest. 24 January 2007, Nichiren Shoshu Myohoji Temple of Los Angeles.

²⁵A stupa is a several tiered Buddhist memorial monument. Graves in Japan are often built as mini-stupas.

²⁶While I have written the text here in Roman letters for the benefit of readers, the actual writing on the *tōba* is done in kanji, sometimes with hiragana or katakana if appropriate. This is true of all the *tōba* and *ihai* discussed in this chapter. For an example, see the *mizuko ihai* of Zenshuji Soto Mission in Figure 2.3.

have been requested. This is the extent of the *mizuko kuyō*. During the service both laypeople and priests do all of the chants together, although the head priest is the only one who addresses the mandala with the list of names. The entire service takes about 30 minutes.²⁷

Nichiren Shōshū performs only a nominal *mizuko kuyō*, but Nichiren Shū temples offer a much more complete and specific service for pregnancy losses. Nichiren Shū, while not as well known in America as Nichiren Shōshū, is by far the larger branch of Nichiren Buddhism in Japan, and has significant differences in theology and practice. It has also been in the United States for more than twice as long as Nichiren Shōshū or Sōka Gakkai—the first temple was founded in Hawaii in 1901—but the high visibility of these other groups due to their active proselytization efforts have tended to overshadow Nichiren Shū.

Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple was founded in 1912, the first Nichiren Shū institution in North America. The temple is currently located two miles east of Zenshuji in Boyle Heights, a neighborhood adjacent to Little Tokyo that was once heavily Japanese-American but is now ninety-five percent Latino. The L.A. temple has been performing *mizuko kuyō* since the 1960s, and currently carries out about four such ceremonies per year, on request from laypeople. Often these are newcomers to the temple, usually of Nichiren Shū background, while members may memorialize new *mizuko* or remember older ones. The resident priest, the Reverend Kanai Shokai, encourages people to perform yearly *mizuko kuyō* around the anniversary of their abortion or miscarriage. At a minimum he hopes that women and their husbands will

²⁷ All information from interview with Satō Shinryo at Nichiren Shoshu Myohoji Temple of Los Angeles on 24 January 2007 unless otherwise specified.

honor the Japanese Buddhist tradition of rites for the deceased on the first, third, seventh, and thirteenth anniversaries of the death.²⁸

Attendees of *mizuko kuyō* at the L.A. temple are requested to arrive with flowers, milk, baby food, and perhaps toys. Rev. Kanai takes these and leads the attendee(s) into the *hondō*, which like other local temples is divided into a sitting area (with pews) and a large stage area housing the *naijin* and many large hanging golden adornments (figure 2.6). The *naijin* contains a calligraphic mandala like the one at Myohoji, but also includes a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha and one of Nichiren, all placed in a line moving away from the viewer. The offerings are placed before the *naijin* while the layperson sits in a pew. A *tōba* with the words “*mizuko no rei*” (*mizuko* spirit) is placed before the *naijin*. Rev. Kanai usually re-uses these, and prefers not to give the *mizuko* a *kaimyō*.²⁹

The first chant is *Kanjo*, an invocation of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and deities honored in the Nichiren tradition. The priest announces that the service is for a *mizuko* who died on such and such a date and the name of the parents. Then the priest and attendees chant extracts from the *Lotus Sutra*, including *Yokuryōshu*:

Shobutsu seson wa shujo
o shite butchiken o
hirakashime shojo naru
koto o eseshimen to
hossuruga yue ni yo ni

²⁸Kanai Shokai. Personal interview with Los Angeles Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple bishop. 13 February 2007, Los Angeles Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple.

²⁹*Kaimyō* are posthumous names given to the deceased during Buddhist funeral rites. *Kaimyō* literally means “ordination name”—through the rites of the priests the dead person is transformed into a monk, the better for them to become a Buddha in the afterlife. This is a standard practice in virtually all sects of Japanese Buddhism.

shutsugen shitamo. . .³⁰

Sutra chanting is followed by extended chanting of *daimoku* (“Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō”), during which the layperson(s) approach and offer incense.³¹ After the chanting there is a dedication of merit. Then the participants recite two American Buddhist compositions. First is *Lord Buddha’s Children*:

Lord Buddha is our infinite Father.
We are His children.
Let us love one another as Buddha’s children.
We are all endowed with Buddha Nature.
Let us pay homage to everyone’s Buddha Nature.

We are Buddha’s children.
We have the seeds of Buddha’s love and wisdom.
Lord Buddha helps us cultivate the seeds of Buddha’s love and wisdom.
Let us help one another cultivate the seeds of Buddha’s love and wisdom.

Next is *Golden Chain*:

I am a link in Buddha’s golden chain of love that stretches around the world.
I will keep my link bright and strong.
I will be kind and gentle to every living thing and protect all who are weaker than myself.
I will think pure and beautiful thoughts, say pure and beautiful words,
and do pure and beautiful deeds.
May every link in Buddha’s golden chain of love be bright and strong, and may we all
attain perfect peace.

The service wraps up with a short talk by the priest, typically about ten minutes in length. During this time the priest takes the opportunity to speak more about the nature

³⁰At the Los Angeles temple this chant is done in the kundoku style of modern Japanese, rather than in the Chinese style one often finds at Nichiren Shū temples in Japan.

³¹Note that Nichiren Shū chants *daimoku* as “Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō,” by far the more mainstream pronunciation, rather than “Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō” as performed by Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shōshū. This extended chanting during *mizuko kuyō* has no set duration but consists of at least 100 repetitions of the mantra.

of *mizuko* and why *mizuko kuyō* is important, as explained in the introduction to this chapter.

When the sermon is complete, Rev. Kanai removes the offerings and hands them back to the attendees. He asks them to drink a little of the milk, and then to pour the remaining milk into a toilet bowl. This is done to help them realize that the *mizuko* is essentially water and to let it go.

Mizuko Kuyō at Jōdo Shū Temples in America

As discussed above, Jōdo Shinshū does not perform *mizuko kuyō*. However the Jōdo Shū branch of Japanese Pure Land Buddhism, which sprang from the same historical roots as Shin and is the second largest Japanese Buddhist denomination (after Jōdo Shinshū), does permit the practice. Jōdo Shū enjoys much less prominence in the United States than Jōdo Shinshū, especially on the mainland: only two of Jōdo Shū's sixteen American temples are in the continental U.S. One of these is Jodo Shu North America Buddhist Mission, a few blocks from Zenshuji and across the street from Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple in Little Tokyo. Just as the larger numbers and more active outreach of Sōka Gakkai causes Nichiren Shū to be hidden from view by Americans, so too Jōdo Shū's unique doctrines and practices are overshadowed by Jōdo Shinshū in the United States.

Once or twice a year the Reverend Tanaka Kōdō of the Jodo Shu North America Buddhist Mission receives a call requesting *mizuko kuyō*. Rev. Tanaka's first response is to inquire whether the caller is affiliated with a particular Buddhist denomination other than Jōdo Shū. If they are, he encourages them to ask a priest in their own tradition to

perform the ceremony—Jōdo Shū is not an aggressively proselytizing sect, and his preference is for Buddhists to deepen their ties to their own denominations, reserving his missionary work for Jōdo Shū members or those who are unaffiliated.³² If they are Jōdo Shū members or have no specific Buddhist connections, an appointment is set up for the *kuyō*, and attendees are asked to arrive with flowers, toys, food, and similar items to offer to the *mizuko*.

Mizuko kuyō attendees are met at the door to the temple and ushered into the *hondō*. As at many of the other temples discussed in this chapter, Jodo Shu North America Buddhist Mission's *hondō* is divided into a pew-area and a stage with *naijin*, sub-altars, and places for ritual leaders to sit. The offerings are taken onto the stage and arranged by the priest, along with a *tōba* (called *kyōgi-tōba* at this temple). The *tōba* has the mantric syllable for Amida Buddha at the top (*kiriku*), followed by the family's name and a *kaimyō*. The parents' names and the date are also inscribed.

The *mizuko kuyō* begins when the priest tolls a bell and offers incense to the Buddha. If there are two priests available, one acts as the officiant while the other handles the bells and drums. Next the officiant chants *Sanbujō*, calling upon Amida, Shakyamuni, and all the Buddhas of the ten directions to enter the sacred space:

Bu jō mida se son nyu dōjō
Bu jō shaka nyorai nyu dōjō
Bu jō jippo nyorai nyu dōjō

This is followed by a repentance verse and ten recitations of *nembutsu* (“Namu Amida Butsu”—Homage to Amida Buddha). This *nembutsu* is the first ritual element that the

³²Tanaka Kōdō. Telephone interview with Jodo Shu Buddhist North American Mission (of Los Angeles) priest. 9 February 2007.

laypeople participate in, and the priest typically indicates that they are to recite along with him. Next the officiant moves onto a high box-shaped seat (*kōza*) directly before the Amida statue to lead the chanting of a sutra, often *Shiseige*:

Ga gon chō se gan
his shi mu jōdō
shi gan fu man zoku
sei fu jō shō gaku. . .³³

During the sutra chanting, the attendee(s) are motioned to come forward and offer incense. Then the officiant dedicates the merit of the sutra and *nembutsu* to the *mizuko*, followed by several minutes of communal *nembutsu* (known as *nembutsu-ichie*). Rev. Tanaka explained:

That's the climax of a Jōdo Shū service. It's not ten times. It's like a while with the *mokugyo*. Sometimes it is 100 times, 200 times, five minutes. In general it's two to three minutes. I think it's a necessity. Good practice. You know, in Sōtō Shū, Zen Shū, you have seated meditation. We practice the recitation. I know many Jōdo Shinshū ministers that are in need of some particular practice, you know, the *monpō*, listening to the Dharma, is their practice. But I don't understand the Dharma, so that's why we ask Amida Buddha for everything. Even though I heard it I don't understand because of my poor ability. That's the self-awareness of the *bombu*. Therefore you have to recite it. That's the only way for a *bombu* to be born in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha. It's kind of a Jōdo Shū understanding.³⁴

The priest makes another dedication and asks for Amida Buddha to help relieve the parents' suffering. The service closes with ten more *nembutsu* and *Sobutsuge*, the returning of the Buddhas who oversaw the ritual. The officiant then delivers a short

³³A common liturgical element, this chant is called *Jūseige* in the Jōdo Shinshū denomination. It is actually an extract from the *Larger Pure Land Sutra* (*Daimuryōju kyō*).

³⁴Tanaka Kōdō. Personal interview with Jodo Shu Buddhist North American Mission priest. 13 February 2007, Jodo Shu Buddhist North American Mission, Los Angeles, CA. *Mokugyo* is a round drum, somewhat resembling a wooden fish. *Monpō*—hearing the Dharma—is the primary practice of Jōdo Shinshū; this contrasts with Jōdo Shū, which holds chanting the *nembutsu* as their main practice. *Bombu* is a foolish person, essentially an unenlightened being in comparison to Amida or another Buddha.

sermon, typically three to five minutes in length. The total ceremony lasts about forty-five minutes, but is also often followed by about ten minutes of chatting over coffee so that the priest can be sure the attendees' minds have been put at ease. Laypeople depart with the toys they brought, while food items are kept to be shared with members of the temple.

Mizuko Kuyō at Tantric Japanese-American Temples in America

Koyasan Buddhist Temple is located just a few blocks from Zenshuji in the Little Tokyo section of Los Angeles; founded in 1912, it was the first Shingon temple established in North America. Just as Shingon Shū is the most common purveyor of *mizuko kuyō* in Japan, Koyasan temple in Los Angeles performs more *mizuko kuyō* than any other Buddhist group in the United States: an average of at least fifty each year. The format is somewhat similar to *mizuko kuyō* at Zenshuji. A person calls and asks for the service, and an appointment is set up with one of the priests. When the attendee arrives on the day of the *mizuko kuyō*, the priest prepares a *tōba* (called *kyogi* at Koyasan). These *tōba* have a stupa image with the five mantric syllables of Dainichi Nyorai (Vairocana Buddha) pre-stamped on the top, below which the priest adds the family name of the attendee and the word “*suishi*” (*mizuko*). As at Zenshuji, the ceremony takes place inside the *hondō*, which at Koyasan is divided into a large auditorium space with chairs in rows and a stage area. Koyasan's stage has a *naijin* and many subsidiary altars, images, and mandalas (figure 2.7). The main object of devotion is Dainichi Nyorai, the Great Sun Buddha who represents the awakened nature of ultimate reality.

The priest places the *kyogi* in front of an incense burner and begins the service by chanting sutras. The first text is the *Hannya Rishu Kyō*, the main sutra of Shingon Buddhism. This is followed by the *Hannya Shingyō*. Next the priest chants a series of mantras, repeating each three times. In order, these are the Fudō Myōō mantra (*Nomaku sammanda bazaradan senda makaroshada sowataya un tarata kamman*), the Jizō mantra (*On kakaka bisammaei sowaka*), the Gohōgō mantra (*Namu Daishi Henjō Kongō*), and the Kōmyō mantra (*On abokyā beirosha nō maka bodarā mani handoma jimbara harabaritaya un*).³⁵ The service concludes with a dedication of merit. Throughout the ceremony, the layperson or people who requested *mizuko kuyō* remain seated in the audience area, rising only one time to make a short incense offering during the first chant. Laypeople are given a service book to use if they wish to chant or follow along, but in actual practice few participate beyond holding the book and watching the priest's activities on stage.

When the chanting is finished, the priest delivers a short (three to six minute) sermon to the attendee(s), as Bishop Miyata Taisen explained:

Jeff Wilson: What is the kind of thing you would say?

Miyata Taisen: In case of a sermon for miscarried baby, that talk is to console the mind of each woman and attendant. *Mizuko* is not a different kind of life—your life and the *mizuko* life are same, same nature. You must care and respect your body and mind and Buddha-nature. In the case of unborn babies, *kuyō* has the part of sending her or him to perfect peace, nirvana. Carried with Jizō Bosatsu, to maybe cross over the river. It is not a real river.

Wilson: Sai no Kawara.

Miyata: Right, Sai no Kawara, you know. [laughs]

Wilson: So the *mizuko* goes to the Pure Land?

³⁵Fudō Myōō is a wrathful protector deity and major patron of Japanese tantric Buddhism. The Gohōgō venerates Kōbō Daishi (also known as Kūkai), the founder of Shingon Shū. The Kōmyō mantra (mantra of light) is one of the most common Shingon practices.

Miyata: Yes. Taking a peaceful journey to be born as a universal being, to be born as Buddha-nature, we are wishing for them.³⁶

After the talk is done, the ceremony is complete and the lay attendees leave. In total, it takes approximately forty minutes from the time the attendees arrive to when they leave, with the chanting occupying about twenty-five to thirty minutes. The introduction of chairs into the *hondō* is the only real change related to how Koyasan performs *mizuko kuyō*, which is otherwise “exactly the same” as how the ritual is carried out in Japan.³⁷

After the laypeople leave, the *kyogi* is collected and kept in storage until August 24th, when Koyasan holds a major ceremony outside in front of the temple, where several Jizō statues, including a *mizuko* Jizō, sit (figure 2.8). This ceremony is known as the Memorial Prayer for Unborn Babies and Okuribi Rite.³⁸ It includes the priests chanting many of the same sutras and mantras as in the *mizuko kuyō*; additionally there is a *goma*, a tantric fire ceremony, wherein the *mizuko* and other *kyogi* accumulated during the year are ritually burned. Whereas the normal *mizuko kuyō* is a private service, this annual event is public and attracts hundreds of onlookers who also engage in throwing water on

³⁶Miyata Taisen. Personal interview with Koyasan Buddhist Temple bishop. 7 February 2007, Koyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles, CA. Sai no Kawara is the name of a legendary river in Japanese Buddhist folklore, akin to Styx in ancient Greek myth. Deceased children go to the riverbank of the afterlife, but are unable to cross over. They spend their time pitifully building stone stupas that are smashed by wicked demons. But Jizō appears to chase the demons away and shelter the spirits in his robes.

³⁷Miyata Taisen. Personal interview with Koyasan Buddhist Temple bishop. 8 September 2005, Koyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles, CA

³⁸Okuribi is the ritual end to Obon, the main festival of the Japanese religious calendar, when spirits return from the afterlife to visit with their living relatives. Okuribi specifically is the sending of the spirits on to the other realms after they have resided in the cemetery, temple, or home altar for several days. The twenty-fourth day of the month is traditionally considered Jizō’s day and rituals are held in his honor.

the Jizō statues (*mizukake*), making monetary donations, and similar basic Japanese merit-producing devotional acts.³⁹

Mizuko Kuyō in a Japanese Buddhist New Religious Movement in America

With the exception of Sōka Gakkai, which developed in the twentieth century in conjunction with the Nichiren Shōshū sect, all of the schools of Buddhism discussed thus far trace their roots to the Heian and Kamakura periods of Japan. These are widely considered the classical periods of Japanese Buddhism, and many commentators have contrasted them with an allegedly more moribund contemporary Buddhism in Japan. Yet Japanese religion has been anything but static in the past hundred years—this “rush hour of the gods” has produced thousands of new religious movements, many of which explicitly locate themselves within the Buddhist fold. One of the most popular of these is Risshō Kōsei-kai, a Nichiren-influenced sect founded in 1938. Risshō Kōsei-kai came to

³⁹There is another denomination of tantric Buddhism present in America: Tendai Shū. Although one of the most important schools in Japan, it has had very little formal representation in the United States. A temple was established in Hawaii in 1918, but closed in 1950. Beginning in 1973 Tendai Shū made modest efforts to re-establish an institutional base in the USA, but at present still has less than a dozen temples. Furthermore, the ones located in North America are not Asian-American in orientation, but rather are small groups presided over by individual Euro-Americans who have had some degree of priestly training in the Tendai tradition. These individual priests are in most cases not located near large Japanese-American populations, and, while aware of the practice, at least some are reluctant to offer *mizuko kuyō* (Jimyo Lisa Ferworn. “Re: Mitsudoji ceremonies.” Email correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Mitsudoji Hidden Path Temple [of Kalamazoo, IL] priest. 20 October 2005). The four Hawaiian temples, on the other hand, are run by and oriented toward the Japanese-American population and have a larger base of participants. Overall, Tendai Shū, while fitting somewhat within the rough classification of Japanese-American Buddhism, is an anomaly. Tendai Shū has no formal presence in Los Angeles, the primary fieldwork site for this project. Therefore, I do not present a detailed description of American Tendai *mizuko kuyō* practices in this chapter. I do know that prayers for *mizuko* can be obtained at Koganji Jizoin, a Tendai Shū temple not far from the main University of Hawaii campus in Honolulu. These are not labeled *mizuko kuyō*, as the elderly Japanese-American nun who founded the temple finds that term distasteful, associating it with money-making schemes in Japan. Rather, she speaks of them as prayers for the unborn (Jikyo Rose. Telephone interview with Koganji Jizoin [of Honolulu] abbess. 12 February 2007). Women from her congregation, which is mostly Japanese-American, come to her for a consultation session. If she determines that a service for an aborted or miscarried pregnancy is appropriate, she will conduct it on their behalf. Even with the information I was able to obtain, my knowledge of Rose’s ceremonies is incomplete. Her age made it difficult to understand her at times on the phone, and circumstances prohibited a site visit. She does not have email and she declined to fill out most of a faxed questionnaire.

America in the post-war period, with the first center outside Japan founded in Hawaii in 1958. There are now eight formal temples or groups in the United States, including Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Los Angeles, located a few blocks from the L.A. Nichiren Shū temple, in a building formerly used by Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple.

The temples discussed so far have largely second-, third-, and fourth-generation Japanese-American membership, based on waves of Japanese immigration that took place before 1924.⁴⁰ Rissho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Los Angeles's members, on the other hand, are mostly first-generation immigrants who arrived in the post-war period of the later twentieth century, in many cases as the wives of native-born Americans.

The story of how *mizuko kuyō* came to this temple differs somewhat from that of other local temples. The Reverend Mizutani Shōkō found that, after his arrival as head minister in 2001, female members sometimes requested special services for pregnancy losses. He felt that there was no need to differentiate between ancestors—the traditional object of veneration for memorial services—and those who died before birth, and therefore encouraged the members to include *mizuko* in the regular observances of the temple. After a few years, however, the Young Mothers Group at the temple decided they wanted a separate *mizuko kuyō* performed. These laywomen felt a need to give special recognition to their lost pregnancies and persisted in their demands, even when Rev. Mizutani explained his opinion that all life should be seen as equal.⁴¹ Relenting, Rev. Mizutani allowed the group to organize the *mizuko kuyō*, which he presided over in

⁴⁰Japanese-Americans are typically classified as first, second, third, and fourth generation—Isseis, Niseis, Sanseis, and Yonseis, respectively, using the Japanese counting system. New Japanese immigrants, however, are differentiated as Shin Isseis—"new Isseis."

⁴¹At least, this is what was reported by Rev. Mizutani Shoko in an interview at Rissho Kosei-Kai Buddhist Church of Los Angeles on 15 February 2007. Because of the Risshō Kōsei-kai practice of testimonials and *hoza*, discussed below, Rev. Mizutani has perhaps greater access to laywomen's feelings than the average priest.

2005. This did not end the story, though. Older women in the temple had a strong reaction to the fact that the ceremony was held for the younger women, insisting that they wanted to be included as well. Therefore the service was held again in 2006, with quadruple the attendance (approximately sixty participants). Because of this demand, *mizuko kuyō* has now been made a regular annual event of the temple, held in June, and appears on the calendar and in literature for newcomers.

Participants sign up for the *mizuko kuyō* ahead of time by filling out a form, stating the *kaimyō* of *mizuko* that they wish to be remembered. In most cases, these *mizuko* will have already received *kaimyō* upon request to a qualified Risshō Kōsei-kai leader—these *kaimyō* are similar to those for ancestors but differ in a few characters because the gender of the fetus is in most cases unknown. The participants arrive ahead of the time set for the ceremony and are greeted by women staffing welcome tables. Here they receive origami paper and are instructed to go and fold paper cranes, which are then presented as offerings before the *mizuko kuyō* begins. The service itself takes place in the *hondō*, a large room with pews and a raised stage area (called the *seidan*) with seats for leaders, musical instruments, and a tall standing statue of the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha, the object of devotion in Risshō Kōsei-kai (figure 2.9). This same room was used as the *hondō* of the Higashi Shin temple when they owned the building, but it was set up 180 degrees opposite of the current layout: in Jōdo Shinshū temples the Amida statue is situated along the western wall, looking east, while in Risshō Kōsei-kai temples the Shakyamuni statue is placed along the eastern wall, gazing west. The *hondō* set up is also much sparer than that of the traditional temples such as Zenshuji and Koyasan, lacking the golden adornments that adorn their *naijins*. All participants wear white

sashes with black Japanese calligraphy that say “Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō Risshō Kōsei-kai *Honbu*.”⁴²

The service begins with a short welcome message from a woman acting as MC of the ceremony, followed by three communal chants of “Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō.” Next everyone recites the Member’s Vow in English:

We, members of Rissho Kosei-kai
Take refuge in the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni,
And recognize in Buddhism the true way of salvation,
Under the guidance of our revered founder, Nikkyo Niwano.
In the spirit of lay Buddhists,
We vow to perfect ourselves
Through personal discipline and leading others
And by improving our knowledge and practice of the faith,
And we pledge ourselves to follow the Bodhisattva way
To bring peace to our families, communities,
And countries and to the world.

This is followed by the Church Anthem, performed in Japanese:

Sawayaka ni noboru asahiyo
Hedatenaku megumi o sosogu
Mihotoke no oshie aogeba ware ni ari
Kyo no hohoemi aa Rissho Kosei-kai

Suzuyaka ni ikiru akarusa
Afurekuru chikara o yosete
Mihotoke no michi ni tsudoeba ware ni ari
Asu no yorokobi aa Rissho Kosei-kai

Next the main sutra chanting begins. The priest and several lay Dharma teachers sit on stage facing the Buddha, while the rest of the congregation sits in the pews. Together they chant a series of extracts from the three main sutras of Risshō Kōsei-kai: beginning with chapter three of the *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings*, then chapters two, three, ten, twelve, sixteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-five, and twenty-eight of the *Lotus*

⁴²*Honbu* means “headquarters.”

Sutra. The sutra chanting concludes with an excerpt from the *Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra*.⁴³ During the sutra chanting, the Dharma teachers recite the *kaimyō* of the *mizuko* being remembered in the service. Each participant rises and individually offers incense before the altar, and the liturgical portion of the service closes with a dedication of merit.

When the chanting is finished, several testimonials are given by laywomen. Each goes to a podium to deliver a reflection on her own loss and appreciation toward the *mizuko*; these talks typically last five or six minutes. These are followed by a sermon from the minister, ten to fifteen minutes in length. The congregation chants *daimoku* three more times. A five-minute break is taken while soft music is played on the CD player, giving participants a chance to reflect on the ritual. Then the attendees prepare for the final phase of the event, a session of group support called *hoza*.

Hoza is a basic practice of Risshō Kōsei-kai, not common among traditional Buddhist sects. Participants sit in a circle and share their personal experiences with one another; during the *mizuko kuyō hoza* they either move to the front of the hall between the pews and *seidan*, or retire to another room where a circle can be more easily created. A Dharma teacher facilitates the discussion, offering suggestions of how the others may relate their experiences to Buddhist teachings and ways in which they might practice those teachings in their everyday lives. The *mizuko kuyō hoza*, however, is slightly different, as the Dharma teachers mostly listen without giving much response, allowing each person to simply voice their feelings. As Rev. Mizutani put it:

⁴³None of these chapters are chanted in full—these are selections from each of the chapters listed, performed in the order above. These chants have been done in Japanese during the two *mizuko kuyō* held so far, although Rev. Mizutani indicated that English would also be appropriate. The *Sutra of Innumerable Meanings* is the *Muryōgi Kyō*; the *Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra* is the *Kanfugen Kyō*.

Probably more instead of giving some teaching, [the *hoza* leaders during *mizuko kuyō*] more try to listen, because speaking is a very important process towards awareness. So if she [a *hoza* participant] feels appreciation, “Oh yes, because of this baby I decided to come, because I feel guilty I remember I decided to come to Risshō Kōsei-Kai, then through Risshō Kōsei-kai not only could I offer my prayer to my baby, but at the same time I could learn Buddhist teaching. So the baby actually guided me to the Buddhist teaching.” So she may be very appreciative. It is a good opportunity for her to remember him, to appreciate him. But at the same time to make a renewed vow to follow the Buddhist teaching. So by speaking it also is a good way to deepen the feeling, deepen the vow. So I think letting them speak is a very important process.⁴⁴

Everyone is given a chance to speak before the *hoza* session is closed. The service portion takes about an hour and the *hoza* lasts approximately thirty minutes, making the total for the *mizuko kuyō* around ninety minutes (but also with origami folding before and a certain amount of socializing afterwards).

While the June *mizuko kuyō* is the main service for pregnancy losses, if a member comes and insists that she cannot wait until the public service then the minister will accommodate her. In this case the *mizuko kuyō* is held in essentially the same manner, though it is conducted in a smaller chapel at the temple or sometimes in members’ homes before the home altar.⁴⁵ These more informal services lack the testimonials but do include *hoza*—the minister typically asks several other people who have experienced abortion or miscarriage to attend so that a proper *hoza* can be held and the woman receives support.

⁴⁴Mizutani Shoko. Rissho Kosei-Kai Buddhist Church of Los Angeles priest. 15 February 2007, Rissho Kosei-Kai Buddhist Church of Los Angeles.

⁴⁵Home Buddhist altars are usually called *butsudan* in Japan, but Risshō Kōsei-kai uses the term *gohozon*. This is also the term applied to the Buddha statue in the *hondō*. Note that this is not *gohonzon*, a term used for a venerated object of worship in Japan, although there is obvious overlap in usage.

Analysis of Mizuko Kuyō in Japanese-American Buddhism

Now that *mizuko kuyō* at Japanese-American temples in various lineages has been examined, continuities and discontinuities can be explored. All of these temples perform *mizuko kuyō* in the *hondō*, the main worship hall, which is the central sacred space in Japanese and Japanese-American Buddhist temples. A priest presides over the ceremony, while laypeople, whether participants or mainly observers, follow his lead. The primary ritual actions are chanting: *mizuko kuyō* always involves sutra recitation, mantras, and merit dedication verses. Incense is always offered, and in some cases food, flowers, toys, or other trinkets are offered as well. Participants—priestly and lay—are oriented toward the Buddha statue or mandala, which is the focus of the ceremony. Priests sit with their backs toward the laypeople, facing the main object of worship, unless constraints on space and manpower force them to sit sideways. A short talk is always delivered by the priest. In virtually all cases the priest is a male Japanese immigrant, trained in Japan and sent to America to lead services at the temple.⁴⁶ If for the moment we exclude the *hoza* conducted at the Risshō Kōsei-kai temple following the formal *mizuko kuyō* service, then none of the ceremonies last as long as an hour: thirty to forty minutes seems to be the average length.

⁴⁶There are two exceptions in my pool of consultants. One is Jikyu Rose, who immigrated to Hawaii after marrying an American man. A lifelong devotee of Jizō, she decided to seek ordination and trained at the Tendai Shū headquarters on Hieizan in Kyōto. She then returned to Hawaii and built Koganji, which she presides over (this temple is described in greater detail above in note 39). Note that Rose resists the label of *mizuko kuyō* for her ceremonies. The other exception is “Watanabe Junkyo” (pseudonym), an elderly Japanese-American nun at Koyasan Buddhist Temple who has sometimes performed *mizuko kuyō* in the past (she is now too old, leaving services to be provided by the three male priests of the temple). She was the only consultant who asked not to be identified; interview with her took place at Koyasan Buddhist Temple in downtown Los Angeles on 7 February 2007. In keeping with her request I have broken my rule here of only assigning pseudonyms to lay consultants. It is perhaps noteworthy that the two women—one who emigrated through marriage and the other who was born in the United States—are also the only two who were not sent as missionaries from Japan.

We may also note what *mizuko kuyō* at each of these temples lacks. For one, there is no meditation in any of these ceremonies. Some practices, such as repetitious mantra chanting or quiet reflection accompanied by music, do seem somewhat similar, but none of the temples includes formal Buddhist meditation on the part of either priests or laypeople as part of *mizuko kuyō*. This would not be significant in the context of Japanese Buddhism, where formal meditation practice is a rather infrequent activity in all branches of Buddhism (Zen included), but is worth mentioning because of the unusual focus on meditation by many practitioners and commentators on Buddhism in America. Also, none of these temples has an area with many *mizuko* Jizōs, as are seen at some Japanese temples, especially the ones most often discussed in the context of *mizuko kuyō*. And rather than large outside cemeteries with family grave plots as are found at many Japanese temples—often containing large *mizuko* Jizōs that can be worshipped by laypeople—they all have indoor columbaria (*nokutsudō*) housing the ashes of temple members.⁴⁷

Overall, the similarities among these *mizuko kuyō* seem greater than their differences, but those differences can reveal interesting variations that demonstrate the range of practices and attitudes in Japanese-American Buddhism. Despite their similar general formats, the most obvious differences lie in the actual material culture and ritual practice. All are oriented toward an object of worship, but that object differs from temple to temple, largely for reasons of sectarian affiliation. At Zenshuji Soto Mission it is Shakyamuni Buddha, while at Rissho Kosei-kai Los Angeles Buddhist Church it is the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha described in the sixteenth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. Los Angeles Nichiren Shu Temple also enshrines the Eternal Shakyamuni, but does so along

⁴⁷It should be noted that it is not unusual for urban temples in Japan to have similar columbaria on site.

with the monk Nichiren and a large calligraphic mandala he inscribed. Nichiren Shoshu Myohoji Temple of Los Angeles, on the other hand, only uses the mandala, while the Jodo Shu North America Buddhist Mission enshrines Amida Buddha and Koyasan has Dainichi Nyorai as its object of veneration. The subaltars at all of these temples also differ widely, enshrining a variety of sect-specific founders and celestial patrons. Thus the image being addressed in each *mizuko kuyō* is different at each temple. Each temple has its own policies about the use of *tōba* and *ihai* and the conferral of *kaimyō*, the basic components of memorial rites in Japanese Buddhism.

The texts used to perform the central portion of the ritual also vary, with each sect having its favorites. The *Heart Sutra* appears at both Zenshuji and Koyasan, all the Nichirenist groups use the *Lotus Sutra*, and the Jōdo Shū temple uses the *Larger Pure Land Sutra*. Each has their own variations on the refuge, dedication, and other standard verses. Perhaps surprising is the relative lack of attention given to Jizō bodhisattva, given his prominent place in the historiography of *mizuko kuyō* in Japan. The Sōtō and Shingon rituals include at least the Jizō mantra, whereas the bodhisattva is absent from the other four temples. The desire to include Jizō seems to motivate the Zenshuji ritual's post-service tour of the temple's statues, something none of the other temples include. Likewise, only the Risshō Kōsei-kai temple includes significant opportunities for laypeople to share their feelings; it is also the only place where offerings are manufactured rather than simply bought at a store and brought to the temple. Laypeople have the most participation in the ritual at this temple—they not only perform almost all the chants along with the priest and share their experiences in *hoza*, but they also create their own offerings and some laywomen serve in assistant roles during the ceremony

itself, reading *mizuko kaimyō* aloud, emceeding the service, or offering formal testimonials. Lay participation is less extensive at other temples. The two Nichiren temples, Myohoji and Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple, both expect laypeople to chant all of the sutras, *daimoku*, and some of the opening and closing verses. At the Jodo Shu temple laypeople generally only chant *nembutsu*, while at Zenshuji and Koyasan the laity are essentially passive observers of the ritual, usually doing little more than offering incense and perhaps saying a mantra or two. This reflects common trends in Japan, where the average *mizuko kuyō* participant is an observer of the rite carried out by the priest, while Nichiren temples often expect a higher degree of lay participation in the chanting.

Arguably more significant are the differences in how each temple approaches *mizuko kuyō*. For instance, there are a range of attitudes toward the privacy of the ritual. In most cases, *mizuko kuyō* is carried out for a single person or couple, occasionally with a few family members as well. Some of the temples consider these ceremonies strictly private. Others allow or even encourage participants to invite family and friends, and are open to outsiders simply observing the ritual. The Risshō Kōsei-kai temple holds a big annual *mizuko kuyō* where multiple *mizuko* are honored by people unrelated to one another. The Koyasan August *goma*, while not strictly speaking a *mizuko kuyō*, also includes some honoring of unrelated *mizuko* in a highly public performance.

Differences in the degree to which people other than the parents of a *mizuko* are allowed to participate or observe are related to the types of clientele that each temple serves in its *mizuko kuyō*. The typical *mizuko kuyō* seeker at Koyasan and Zenshuji, for instance, is a Shin Issei or Japanese student who is unaffiliated with the temple. They appear to seek the temple out only in the wake of an abortion or miscarriage, typically

looking the temple up in the phonebook. Koyasan also gets referrals from the several Jōdo Shinshū temples in the area, none of which perform *mizuko kuyō*, and benefits from having a large *mizuko* Jizō in front of the temple (located next to the main shopping and dining area in Little Tokyo).⁴⁸ Sectarian identity of *kuyō* participants is unimportant to either of these temples, and often *mizuko kuyō* seekers have no particular denominational affiliation at all. On the other hand, Myohoji only performs services for members and the Jōdo Shū temple prefers to serve Jōdo Shū Buddhists or those specifically without affiliation, steering away people who admit to being connected to traditions represented by other local temples. Risshō Kōsei-kai *mizuko kuyō* participants are almost always member, though this is not because of an official policy. Apparently, unaffiliated Japanese in America prefer to seek services from traditional Buddhist denominations, rather than New Religious Movements, which are often associated with aggressive proselytization. And the L.A. Nichiren Shū temple shows an interesting split in its clientele: members seek *mizuko kuyō* for miscarriages, while *kuyō* performed for abortions are usually done at the request of outsiders. It might be that temple members are embarrassed or ashamed to make their own priest aware of their abortions, and seek to have *mizuko kuyō* performed elsewhere, such as at Koyasan.

Money too divides some of these temples from the others. Although a set fee is never charged, there are different attitudes toward donations, which are in fact expected. At Zenshuji, Koyasan, and the Nichiren Shū temple, it is expected that laypeople who ask

⁴⁸This *mizuko* Jizō, one of the few such full-size statues in America, was dedicated in 1982. Although the typical client for *mizuko kuyō* is an outsider, the statue was purchased with funds pledged by temple members, as well as some money from the temple general fund. Honoring their own *mizuko* was a main motivation for the temple members in purchasing the statue from Japan, but another was that it would be good for the temple mission. Miyata Taisen. Personal interview with Koyasan Buddhist Temple bishop. 7 February 2007, Koyasan Buddhist Temple, Los Angeles, CA.

for a *mizuko kuyō* will make a donation to both the priest who performs the ritual and the temple itself, with each separate donation equaling about \$50. In actual practice this ranges considerably—a significant number of participants are students, often with limited budgets. Donations of \$20-25 are not uncommon; on the other hand, some donors provide as much as \$100 to both the priest and the temple. The Jōdo Shū mission and Risshō Kōsei-kai, meanwhile, only accept money for the temple, not the priest. Myohoji, the Nichiren Shoshu temple, connects its donations to the *tōba* that is inscribed for the parent, asking for a \$10 donation to offset costs. Additional expenses can be accrued at the various temples if the layperson wishes for a formal *ihai* to be created for the *mizuko*, but in these cases the temple merely acts as the middleman, with the actual money going to the supply shop that creates the *ihai* upon request.

Money then plays a different role for a temple like Koyasan compared to the Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple, for instance. Both expect donations to be made to both priest and temple. But even though Rev. Kanai at the Nichiren temple is one of the most vocal local advocates of *mizuko kuyō*, he performs the ceremony rarely and receives scant income from these services on an annual basis. Koyasan, meanwhile, conducts *mizuko kuyō* regularly, and conducts other services (such as *senzō kuyō*—memorials for ancestors—and rituals for health or fortune) with about the same frequency.⁴⁹ This translates into significant income for priest and temple alike, not a small matter when one considers the precarious financial situation of many American Buddhist temples. They lack the benefits of the *danka* system of Japan, which ties families more or less

⁴⁹At about fifty or so *mizuko kuyō* per year, Koyasan Buddhist Temple conducts nearly one for each week of the year. However, the actual frequency is less than weekly—in some months there are only one or two such services, while July and August (the traditional months for honoring the dead in Japan) often boast several *mizuko kuyō* per week.

permanently to specific temples. They also have to fight the demographics of Japanese-America: Japanese immigration to the United States has been far smaller since the major waves of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and Japanese-Americans have one of the highest out-marriage rates of all ethnic minorities, significantly reducing the number of children raised Buddhist over time. These factors have led to a diminishing of the membership rolls at many older Japanese-American Buddhist temples and puts some in financial jeopardy. In such a situation one might expect some temples to market their services, such as *mizuko kuyō*, more actively. But Koyasan does little to announce its willingness to perform such rituals, and the other temples that perform far fewer *mizuko kuyō* show no interest in pursuing a higher rate of *kuyō* performance.

A final area of difference deserves note: attitudes toward *mizuko* spirits and the women who create them. All of the priests consulted for this project stated clearly that abortion is against fundamental Buddhist principles. However, many were more equivocal about its legal status. The majority felt that while abortion is wrong morally, it is a matter for a woman to decide for herself, and several suggested that it was possible that abortion could be the lesser of two evils in some situations if the child would be born into a very unfavorable situation. Rev. Kanai and Rev. Mizutani both felt that abortion should be illegal, though Rev. Mizutani believed exceptions relating to the health of the mother or genetic defects in the fetus should be permitted.

Ideas about *mizuko* spirits also differed. Most felt that *mizuko kuyō* assisted the spirit in achieving Buddhahood or being reborn in a pure Buddha-land (not necessarily that of Amida Buddha). Rev. Tanaka was uncertain about the status of *mizuko*: doctrinally a being must chant nembutsu themselves to achieve the Pure Land according

to Jōdo Shū, yet he felt instinctually that Amida would embrace *mizuko* nonetheless. Rev. Kojima, the Sōtō Zen priest, simply said that he didn't know what happened to *mizuko* and wasn't particularly concerned about the matter. Feelings about spirit interference in the world of the living were not unanimous. All disclaimed the specific term "*tatari*," suggesting that it had no basis in authentic Buddhist teaching.⁵⁰ Here the effects of public criticism of *mizuko kuyō* can be seen—*tatari* has become a dirty word for many Japanese Buddhists, so that even individuals who believe in the phenomenon may avoid directly professing such a belief. But when that particular word was set aside during interviews, a range of attitudes revealed themselves. On one end, Rev. Tanaka felt that belief in spirits bothering the living was absurd, equating it to superstitions picked up from Japanese horror films such as *Ringu*.⁵¹ On the other end of the spectrum, Rev. Kanai expressed clear belief that *mizuko* spirits may pester a woman's other children as a way to cause her to conduct *mizuko kuyō*, and, while stopping short of explicitly stating

⁵⁰Actually, Jikyū Rose, technically not a subject of this study because she does not consider her ceremonies to be *mizuko kuyō*, did profess a belief in *tatari* (Jikyū Rose. "Re: Mizuko." Fax correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Koganji Jizoin [of Honolulu] abbess. 21 February 2007.).

⁵¹Remade in America as *The Ring*, these two movies and their sequels center around haunted videotapes, and lend themselves readily to an interpretation as *mizuko* allegory. Anyone who watches them is killed violently by the angry ghost of a murdered girl one week after the viewing. The main character is a young woman, who, along with her son, is targeted by the child ghost. The spirit is vengeful because it has been wronged (shunned, murdered, and improperly memorialized). It dwells in a cold, clammy proxy womb at the bottom of a well, floating in darkness like the *mizuko*. It ventures forth to harm all those it contacts, but especially the young, its symbolic siblings who have the mortal experiences it lacks and are filled with life (and passion as they enter teenage years). The heroine attempts to offer the traditional solution—she descends into the well, mothers the lost child, buries it properly, and restores it to public memory so it can be memorialized in the future. This should appease the spirit and prevent *tatari*, but it fails. In anxiety-filled modern Japan, the old solutions have broken down. The old ways of memorialization no longer apply. Instead, the spirit demands that modern technology, not ancient ritual, be used to spread her memory throughout the world, as each person passes on the tape in order not to be killed. The memory must spread continuously, there is no real escape—the spirit can *never* be put to rest, only warded off for the moment. The spirit uses the tape as a cry for remembrance, for its plight to be recognized and regretted. It is a kind of *mizuko* from the beginning, conceived in a sea-cave, the descendant of a water goblin. From the orthodox Buddhist viewpoint, the objection here is that the people are being attacked just for watching a video, an action that carries no negative karmic implications and should not serve to justify ill fortune.

that they are caused by spirit attacks, has suggested that women who have abortions will suffer symptoms associated in Japan with *tatari*:

Abortion has many harmful influences. It is not always true but it is said that a woman who has an abortion tends to be more stressful and frigid, or her husband cheats or becomes violent, or her child misbehaves or is easy to get sick.⁵²

I was unable to speak to any laypeople during this portion of my research, because these temples felt their records of *mizuko kuyō* participants should be kept confidential.

However, the priests said that fear of *tatari* was a clear reason some women expressed in explaining why they sought out *mizuko kuyō* at Japanese-American temples. They dealt with this in different ways: some priests attempted to convince their clients that *tatari* was a wrong idea, while others explained that now that *mizuko kuyō* had been performed, *tatari* would not occur.⁵³

Acculturation of Mizuko Kuyō at Japanese-American Buddhist Temples

Religious acculturation, the process by which a religion shifts from being the product and expression of a foreign culture to being somehow “American,” is a major theme in the historiography of religion in the United States. It is arguably *the* theme of studies of American Buddhism, a fact that has both benefits and drawbacks. In examining the practices of non-white Buddhists in particular, it can have the effect of

⁵²Kanai Shokai. “Abortion and a Memorial Service for the Unborn Babies.” *The Bridge*, no. 31 (Autumn, 2000): 3. In this same article Rev. Kanai implicitly endorses the election of George Bush in that year’s election because of his conservative stance on the abortion issue.

⁵³That the most conservative attitudes toward *mizuko kuyō* should not be found among missionary priests in America is unsurprising. Self-selection means that Buddhist priests with the most nationalistic views are hardly inclined to move to the United States. Similarly, those with the greatest inclination to make money from *mizuko kuyō* rites are likely to stay in Japan, where they have a far larger client population for the ritual.

rendering Asian traditions practiced in the West somehow “un-American,” reifying both Asia and America in problematic ways. Asian-American Buddhism in this critique is only authentically American to the extent that it changes from its culture of origin. I would counter that “American Buddhism” is whatever Buddhist practices are performed in the United States and its territories or by its citizens in whatever locale. A sutra chanted in Japanese or Pali is no less “American” than one performed in English (or, increasingly, Spanish). An ironic second drawback is that tales of adaptation can make changes by Asian-American communities in their Buddhist practices seem “inauthentic.” This is a common implication of comments on the usage of terms such as “church” and “minister” by Asian-American Buddhists or the inclusion of Sunday morning meetings. By taking on elements that are identified by some as inherently Christian, for instance, these Buddhists are charged with having deviated from some purer essential Japanese Buddhism. This critique is as condescending in its way as the first, not only to Asian-American Buddhism but to that of Japan as well, which is hardly static. In examining the changes that have been made to *mizuko kuyō* by Japanese-American temples, therefore, let us bear in mind that we are not making value judgments or suggesting one form is more authentically American or Japanese than another. Rather, the purpose of this exercise is simply to note if and how *mizuko kuyō* practices are impacted specifically by being conducted at temples in the United States.

In fact, Japanese-American temples that perform *mizuko kuyō* have made few deliberate changes to allow these rituals to “fit” into a new cultural milieu. This contrasts with the significant alterations of the convert Zen communities examined in chapters three and four, and thus necessitates some discussion to account for this conservative

trend. One important reason that *mizuko kuyō* remains generally intact when it crosses from Japanese to Japanese-American temples lies with the particular clientele for this service. While the average member of most of these temples is a native-born Japanese American (most often second- or third- generation), those who seek *mizuko kuyō* in the United States are generally Japanese citizens who have moved to America (Shin Isseis) or those who are here for extended periods of work, study, or relaxation.

The demographics of Japanese-American Buddhism and the history of twentieth century Japanese religion largely account for this phenomenon. *Mizuko kuyō* rose to prominence in Japanese culture after World War II ended and abortion became a common form of birth control. But Japanese immigration was virtually choked off by racist immigration laws in place between 1924 and 1965. When Japanese citizens could once again emigrate to America, they did so in far smaller numbers than had come before World War II. This means that the average person of Japanese ancestry in America is a descendant of that first wave of pre-*mizuko kuyō* immigrants, among whom the practice was unknown. Furthermore, this earlier immigration was dominated by members of the Jōdo Shinshū school, which as discussed at the beginning of this chapter opposes the performance of *mizuko kuyō* and the complex of beliefs that support it. Therefore, even when knowledge of the practice began to arrive on American shores in the latter-half of the twentieth century, the majority of Japanese-American temples resisted adding this newly popular ritual to their repertoire. Furthermore, as discussed in the introduction, abortion was generally illegal in the United States until 1973. That means that while Japanese women from 1948 onwards had recourse to abortion and thus became involved

in situations that potentially invited *mizuko kuyō*, an entire additional generation passed in America before Japanese-American women had the same options.

The aging of Japanese-American Buddhism, which has shifted in the direction of older membership as the Japanese became more assimilated in American society, has an impact here. Those Issei, Nisei, and Sansei Buddhists who learned of *mizuko kuyō* and did seek it out had by the time of this project (2002-2007) already participated in the ceremony years or decades ago and are now past the fertile stages of life when new *mizuko* might be produced. Yonseis, meanwhile, who are in their productive childbearing years, are a rather small proportion of Japanese-American temple membership, a matter of serious concern in American Jōdo Shinshū and similar circles. On the whole, the traditional Japanese-American community is not a very fertile ground for *mizuko kuyō*. Therefore, it is among the more recent arrivals from Japan—whether here temporarily or as permanent immigrants—that *mizuko kuyō* finds its niche. Unlike the Isseis, the Shin Isseis and visitors arrive from a Japan where *mizuko kuyō* is omnipresent and familiar, and they are less likely to be Jōdo Shinshū followers. Current or recent Japanese citizens, they do not need or seek significant alterations in *mizuko kuyō* from how it is performed in Japan. And the priests who provide it to them are in nearly all cases Japanese immigrants themselves; only Jōdo Shinshū, the major traditional sect that refuses to perform *mizuko kuyō*, has a significant number of American-born ministers.

What changes occur in *mizuko kuyō*, therefore, are mainly indirect, related to other tangential factors. These include lack of access to traditional Japanese material objects, restricted space in dense urban environments, and clerical shortages. They affect not only *mizuko kuyō* but virtually all services provided by these temples. Thus, we find

that even though most of the temples examined in this chapter are major representatives of their sects (Zenshuji, Koyasan, Myohoji, and Jodo Shu North America Buddhist Mission are all the North American headquarters of their sects), they nonetheless occupy smaller spaces, with fewer priests and tighter budgets, than temples of equivalent status would enjoy in Japan. This means, for instance, that they typically have smaller *hondōs* with less room to replicate the *naijin* and surrounding spaces in a manner similar to Japanese temples. The amount of ritual activity that can take place is therefore restricted (some temples, for instance, cannot accommodate priests performing full prostrations before the altar) and forces some activities to be performed in an altered manner, such as facing in a different direction (perpendicular to the *gohonzon* instead of facing it, for instance). Some temples leave out *tōba* and *ihai* that would probably use them in *mizuko kuyō* if performed in Japan. Myohoji, one of the temples that does employ *tōba*, manufactures their own out of stiff construction paper that can be obtained easily in America, a material never used for this purpose in Japan. This adaptation allows the Nichiren Shōshū community to continue its familiar memorial practices without paying to continually import materials from Japan; it also is partially prompted by the environmentalist concerns of American members, who criticized the logging required to produce traditional wooden *tōba*. Lack of resources and space also helps to explain why no *mizuko jizōdō* (separate *mizuko* shrines), a common site for *mizuko kuyō* in America, forcing all *mizuko* rites to be performed in the temple *hondō*.⁵⁴

The most significant change to the setting in which American *mizuko kuyō* takes place is the introduction of pews or chairs into the *hondō*. Every Japanese-American

⁵⁴ This also explains the paucity of *mizuko* Jizō images and total absence of *mizuko* Kannon images.

temple studied for this project has such a *hondō* arrangement.⁵⁵ This reduces the number of people who can attend services and necessitates the elevation of the *naijin* onto a high stage-like area so that the *gohonzon* will not be at eye-level.⁵⁶ The effect tends to subtly cut the laity off to a greater degree from the holy image and the ritual actions of the priests. Even when laypeople stand and approach to offer incense, the *gohonzon* is often at a significantly higher relative level than in a Japanese temple, reducing the element of direct personal encounter with the object of worship.⁵⁷

Contrary to some reports, the use of pews and chairs is not necessarily an attempt by Japanese-American temples to appear more Christian and thus blend in better in America. Many priests said that these innovations had been made simply to accommodate the needs of Japanese-Americans, who were unused to sitting on the floor in their personal and work lives. The need to make senior citizens comfortable was also cited as a major factor in the current arrangement of temple *hondōs*. In fact, some modern temples in Japan use chairs (though not pews) as the Japanese themselves have moved to a more chair-based culture. A small irony is that Risshō Kōsei-kai is one such group that frequently uses chairs in its Japanese meeting halls, but the Los Angeles Risshō Kōsei-kai temple uses pews instead.

⁵⁵I would almost go so far as to say that every single Japanese-American temple in America is set up in this manner. Certainly I have seen no exception to this apparent rule in my research at dozens of such temples across a wide range of sectarian affiliations.

⁵⁶In a traditional Japanese temple laypeople, priests, and the *naijin* are generally all on the same level, with only a low fence to separate the laity from the front of the hall. Less often, the *naijin* is on a very slightly raised level. But in either case the *gohonzon* itself will sit on a tall pedestal, putting it well above the heads of kneeling or sitting worshippers.

⁵⁷There is another adaptation worthy of mention in passing: many of these temples include American flags in their *hondōs*.

Actual changes to the ritual actions of *mizuko kuyō* at Japanese-American temples seem to be few and difficult to discern. Few consultants said they had deliberately altered their style of *mizuko kuyō*. Rev. Kojima of Zenshuji is one of them: he performs the *Daihishin Darani* as the central chant of *mizuko kuyō* at his temple. This is a modification of how he was taught to carry out the ritual by his preceptor in Japan. There, the main text would be the *Jizō Bosatsu Hongan Kyō*, the primary sutra devoted to the bodhisattva Jizō. This text is more than ten times longer than the *Daihishin Darani*.

Jeff Wilson: Have you adapted or changed the *mizuko kuyō* in any way?

Kojima Shūmyō: It's adapted to this temple, because the style of this Zenshuji is kind of Los Angeles-style.

Wilson: What is Los Angeles-style?

Kojima: Shorter than Japanese style.

Wilson: So not just this service, but many services tend to be shorter?

Kojima: Right.

Wilson: Why are they shorter?

Kojima: I think in Japan long chanting is traditional. People understand it and they understand that it is as it is, even longer services they consider they have to be patient for them, to keep listening to the chanting. But here, the need to be patient without understanding the meaning makes a very difficult time for people.⁵⁸

Rev. Kanai's *mizuko kuyō* at the Nichiren Shū temple contains two obvious American liturgical additions, the compositions *Lord Buddha's Children* and *Golden Chain*. These are English verses with no precise Japanese antecedent; they therefore would never appear in Japanese *mizuko kuyō*. While they sometimes appear in other services at the Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple, he makes a particular point of performing them during *mizuko kuyō*, especially the verse about Buddha's children. *Golden Chain* is one of the most popular original American Buddhist pieces of liturgy:

⁵⁸Kojima Shūmyō. Personal interview with Zenshuji Soto Mission priest. 7 February 2007, Zenshuji Soto Mission, Los Angeles, CA.

created for use in Hawaiian Jōdo Shinshū temples early in the twentieth century, it is now found in the service books of nearly every Japanese-American Buddhist tradition, regardless of denomination.

The only other changes made in American *mizuko kuyō* were slight alterations to the service at the Rissho Kosei-Kai temple. Rev. Mizutani indicated that he encouraged slightly longer testimonials during the *mizuko* service and more listening rather than discussion in the post-service *hoza* session. He also plays music between the end of the service and the beginning of the *hoza*, a difference from how the ceremony might be carried out in Japan. But these changes seem to be more personal in nature, related to how Mizutani would like such services performed in general. While first unveiled in America, these changes are related to what he thinks is best for the members but are not necessarily in response to the fact that it is an American temple. The L.A. temple is his first appointment, making it difficult to determine precisely what is American innovation and what is simply the experimentation of a new minister with his first congregation.

Conclusion

Mizuko kuyō came to the United States in the 1960s, quietly, before abortion became a major national issue. Even with the subsequent rise in prominence of the abortion debate and the explosion of interest in Buddhism among Americans of the last decades of the twentieth century, the presence of this ritual in select Japanese-American communities remained overlooked. In part this is because of the relative lack of attention given to Asian-American Buddhism, especially Japanese forms of Buddhism other than Jōdo Shinshū and Sōka Gakkai, by scholars. But it also suggests the general isolation of

these communities from outsiders. Nichiren Shū, Jōdo Shū, Shingon Shū, and Risshō Kōsei-kai engaged in limited outreach and attracted little interest from the non-Asian population of the United States. Nichiren Shōshū fared a little better, mainly through its pre-1991 partnership with Sōka Gakkai, but happens to conduct only a very minimal *mizuko kuyō*. Furthermore, the average lay practitioner of Nichiren Shōshū-based Buddhism, whether the temple tradition or Sōka Gakkai, has always been a layperson with little to no access to the formal services, such as *mizuko kuyō*, of the small number of Nichiren Shōshū priests operating in America. Meanwhile Sōtō Zen did manage to attract significant attention from European-Americans beginning in the early 1960s. But as will be discussed in the next chapter, this interest was almost entirely in meditation practice and the hagiographies of seemingly liberated ancient masters, not in non-meditative ritual practice, savior figures such as Jizō, or everyday Japanese temple Buddhism. *Mizuko kuyō* at Japanese-American temples made no impact on the growing European-American practices; their development of *mizuko*-related rites is a separate tale to be narrated in chapter three.

Finally bringing a measure of attention to these temples through the lens of *mizuko kuyō* reveals facets of Japanese-American Buddhism rarely captured by current historiography. In particular the categorization of Japanese-American Buddhism as “ethnic” or “export” Buddhism tends to flatten out important differences between various groups. Looking once again, we can see that where there is usually expected to be consensus we find considerable disagreement—the two large Jōdo Shinshū temples in Little Tokyo refuse to perform *mizuko kuyō* while their seemingly similar Pure Land neighbor the Jōdo Shū temple has been conducting services for pregnancy losses since

the 1960s. The Nichiren Shū and Nichiren Shōshū communities diverge sharply in the amount of ritualization they believe a pregnancy loss deserves. Koyasan Buddhist Temple has conducted thousands of *mizuko kuyō* ceremonies as part of its wide range of services—including rituals for good luck and selling fortunes (*omikujī*), traffic safety charms (*omamori*), and votive tablets (*ema*)—while the Risshō Kōsei-kai temple only began to hold its large public ceremonies within the last two years.

We also see intriguing details about the participants at these temples. Contrary to the assumption that historic Japanese temples in the United States cater to the descendants of pre-1924 immigration, we find that new immigrants have a measurable impact on the ritual life of these temples, requesting services that are rarely sought by “old-line” members. Shin Isseis are the x-factors of Japanese Buddhism in America—their practices and religious orientations are largely unknown, and assumptions that they simply fit pre-existing patterns of Japanese-American religiosity are clearly flawed. Significantly, they are able to move Japanese-American temples in a more Japanese direction, causing them to perform new Japanese rituals previously absent from the practice of these American temples—and in this case they did so precisely during the post-World War II period when increasing “Americanization” of such temples has been assumed to be the trend. We also see that Asian-American laypeople have considerable ability to influence the types of practices performed in many temples—rather than beholden to priests or goaded into allegedly anti-feminist rituals like *mizuko kuyō*, laypeople (especially women) are the initial actors who provoke the performance of *mizuko kuyō* at local temples, sometimes in the face of priestly opposition. Even Jōdo

Shinshū priests will back down and try to find a comfortable compromise solution if a layperson is sufficiently insistent that they want an unorthodox ceremony performed.

A final benefit of looking at these temples is that it prepares us for a comparative glance into the convert Zen communities. These groups also take their inspiration from Japanese religious customs, but they understand and practice Buddhism in significantly different ways. It is to these new Buddhists and their *mizuko kuyō* practices that we now turn.

“A SHADOW IN THE HEART”: MIZUKO KUYŌ IN CONVERT AMERICAN ZEN

When Zen abbess Jan Chozen Bays wished to introduce Jizō bodhisattva to an American audience in 2001, she did not resort to a history lesson about his place in Asian tradition or a commentary on the texts connected with him. Rather, she sought to put her American readers into direct encounter with him, using the second person narrative perspective and focusing on emotional cues and visual images:

A little man of gray stone stands in the garden. His eyes are closed and his lips curve in a faint smile. A fern leaf arches over his head like an umbrella, holding a few bright drops of rain. Someone has made a small bonnet and cape of red cloth for him. A bit of paper peeks out of a pocket sewn on the cape. If you slip it out, you will find it is a message to a child, a dead child. *You had a sweet soul. In your short life you knew pain and love. I miss you.*

A small kite flutters on a low branch. It has a long tail made of twists of bright paper, each bearing a message. *“Uncle Jim remembers your wonderful laugh.” “Auntie Jean sends you butterfly kisses.” “Bye, bye, baby boy. Mommy loves you.”*¹

Step by step, Bays drew her audience in closer. This garden isn’t just for dead children, but for those who were never born. It is a place where God and Jizō alike can be called on in a time of need:

As you walk around the garden you find other stone figures standing among the slender trees and seated on cushions of green moss. Some have begun to crumble, their features softening, and gray lichen has begun to creep over their patient bodies. You see several thin wooden plaques hanging from a tree and see that they bear names and dates of birth and death separated by only a few months or

¹Jan Chozen Bays. *Jizo Bodhisattva: Modern Healing and Traditional Buddhist Practice*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 2002: 1.

years. On some plaques are faded drawings, flowers, a teddy bear, a sprinkling of stars and on some, more prayers. *“You are loved and remembered my sweet baby girl. Conceived in love and desired. Died through medical mishap. Never far from our hearts and minds—one of God’s smallest angels. . .*

At the base of a standing Jizo, there is a little blue doll. It was painstakingly cut and sewn from a favorite T-shirt by a man whose unborn son died when the mother was struck by a car. He had stuffed the doll with paper tissues wet with the tears of friends who came to mourn. There are notes and remembrances from women recalling abortions many years past and from doctors and nurses who assisted in abortions. . .²

Finally, Bays introduced her take on the *mizuko kuyō* ceremony, and revealed that this was not a Japanese scene after all. It was a new development in American religion, a quiet revolution with implications for the abortion issue, Zen in the West, and all who mourn children known and unknown:

If you came on another day, you might witness a procession of men and women wending their way to the garden carrying tiny garments sewn from red cloth, wooden plaques, and pinwheels or other handmade toys. Led by a woman in a Zen priest’s black robes, they chant together, offer incense, then place the remembrances they have made on the statues in the garden. The priest intones a dedication, a list of names of children, including babies whose sex was unknown or who were never named. A few couples hold hands, tears run silently down cheeks, and one woman slips quietly into the trees for a few minutes to sob alone before joining the group for the final chant.

This is a Jizō garden, one of the first in America.³

As discussed in chapters one and two, in Japan, Zen is a common purveyor of *mizuko kuyō*. But Zen in America shows many differences from that of Zen in Japan. Here, some argue, Zen is associated with individualistic meditation practice, disdain for mythology and superstition, anti-ritualism, liberal social and religious values, and

²Bays 2002: 2.

³Bays 2002: 3.

psychological approaches to religion.⁴ Some Buddhist apologists influential on American perceptions of Zen have even gone so far as to suggest that Zen is something other than Buddhism—some core, universal insight that transcends the debased ideas of popular religion and the rigid structures of denominational institutions.⁵ What chance then does a ritual associated with appeasing angry ghosts have in the rational world of American Zen?

Surprisingly, it is precisely Zen groups in America that have become most active in promoting *mizuko kuyō*. At least eleven convert-oriented Buddhist temples in the United States provide variations on *mizuko kuyō*. A full list of Zen leaders providing such ceremonies is provided in Appendix A and includes Yvonne Rand at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in California; Wendy Egyoku Nakao at Zen Center of Los Angeles; Sevan Ross at Chicago Zen Center; Robert Aitken at Diamond Sangha in Hawaii; Amala Wrightson at Rochester Zen Center, NY; and Jan Chozen Bays at Great Vow Monastery in Oregon. Together the temples include Sōtō, Rinzai, Sanbōkyōdan, and independent lineages.

Some of these temples have multiple priests who have performed the ceremony, and some of these priests have on occasion offered the ritual at other temples, at national Buddhist conferences, or at private homes as well. There are also other centers that have held the ceremony a single time. These include Zen Community of Oak Park, IL,

⁴See for instance James William Coleman. *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

⁵For a particularly clear discussion of these ideas see Robert H. Sharf. “The Zen of Japanese Nationalism.” *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism Under Colonialism*. Edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1995: 107-160.

Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, CA, and Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, NY.⁶ Furthermore, priests at a number of additional convert Zen temples have expressed their intention to hold “water baby” ceremonies in the future (for example, Sunya Kjolhede at Windhorse Zen Center, in North Carolina), and lay people have discussed having a ceremony performed at centers lacking a resident priest (such as Madison Zen Center in Wisconsin).⁷ Some temples, such as Zen Mountain Center outside Palm Springs, California, include prayers for aborted fetuses in annual Jizō ceremonies.⁸ And there are yet other Zen temples (for example, Dharma Rain Zen Center in Portland, Oregon) that will hold abbreviated funeral rites for fetuses on request—not truly *mizuko* ceremonies, they nonetheless support an atmosphere of ritual acknowledgement of pregnancy loss and may come under the influence of *mizuko kuyō*-related ideas and practices as water baby ceremonies gain prominence in American Zen.⁹

In total, Appendix A includes some of the most important teachers and lineages in American Zen—their influence extends far beyond these individual temples to entire

⁶Appendix A carries a full list of these temples. Note that Berkeley Buddhist Monastery is officially Chan, the Chinese parent tradition of Japanese Zen. However, even if we consider these as separate traditions—which my consultants typically do not—the Berkeley temple is run by a convert American monk and shares many similarities with the specifically Japanese-derived groups. Furthermore, the actual water baby ceremony performed in Berkeley was carried out by Zen priest Yvonne Rand of San Francisco Zen Center and was not significantly altered from her normal Zen ceremonies to make it somehow “Chan.”

⁷Sunya Kjolhede. Personal interview with Windhorse Zen Center abbess. 17 June 2006, Windhorse Zen Center, Alexander, NC.

⁸Tenshin Charles Fletcher. Telephone interview with Yokoji Zen Mountain Center (of Mountain Center, CA) abbot. 12 January 2007. ZMC also has a large Jizō statue with a small child at its base peering up in devotion at the bodhisattva, a common *mizuko* motif. Rather than an import from Japan, it was actually carved with a chainsaw by an American woman, using cedar from the center site. Women sometimes hang ribbons for lost pregnancies or babies in the grove that holds the statue, and Fletcher performs a ceremony that contains the same elements of the offering portion of the ritual in true water baby ceremonies: the *Heart Sutra*, *Enmei Juku Kannon Gyō*, and Jizō mantra. However, the center has not held a specific ceremony for lost pregnancies.

⁹Sallie Jiko Tisdale. “Ceremony at Dharma Rain.” Email correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Dharma Rain Zen Center (of Portland, OR) priest. 1 October 2006.

networks of branch temples, publishing houses, and sophisticated websites. It would not be overstating the matter to say that these temples and the networks associated with them represent the majority of Japanese-derived Zen centers in America today.

This chapter traces the process of how these convert American Zen centers came to offer and promote *mizuko kuyō*-derived post-pregnancy loss rituals. As we will see, it has been women who have taken the lead in researching, publicizing, and performing these ceremonies. This includes not only female priests who facilitate the ceremonies but also laywomen who prompted male temple leaders to help them ritualize their pregnancy losses. In order to distinguish American from Japanese ceremonies, I henceforth refer to *mizuko kuyō* in convert temples as “water baby ceremonies,” a common term used by several of these American groups.¹⁰

I will also discuss the rise of bodhisattva devotion within American convert Buddhism, an important contributing factor to the popularity of these rituals. Finally, I offer a participant-observer view of a ceremony performed at Bays’ temple to help demonstrate how these rituals are actually carried out. This prepares for chapter four, where I explore the adaptations that have been made in the ritual performance and assess what the ritualization of pregnancy loss teaches us about American Zen.

Transmission and Importation: Bringing Mizuko Kuyō to America

¹⁰Other names applied to these ceremonies include “Abortion healing circle,” “Ceremony for children who have died,” “Ceremony on the death of an unborn child,” and the “Jizō ceremony.” Not all centers discussed in this chapter actively use the label “water baby ceremony,” but most do use the term “water baby” and recognized “water baby ceremony” as an accurate moniker for their rituals. Therefore I have made the decision to standardize the terminology for the sake of clarity in this dissertation. “Water baby ceremony” and “Jizō ceremony” are the most widely used of the various names.

The first record of Jizō-related memorial rites involving American converts dates from 1969.¹¹ Suzuki Shunryū and Yvonne Rand conducted a memorial service at Tassajara Zen Center in California for an adult man, which included placing a Jizō statue atop the man's grave. This does not seem to have been a deliberate attempt by Suzuki to introduce Jizō rituals to America, but nonetheless it was to have far-reaching implications. As Rand explains:

This, my first meeting with Jizo, affected me deeply. For some years afterwards, I could not explain my pull to the figure of this sweet-faced monk with hands in the mudra of prayer and greeting.

Several years after this funeral ceremony, I terminated an unexpected pregnancy by having an abortion. I suffered after the abortion, but it was not until some years had passed that I came to fully understand my grieving and/or the resolution to which I eventually came.

Subsequently, I began spending time in Japan and became reacquainted with Jizo. Figures of Jizo are everywhere there. I saw firsthand that Jizo ritual and ceremony involved not just graveyards and death in general, but particularly the deaths of infants and fetuses through abortion, miscarriage or stillbirth. Back home, during the 1970's and 1980's, women had begun coming to me and asking if I could help them with their difficulties in the aftermath of an abortion or a miscarriage. In consequence I began doing a simple memorial service for groups of people who had experienced the deaths of fetuses and babies.¹²

Rand's first ceremony was held in 1973.¹³ She was not the only American Zen leader struggling with abortion and Buddhist practice during this period. Robert Aitken, one of the founders of American Zen practice communities in the 1950s, was approached in the late 1970s by a couple who belonged to his center. They asked him to do some sort

¹¹Yvonne Rand. "The Buddha's Way and Abortion: Loss, Grief, and Resolution." *Inquiring Mind* (Fall 1993): 21. This article has been widely reprinted in mostly unaltered form in many Buddhist publications, spreading awareness of Buddhist post-pregnancy loss rituals.

¹²Rand 1993: 21. A mudra is a symbolic Buddhist hand gesture, in this case the familiar pose of bringing one's hands palms-together in front of the chest.

¹³Yvonne Rand. Telephone interview with Goat in the Road Zendo abbess. 24 January 2007.

of ritual for an abortion they had experienced.¹⁴ Aitken developed a basic ceremony and then consulted his teacher, Yamada Kōun. Yamada described the process of *mizuko kuyō* at Nichiren, Shingon, and Tendai temples in Japan, and Aitken incorporated some of this information.¹⁵ The result was a ceremony that has only occasionally been performed at the Diamond Sangha, but, because it was published as an appendix to Aitken's *The Mind of Clover* in 1984, has received some wider attention.¹⁶

Establishing the date of the first convert Zen water baby ceremony is difficult to do for two reasons. First, records and memories from the 1970s and 80s are imperfect, and my project was made more complicated by the serious illness of Robert Aitken, who was understandably unable to provide me with in-person interviews during my research period.¹⁷ Second, what information we do have of rituals during this initial phase suggests that the ceremonies were different in certain ways from the format that has become standard for water baby ceremonies in the 1990s and early years of the new millennium.¹⁸ Therefore, I suggest a demarcation between Rand and Aitken's early efforts and the more robust phenomena that follow Rand's decision to begin offering the

¹⁴Robert Aitken. "RE: Your query." Email correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Honolulu Diamond Sangha leader. 18 August 2006.

¹⁵Robert Aitken. "Your query." Email correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Honolulu Diamond Sangha leader. 5 June 1006.

¹⁶Robert Aitken. "RE: Diamond Sangha Ceremony for the Unborn." Email correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Honolulu Diamond Sangha leader. 24 September 2006. Many Zen teachers have told me they read Aitken's ceremony with interest when it was published. It was also the subject of a brief but perceptive analysis by William LaFleur in *Liquid Life* (see pages 199-201). Interestingly, LaFleur seems to assume Aitken's ceremony was a directly imported and then modified ritual. Although this was not the case, LaFleur's basic analysis remains useful.

¹⁷Luckily, Aitken's ceremony was published with some useful comments in 1984. He also graciously consented, despite ill health, to an extended email exchange that provided key information.

¹⁸Aitken's ceremony is noticeably different, and Rand writes that she has modified her ceremonies since this earlier period (Rand 1993: 21). Importantly, her pre-conference ceremonies were oriented toward individual mourners and were not communal affairs.

ceremony “as often as possible,” which occurred after seeing its effect on participants at women’s conferences in 1988 and 1990. In 1991 she took a three-month research trip to Japan to learn more about *mizuko kuyō*, and her return corresponds roughly with when the ritual began to be performed in a more publicized manner and began to be actively taken up by other American Zen communities. It is also at this time that the term “water baby ceremony” emerges and the general outline of the ritual seems to have stabilized into the familiar ritual performed at the temples listed above.¹⁹ Thus it seems reasonable to differentiate a) the proto-water baby ceremony period of approximately early 1970s to late 1980s, when Rand and Aitken worked on abortion-related rituals that would later influence b) the rise of the fully-fledged water baby ceremony beginning at the end of the 1980s, when a specific model emerged that has remained relatively unchanged to the present and began to attract significant attention and emulation. Because of this periodization, I do not consider Aitken’s ritual a “water baby ceremony” but rather a proto-water baby ceremony; his ritual also differs considerably from the now-standard water baby ceremony, being far shorter, designed for a single couple, involving no sewing or talking circles or offerings, and having only a minor role for Jizō.²⁰

Following Rand’s decision to begin offering the ceremony more frequently and expose more people to it, she began to draw attention to it in several ways. Besides

¹⁹Aitken does use the term “water baby” in his book but not “water baby ceremony,” which he names “The Diamond Sangha Ceremony on the Death of an Unborn Child.” He still does not use the label “water baby ceremony,” instead calling it the “Ceremony for an Unborn Child” in his correspondence with me. Robert Aitken. “Your query.” Email correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Honolulu Diamond Sangha leader. 5 June 1006. Rand’s newfound dedication to the ritual is described in Bays 2001: 12.

²⁰We can also tentatively date the first true American water baby ceremony to Rand’s ritual at the 1988 A Celebration of Women in Buddhist Practice conference, with the caveat that it is possible to argue for an earlier date because of Rand’s prior history of holding post-abortion ceremonies. An important difference from the earlier events is that they were private affairs, generally for a single person. By contrast, there were thirty-seven participants in the conference ritual (Yvonne Rand. Telephone interview with Goat in the Road Zendo abbess. 24 January 2007). This large, corporate ceremony became the model referenced by most of the leaders described later in this chapter in creating their own rituals.

conducting it at conferences for Buddhist women, she discussed it at Zen teachers' meetings and wrote articles about the ceremony for venues like *Inquiring Mind* (the journal of the Vipassana movement in America) and the anthology *Buddhism Through American Women's Eyes*.²¹ Articles by other Buddhists exposed to the water baby ceremony by Rand began to appear in such venues as *Turning Wheel*, the journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, often with step-by-step accounts of the ritual and highly positive reflections on the emotional-healing potential of the ceremony.²² The publication of William LaFleur's *Liquid Life* in 1992 also helped stimulate interest in *mizuko kuyō*, as did an article he wrote for *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* in 1995.

Rand was now conducting the ceremony regularly at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in Marin County, a branch of the Sōtō-affiliated San Francisco Zen Center; eventually she opened her own center nearby, named Goat-in-the-Road Zendo, which continues to conduct the ritual about three to five times each year. The first leader to take up Rand's ceremony and begin holding it elsewhere was Susan Jion Postal, leader of the Empty Hand Zendo. Postal's community shows a mix of Zen influences—originally a student in the Sōtō lineage of Maezumi Taishan, Postal also studied with the Rinzai teacher Maureen Stuart.²³ Postal was prompted to hold the ceremony by laywomen who asked her for help with their pregnancy losses. She responded by participating in a water baby ceremony held by Yvonne Rand—in part to memorialize Postal's own pregnancy

²¹Rand 1993; 1995.

²²Melody Ermachild Chavis. "A Ceremony for Aborted and Miscarried Children." *Turning Wheel: Journal of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship* (Summer 1990).

²³Empty Hand Zendo has now become Empty Hand Zen Center and is the process of affiliating with the Sōtō-based San Francisco Zen Center. Postal's background also includes ten years as one of the first Tibetan Nyingma Buddhism practitioners in America and an earlier period with the Gurdjieff Work. Susan Jion Postal. Telephone interview with Empty Hand Zen Center (of New Rochelle) abbess. 23 January 2007.

losses—and then holding a ceremony for her own community in 1991. Her temple does not schedule the ceremony regularly, holding it only as needed, an average of once every four years. Typical participation is seven to ten attendees, mainly women.

Sunyana Graef, founder of Vermont Zen Center, was the next teacher to take up the ceremony. Graef was trained at Rochester Zen Center, which draws on Sōtō and Rinzai forms but is independent of any specific Zen sect—its roots lie with the Sōtō- and Rinzai-influenced Sanbōkyōdan, a Buddhist New Religious Movement, but it broke away in the 1970s. Graef learned of the ceremony from Rand in 1990 and held the first water baby ceremony at Vermont Zen Center in August 1992.²⁴ Her ceremony was based on Rand's but also modified to meet the needs of her own community. Vermont Zen Center has held the water baby ceremony every August since 1992, with an average attendance of about 20 participants. Like many temples, Graef's community created a Jizō garden at the center to accommodate the ritual.

The next American Zen teacher to take up the ceremony was Jan Chozen Bays. Bays is the co-founder of the Zen Community of Oregon and a disciple of the late Maezumi Taizan of Zen Center of Los Angeles, who was affiliated with the Sanbōkyōdan as well as mainstream Japanese Sōtō Zen. She had first encountered *mizuko* when Maezumi returned from a trip to Japan with a small *mizuko* Jizō statue, which he placed in the temple's clinic, where Bays worked.²⁵ However, Maezumi made no attempt to explain *mizuko kuyō* to Bays or others in his community. Rather, Bays heard about *mizuko kuyō* from Rand, whom she had become friends with by the early 1990s. As a

²⁴Sunyana Graef. "Re: Water baby ceremony." Email correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Vermont Zen Center (of Shelburne, VT) abbess. 25 September 2006.

²⁵Jan Chozen Bays. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery abbess. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

child-abuse investigator in Oregon, Bays was moved by the idea of a ceremony for dead infants and decided to participate. In 1993 she took part in a water baby ceremony led by Rand at Green Gulch. She described the effect of the ceremony:

Later as I looked out the window of the plane heading back to Portland, I realized that my heart was palpably lighter. I hadn't realized how heavy the burden of sorrow was, accumulated over ten years of child-abuse work. Also relieved was the hidden sorrow of my own miscarriage twelve years before. I did not talk or think much about the miscarriage because people could not understand the long-lasting grief over an eight-week-old fetus.²⁶

This realization crystallized into resolve: "I thought, 'This ceremony has tremendous power. We have to do this ceremony in Oregon.'"²⁷ The first water baby ceremony was held at Bays' Larch Mountain Zen Center, east of Portland, on August 8, 1993. There were eleven participants, and a second ceremony was soon scheduled for just three months later, on October 2, 1993. From then on, Bays has conducted water baby ceremonies three to four times each year at Larch Mountain or Great Vow Monastery, the community's newer center founded in 2002. When she is away another female priest leads the ceremony.²⁸

In the mid-1990s, word of the ritual at Vermont Zen Center spread back to the head temple of the lineage, Rochester Zen Center. Discussion of *mizuko kuyō* began as

²⁶Bays 2001: xxvii.

²⁷Jan Chosen Bays. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery abbess. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

²⁸Kojun Hull. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery priest. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

early as 1994, and some laywomen pushed for the ritual to be performed in Rochester.²⁹ However, it took time to convince the priests in Rochester that such a ceremony was worth performing, and it is not generally approved for laypeople to hold their own ceremonies in this community. Eventually, a group of female priests and laywomen began to prepare to hold a ceremony. One laywoman flew to California and participated in Rand's ceremony, while two female priests at Rochester Zen Center received information about the ritual from Graef, including materials about how Bays conducted her ceremonies. Together this ad-hoc committee developed a plan for the ceremony, which was first performed on May 23, 1999.³⁰ The ritual leader was Sunya Kjolhede, who led fifteen participants, a mix of both regular center members and non-Buddhists who attended yoga classes held at the center.³¹ After Kjolhede, Amala Wrightson took over responsibilities for the ceremony, which was held every May for several years. When Wrightson left in 2004 to found her own temple, it became more difficult to hold regularly-scheduled ceremonies.³² However, the center continued to offer them upon request, with the male head of the temple or other priests leading it.

Around the same time as the first Rochester Zen Center ceremony, the Floating Zendo of San Jose, California, began to perform water baby rituals. Their leader, Angie Boissevain, had attended a ceremony by Rand at one of the women's conferences

²⁹Per Drougge. *Jizo Bodhisattva. Zen Bow*, vol. XVI, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 30-31; Regina McMaster [pseudonym]. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center member. 6 November 2005, her home, Rochester, NY.

³⁰Sunya Kjolhede. Personal interview with Windhorse Zen Center abbess. 17 June 2006, Windhorse Zen Center, Alexander, NC.

³¹"Water Baby Ceremony To Remember," notes, Rochester Zen Center, 1999; Diane Renison [pseudonym]. Personal interview with former Rochester Zen Center member. 2 November 2005, Starry Nite Café, Rochester, NY.

³²Wrightson does return regularly to the Rochester area for additional training and to practice outside the demands of being a teacher, however.

mentioned earlier. When students began to ask her for some help with their grief over child and pregnancy losses, she drew on her memories of that past ceremony to create her own ritual. The group has held four more water baby ceremonies since, approximately one every other year, drawing seven or eight people on average.³³

The Zen Center of Los Angeles held its first water baby ceremony in 2000, led by current abbess Wendy Egyoku Nakao, with twelve participants. As with many of the ceremonies at other temples, this one was prompted by the grief expressed by lay members of the temple. As Nakao described it:

I facilitated a healing circle on abortion, an intimate gathering of five women and four men. The circle was open to women who have had an abortion, whether therapeutic or by choice, and to men who were partners to an abortion.

No one who has ever had an abortion, or been partner to one, escapes its pain. This is not a loss we grieve openly, if we allow ourselves to grieve at all. Our grief and guilt live, as one person said, “as a shadow in the heart.” The cultural, legal, and religious postures around abortion offer little support for women and men who have lived through it. The word “abortion” itself is rather clinical, far removed from the visceral experience that it is. . .

“The thing that most impressed me about the Abortion Healing Circle,” one man wrote, “was what a big chunk of repressed anger and remorse it chipped away. I felt the aftershock up to a week later. Who would have thought that the simple acts of telling one’s story and making Jizos could bring up so much ‘negative’ emotion? It came as quite a revelation to discover that, in facing these emotions honestly, I also had to face a few lies I had told myself to keep them stored so neatly away. I’ve rarely experienced such profound grief, and better understand now how this emotion is necessary to letting go.”³⁴

³³Angie Bossevain. Telephone interview with Floating Zendo (of San Jose) abbess. 18 January 2007. Bossevain’s group was founded by Kobun Chino, a Sōtō Zen teacher associated with the San Francisco Zen Center.

³⁴Nakao, Wendy Egyokyu. “Journey to the Earth’s Womb: A Healing Council on Abortion.” *Water Wheel*, 2000 (unpaginated).

Nakao drew on LaFleur's book, ritual formats already common in her lineage, and some knowledge of Bays and Rand's ceremonies. The success of the first ceremony led to a second; the temple now holds such ceremonies whenever a need arises.³⁵

Meanwhile, laypeople had begun to approach Sevan Ross, head priest of Chicago Zen Center, and ask for help dealing with their abortions. Ross was trained at Rochester Zen Center and heard about the slowly-building plans to conduct a water baby ceremony there prior to his move to Chicago in 1996. In June 2001 the first water baby ceremony was held at Chicago Zen Center, with about a dozen participants. The ceremony was based on the ritual forms worked out at Rochester Zen Center, though Ross modified it by staying out of the room during the sewing portion because he had not personally experienced a pregnancy loss. A second ceremony was held in late summer of 2002, and a third in mid-2006, which was led by one of Ross's male priests. Despite the gap between 2002 and 2006, it is Ross's intention to hold the ceremony every other year.³⁶

Finally, the Santa Cruz Zen Center held its first water baby ceremony in 2001. The center's leader, Katherine Thanas, had participated in one of Yvonne Rand's ceremonies at Goat-in-the-Road Zendo a couple of years previously. She also consulted with Jan Bays and had someone from Bays' community assist with the first ceremony. A second ceremony was held a few years later—like many temples the Santa Cruz center holds water baby rituals as the need arises, rather than regularly scheduling them. Typical attendance is about a dozen people.³⁷

³⁵Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Personal interview with Zen Center of Los Angeles abbess. 30 June 2006, Zen Center of Los Angeles.

³⁶Sevan Ross. Personal interview with Chicago Zen Center abbot. 14 March 2006, Chicago Zen Center, Evanston, IL.

³⁷Katherine Thanas. Telephone interview with Santa Cruz Zen Center abbess. 25 January 2007.

As discussed earlier, there are other groups that have held a first water baby ceremony since 2001, but for our purposes I have focused only on those that have to date repeated the ritual and therefore made it a part of their ongoing temple practices, whether it be by performing them at specific intervals or by request. We now turn to an analysis of what this historical sketch can teach us about how convert American Zen centers learn about new ceremonies.

Following the Flows

We can observe some patterns in the transmission of these ceremonies in and through American Zen temples. First, none of them were transmitted from a first-generation Zen missionary to an American disciple.³⁸ Suzuki Shunryū, Maezumi Taizan, and the other major Japanese Zen teachers present in America in the latter half of the twentieth century must surely have been aware of *mizuko kuyō*, one of the most dramatic phenomena in post-war Japanese religion. Yet none felt a need to pass along knowledge of how Japanese Zen routinely memorializes aborted fetuses and other pregnancy losses. This is true even though these and other major figures had numerous female students, many of whom had experienced pregnancy losses.

How are we to account for this? With all of these figures now dead, it is only possible to speculate. We must therefore be cautious, but a number of possibilities do present themselves. First, most of the missionaries were radicals by Japanese standards and preached a sort of neo-Zen based on *zazen* for laypeople, rather than the normal

³⁸The only person who even consulted with a Japanese teacher was Aitken, who asked Yamada for permission to conduct the proto-water baby ceremony he had already developed and thus received information about Shingon, Tendai, and Nichiren—but not Zen—*mizuko kuyō* rituals. Some American ritualists have gone on to discuss *mizuko kuyō* with priests in Japan, but only after they had already begun to perform water baby ceremonies.

temple Zen of Japan. They may have felt that *mizuko kuyō* was superstitious and/or exploitative, and intentionally chose not to pass the practice on to Americans. Second, these Zen missionaries were quite savvy about the attitudes of their Western students, and they may have perceived that praying to a supernatural savior to alleviate the attacks of angry fetal ghosts would not offer the particular image of Zen they sought to portray. Third, it may be that these teachers, all male, were inattentive to their female students' feelings or uncomfortable discussing such intimate and gendered issues with them.³⁹ For now, all we can say for sure is that the first generation of Japanese Zen teachers did not transmit *mizuko kuyō*, a very common Zen ritual, and that nevertheless the ritual has found a place in major Zen centers run by their direct disciples.

Rather than from their teachers, the Zen priests who offer water baby ceremonies developed their rituals from a number of other sources. One of these is printed accounts: all of the American priests I interviewed had read something about *mizuko kuyō*, whether it was accounts by American Zen priests, scholarly works such as *Liquid Life* or Helen Hardacre's *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan*, or articles in popular periodicals like *The New York Times*, *Harper's*, or *Yoga Journal*. A second source was contacts with other American Buddhists. Some of these came via intra-lineal linkages, such as the flows between Rochester Zen Center, Vermont Zen Center, and Chicago Zen Center—all part of the network of temples founded by Philip Kapleau—or through interpersonal relationships. In fact, there is a rather tangled web woven between many of these individuals. For example, Jan Bays, who had a non-platonic relationship with Maezumi

³⁹Possibly arguing against this interpretation, we should note that Maezumi did counsel at least one woman who was considering abortion and apparently provided her with some sort of private ritual, and on another occasion he held a funeral for a miscarriage. Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Personal interview with Zen Center of Los Angeles abbess. 30 June 2006, Zen Center of Los Angeles.

Taizan, is married to Hogen Bays, the ex-husband of Sunya Kjolhede, who is the sister of Bodhin Kjolhede, the main successor of Philip Kapleau.⁴⁰ The goal here is not gossip but to make a crucial point about Buddhism in America: despite the presence of several million Buddhists in the United States, in the upper echelons it is quite a small pond, and many of the big fish know one another and have personal entanglements that go beyond shared lineage. In tracking the transmission of knowledge about Buddhism through these communities, be it about a practice, a doctrine, or an icon, it pays to give attention not only to the obvious connections of lineage but also the more subtle but often more important shared histories of the actual individuals involved.

One more source for these rituals is much less involved: to a certain extent, these teachers just made them up. While all of them drew on some knowledge of Japanese Buddhist rituals, and modified their ceremonies as more information about *mizuko kuyō* became available, they readily filled in the gaps in their knowledge with their own invention. Angie Boissevain, the leader of the Floating Zendo, explained this attitude to me toward ritual in general:

[Kobun Chino Roshi] taught us very little. He taught us *oryōki*, and the *Heart Sutra*, how to do the ceremony at the altar, and that's about it for a long time. As some of us got older and were asked to teach at various places, we were eventually asked to do weddings and things like that. We would go to Kobun and ask how to do them, and he would say "Make it up." . . . So my own way of learning has been a lot of making it up. I just met again a woman in Switzerland, a woman who I had met before, and we got to talking about rituals and she said that she didn't know how to do anything and Kobun told her just to make it up. And she's now transmitted and has her own place, so I bundled up and sent her all the things we've accumulated. So I think that's what we mostly do, is pass around what we've done. I found that I had two new baby ceremonies that people had sent me, and an eye-opening ceremony that someone had sent me. A couple of weddings. In the AZTA listserve people just write back and forth: "Hey, does

⁴⁰Sevan Ross. Personal interview with Chicago Zen Center abbot. 14 March 2006, Chicago Zen Center, Evanston, IL.

anybody know how to do a house blessing?” And then several people write back with their versions of how to bless a house. So it’s very curious how we’re doing this. There is a book, Shasta Abbey has a book with all the ceremonies in it in the Sōjiji style. But most of us I think are just kind of winging it.⁴¹

There is something remarkable about this attitude. Few American water baby purveyors have seen a *mizuko kuyō* performed, whether in America or Japan. They discuss it informally among themselves, sometimes as a committee, and some merely read about it in a book and proceed. Indeed, books like *Jizō Bodhisattva* give step-by-step instructions with the assumption that a reader can then go off on their own and do it. And some believe you can just make up ritual. This contrasts sharply with their idea of meditation. These same teachers push the idea that meditation must be done in the context of a teacher-student relationship, that it must be formally practiced, preferably at a temple among a community of co-practitioners. Many assert that one can read about it in a book but will never truly succeed without personal guidance. In Japan, on the other hand, a priest would most likely receive instruction and sanction for both meditation and *mizuko kuyō* from a teacher, such as one’s preceptor.⁴²

There are two important points for future researchers that should be gleaned from this. First, American Buddhist communities are not necessarily good representations of Asian Buddhist practices. This means that investigation of convert activities has the potential to create misunderstanding of Asian Buddhist practices, especially when comparable research on practices is not performed in Japan or other Asian Buddhist

⁴¹ Angie Bossevain. Telephone interview with Floating Zendo (of San Jose) abbess. 18 January 2007. *Oryoki* is a ritualized form of eating employed in some Zen monasteries. The AZTA is the American Zen Teachers’ Association; their listserve is an email chat group. Shasta Abbey is a convert Sōtō Zen monastery in Shasta, CA. Sōjiji is one of the two main Sōtō Zen monastic training headquarters in Japan.

⁴² We can see this dynamic for example in Kojima Shūmyō of Zenshuji Soto Mission, discussed in chapter one, who received his *mizuko kuyō* from the teacher who raised him. Kojima Shūmyō. Personal interview with Zenshuji Soto Mission priest. 18 January 2007, Zenshuji Soto Mission, Los Angeles, CA

countries.⁴³ Secondly, the presence of a ritual within American convert temples does not necessarily mean that it was derived from an Asian practice, even when an analogous practice exists within Japanese or other Asian traditions. Researchers must bear in mind the need to directly investigate the source of all practices within convert Buddhist temples—what seems at first glance to be a transplanted activity may well turn out to be a wholly original ritual that just coincidentally bears a resemblance to an Asian practice.

In examining the lineage links, we see other surprising disjunctions. Not only did none of the purveyors of water baby ceremonies receive the ritual from a Japanese missionary priest, none received it from their own American teachers either. None of the Americans described earlier in this chapter is a disciple of any of the others. Instead they are all what we might loosely call “Dharma brothers and sisters,” priests of the same generation and mainly the same rank, who studied parallel to one another, in some cases together in the same communities.⁴⁴ While we see cases of the ritual subsequently being passed from American master to American disciple once it is established in a community—from Jan Bays to her priests, for example—we also see surprising examples of back-flow *up* the ladder of Zen hierarchy. Thus, Bodhin Kjolhede, abbot of the

⁴³There is an obvious application of this point for classroom pedagogy as well. Many professors enjoy bringing in local convert Buddhist leaders to speak on Buddhism to their undergraduate students. However, we must be aware of the potential for misrepresentation of Asian forms by American converts. An American convert in a Japanese-derived Zen lineage may understand *zazen*, say, in ways significantly different from how actual Japanese practitioners would, and thus may offer a sincere but highly inaccurate portrait to a class on Japanese religion.

⁴⁴Here again I am specifically referring to those who practice the full water baby ceremony, rather than the proto-water baby ceremony designed by Robert Aitken. Aitken would not fit this description, as he is older and, while not Japanese, was himself a foundational figure for the first generation of convert Zen (although we can note that none of these other water baby ceremony proponents is a direct disciple of his). He too did not receive the ritual directly from his teachers and invented his ritual in part based on his own intuition, not Japanese precedent.

American Zen flagship temple Rochester Zen Center, conducted a water baby ceremony after being taught about it by subordinate female priests and laypeople at his temple.⁴⁵

Zen practitioners did receive some information about *mizuko kuyō* in Japan, and all justify their water baby ceremonies by reference to the Japanese ritual. So we can say that even after the death of the founding Japanese teacher, convert Zen communities remain pervious to new ideas and rituals from Japan. Yet we can also note that none of these convert Zen practitioners learned about the ceremony from Japanese-American Buddhist communities. As explained in chapter two, there are a number of mainly Japanese-American temples in the United States that have been performing *mizuko kuyō* at least since 1978. One of these is Zenshuji, the oldest Zen temple in mainland America, which is presided over by the bishop of all American Sōtō Zen establishments. Less than four miles away, Wendy Nakao of the Sōtō-affiliated Zen Center of Los Angeles was unaware of the practice at Zenshuji.⁴⁶ In some cases at least, it seems fair to observe that convert Zen practitioners are more likely to interact with Japanese temples 5,500 miles across the Pacific than with non-white Zen Buddhist communities in their own cities.

Forces Driving the Spread of Water Baby Ceremonies

Both external and internal forces have played a part in the rise of American Zen rituals for pregnancy loss. As I noted in the introduction, abortion was legalized in the United States in 1973, and it is soon thereafter that Yvonne Rand and Robert Aitken began to offer the first convert Zen rituals for dealing with the effects of abortion. The

⁴⁵Emily Kennett [pseudonym]. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center member. 2 November 2005, Rochester Zen Center.

⁴⁶Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Personal interview with Zen Center of Los Angeles abbess. 22 January 2007, Zen Center of Los Angeles.

number of American abortions rose from 1973 to 1990, peaking at 1,429,247 annually, before declining to approximately 850,000 today.⁴⁷ This period after 1993 also roughly corresponds to the greatest expansion of convert Buddhism in America. The women's movement, both influential in legalizing abortion and stimulated in turn by the new possibilities unleashed by greater reproductive options (and the new need to vigorously defend them from conservative opposition) also expanded and diversified during this period, and during the 1980s brought about significant changes in attitudes within American Zen, especially toward models of leadership.⁴⁸ With so many more abortions occurring and growing cultural attention paid to women's needs and opinions—as well as gradually increasing opportunities for female leadership in American Zen—the situation developed in directions favorable to the emergence of ritualization around abortion and other potentially traumatic pregnancy losses.

In the growth of water baby ceremonies we can discern forces of both supply and demand. In many cases, it was laypeople who prompted their community leaders to offer some sort of ritual recognition and healing of pregnancy loss. Zen priests followed up on this demand by studying pre-existing models for water baby ceremonies or developing their own. At the same time, supply is clearly a driving force behind this growing phenomenon. Some leaders heard about or participated in water baby ceremonies in other locations, and then decided to offer them to their own students on a trial basis to see

⁴⁷The primary reason for the decline can be tied to demographics: since 1990 the Baby Boomers have experienced menopause. The most reliable figures available are from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Their current public records do not go past 2003, but 850,000 was the approximate number of abortions in the United States from 2000-2003, making it likely that in 2007 this ballpark figure still holds true. See Straus et. al. *Abortion Surveillance—United States, 2003*. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2006. Available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5511a1.htm>.

⁴⁸Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Personal interview with Zen Center of Los Angeles abbess. 22 January 2007, Zen Center of Los Angeles.

if there was sufficient interest. Books like *Liquid Life* and *Jizō Bodhisattva* set off waves of new ritualization as communities learned about previously unknown facets of Buddhist practice. The fortunes of the water baby ceremony have also risen and waned with changing local supply and demand. Some communities do the ceremony infrequently because their membership is not high enough to regularly provide potential participants who still need to resolve previous abortions and miscarriages. Others have members who would like to do a water baby ceremony but no longer have resident priests dedicated to providing the service. The continued spread of the ceremony, at least in its current form, thus relies both on more priests becoming involved in offering the ritual and in ever more temple members, especially laypeople, desiring the ceremony.

One interesting detail about the water baby purveyors is that prior religious affiliation is not a good predictor of which convert Zen practitioners will take to such rituals, and perhaps by extension to other rituals as well. For instance, Jan Bays grew up in an active Disciples of Christ family that disliked religious icons or elaborate rituals. Her initial reactions to Jizō at the Zen Center of Los Angeles were ambivalent. She liked a simple statue out in the garden, but balked at a more ornate *mizuko* Jizō:

Roshi went to Japan and he brought back a golden Jizō statue with some children, like a *mizuko* Jizō, for the clinic. We put it up in the clinic. But I was raised Protestant, and I looked at these images and I was like, “Um, hmmm, that’s a little dicey there, these images!” [chuckles] So I didn’t really personally relate to it, but we had a lot of poor Mexican-American immigrants at the clinic and I think they liked it. It was like a saint.⁴⁹

Yet today Bays is arguably the most prominent missionary of Jizō bodhisattva—she is the de facto leader of the Jizō movement which will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁴⁹Jan Chosen Bays. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery abbess. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

Leaders of water baby ceremonies come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including Protestants, Catholics, and smaller religions such as Tenrikyō.

Bodhisattva Movements in Convert Buddhism

In addition to the factors cited so far, there is another phenomenon that needs to be taken into account when considering the rise and spread of water baby ceremonies. This is the development of bodhisattva-oriented movements within American convert Buddhism. Not unified factions but rather a confluence of loosely-connected currents running through (and out of) American Buddhism, the growth of interest in such bodhisattvas as Kwan Yin and Jizō has contributed to increased performance of water baby ceremonies and, in turn, been reinforced by the spread of these rituals.⁵⁰ The presence of bodhisattva devotion in convert American Buddhism has not received scholarly attention, but despite their disorganized state they are among the more intriguing developments in Western Buddhism since the 1980s. Because these movements have not been previously described, it is necessary to spend some time exploring their parameters before discussing how they influence water baby ceremonies.

Knowledge of bodhisattvas, especially Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri, has been present to some degree in convert Buddhism from the beginning. Nonetheless, what I wish to call attention to is the rise in devotion by convert Buddhists to particular Buddhist mythological figures. Where earlier periods in American Buddhism saw bodhisattvas relatively marginalized, appearing as a statue here or there or a few words about what this or that bodhisattva represents, they are now a visibly growing presence in American Zen

⁵⁰Kwan Yin is a somewhat archaic spelling for the bodhisattva Guanyin. However, as will become clear below, I have good reasons for choosing this spelling. See note 53.

and other traditions, with a substantial industry of bodhisattva-related products, books advocating devotion to such figures, and large numbers of converts claiming Kwan Yin or Jizō as integral parts of their Buddhist practice. Many Kwan Yin or Jizō devotees are quite self-conscious in their attempts to attract newcomers to these movements and increase the profile of their favorite figure in Buddhist circles. Moreover, this shift corresponds roughly to the periodization of proto- and full water baby movements, and attention to one development helps shed light on the evolution of the other.

Although they are centered on devotion to a particular figure, I call these phenomena “bodhisattva movements,” as in “the Kwan Yin *movement*,” rather than “the Kwan Yin *cult*.” The primary reason for this decision is that devotion to Kwan Yin, for instance, is widespread but also diffuse—there are no groups specifically dedicated to worshipping Kwan Yin and no temples founded in order to offer devotions to this figure.⁵¹ Rather, the Kwan Yin movement is made up of individuals across a range of groups and also those belonging to no group in particular, and takes place within Buddhist institutions and other sites where loyalties do not lie solely with Kwan Yin. Devotion to Kwan Yin augments pre-existing practices and does not create sustainable new communities. The same is true of Jizō. A secondary reason is that while Kwan Yin is called upon for general guidance, support, and inspiration, the bodhisattva is not usually petitioned for physical or material ends, such as pregnancy, easy childbirth, healthy

⁵¹I must stress here that the phenomenon I am talking about is one within convert Buddhism specifically. Asian-American Buddhist communities also include devotion to various bodhisattvas, and the presence of such devotion in these communities sometimes reinforces the devotion or interest of converts. Kwan Yin and Jizō are not “owned” by either birthright or convert Buddhists. But devotion to these figures in non-convert communities is part of an inherited tradition that stretches back more or less seamlessly to earlier periods of American history and further into the Asian past. This contrasts with what I am trying to point out: the recent “explosion” of interest in bodhisattvas among convert Buddhists, who learn about, think about, and practice in relationship to these figures in ways quite different in certain respects from cultural Buddhists.

children, alleviation of specific physical problems (blindness, back pain, incontinence, etc), success in school, or other practical benefits associated with bodhisattva cults in Asia. I should stress, however, that these are only broad trends, as there is some exception to this general rule with Jizō and the water baby ceremony.

The rise in attention to bodhisattvas in American Buddhism can be seen in the popularity of Taigen Dan Leighton's book *Bodhisattva Archetypes: Classic Buddhist Guides to Awakening and Their Modern Expression*. Leighton is a priest in the American Sōtō Zen lineage of Suzuki Shunryū. Explicitly conceived as a way to encourage appreciation of bodhisattvas by Westerners, Leighton's book focuses on seven figures from the Buddhist tradition: Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha prior to his awakening), Manjushri, Samantabhadra, Avalokiteshvara (Kwan Yin), Kshitigarbha (Jizō), Maitreya, and Vimalakirti. Although he presents them as psychological forces and role models, the book nonetheless contains many miracle stories and significant information about devotional practices associated with these bodhisattvas, from pilgrimage to Kwan Yin's Pure Land of Putoushan to Jizō and the rituals of *mizuko kuyō*.⁵² The book thus reinforces the tendency of American Zen to psychologize Buddhism and simultaneously undercuts it with elements often perceived as "superstitious" in convert Zen. Furthermore, while preserving a prominent place for modern reconstructed ideas of the historical Buddha—a perennial icon in Western Buddhism—it also decenters him by offering multiple alternative (and ahistorical) objects of veneration in the form of cosmic bodhisattvas. We can see in this work of the late 1990s a bridge between an earlier

⁵²Taigen Dan Leighton. *Bodhisattva Archetypes: Classic Buddhist Guides to Awakening and Their Modern Expression*. New York: Penguin Arkana, 1998. The enduring popularity of this book can be seen in its reprinting by Wisdom Publications in 2003 under the name *Faces of Compassion: Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression*. Leighton mentions *mizuko kuyō* a number of times and discusses the phenomenon at greater length in the chapter on Jizō. See Leighton 1998: 217-219.

“Protestant Zen” that resisted elements other than meditation and avoided savior figures and ritual, and more recent reappraisals of ceremony, saviors, and devotion. *Bodhisattva Archetypes* reflects growing interest in these figures among American Buddhists and also contributed significantly to greater interest among both priests and laypeople.⁵³

The Kwan Yin Movement

The first bodhisattva movement to consider is that of Kwan Yin, which, as the most widely spread and popular one, as well as the one that appears first in the historical record, provides a useful model that can then be applied to the Jizō movement and perhaps others that may arise in the future. Avalokiteshvara, the Indian bodhisattva of great compassion, is widely revered in Buddhist Asia. The bodhisattva appears in many forms, such as Chenrezi in Tibetan Buddhism, where he receives frequent devotion. But one specific form of Avalokiteshvara has enjoyed a particularly high profile in American Buddhism. This is Kwan Yin, the bodhisattva as understood in East Asia, and specifically Kwan Yin depicted as a woman.⁵⁴ The most popular form of Kwan Yin in America shows her in a flowing white robe with a high cowl, holding a willow branch and a vase. Amitabha Buddha is usually depicted seated between her eyebrows and she often stands on the head of a dragon, near the seashore, or against the backdrop of a full

⁵³Leighton’s work on bodhisattvas was often referenced by my consultants and is drawn upon by many figures in the Kwan Yin and Jizō movements which I describe.

⁵⁴Kwan Yin is only one possible spelling of the bodhisattva’s name, and is in fact somewhat archaic. Other spellings include Kwan-yin, Kwanyin, Kuan Yin, Kuan-yin, Kuanyin, Kuan-shih-yin, Quanyin, and Guanyin, with the last, the Pinyin spelling, being perhaps the most faithful to the Chinese pronunciation. Additionally, in Japan this same incarnation of Avalokiteshvara is known as Kannon, Kanzeon, or Kanjizai, in Korea as Kwan Um, and in Vietnam as Quan Am. All of these versions can be found in American convert writings on the bodhisattva. However, I have chosen to term the new devotion the “Kwan Yin movement” because it is this spelling that is most frequently used by Americans, and is used by a number of key figures in the movement, such as Sandy Boucher (see her 1999 book, *Discovering Kwan Yin*). I am not arguing for the use of this spelling by Sinologists but rather suggesting its adoption in relation to a specific stream of thought and practice in American convert Buddhism.

moon. Sometimes a child or children accompany this Kwan Yin, in some cases cradled in her arms. A second image that is tremendously popular is of the bodhisattva seated with right leg raised in the pose of “royal ease.” This is a specific statue: the “Water and Moon Kuanyin Bodhisattva” held in the collection of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri.⁵⁵ Although iconographically distinct in the minds of art historians, in convert Buddhism these two forms seem to have been collapsed into a single idea of the “Buddhist goddess of mercy.” Ironically, the Kansas City Kuanyin is actually a male figure, but Americans persistently mistake it for female, and it is the perceptions that are important in this case. Together these two forms of the bodhisattva are among the most easily recognizable images in American Buddhism, and it is likely that the majority of contemporary practitioners can readily identify either as Kwan Yin.⁵⁶

Sometimes historians are faced with a difficult challenge in explaining why a particular figure or image becomes popular with a specific religious demographic. Luckily, no such difficulties pertain in the case of Kwan Yin. This bodhisattva is increasingly favored by convert Buddhists for some very obvious reasons, which her devotees are happy to explain. The first is gender: among a constellation of male Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats, Kwan Yin stands out as a *female* bodhisattva. She thus attracts the attention of many convert Buddhist women, particularly those who are actively looking for feminist or at least overtly woman-friendly approaches to Buddhism. For women who have left forms of Judaism or Protestant Christianity that are dominated

⁵⁵ This figure is also sometimes referred to as the “Seated Kuanyin Bodhisattva.” The Water and Moon Kuanyin Bodhisattva, 11th/12th Century. Wood with paint, Height 95 inches (241.3 cm). Northern Sung (CE 960-1127) or Liao (CE 907-1125) Dynasty. Purchase: Nelson Trust [34-10]. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

⁵⁶ Avalokiteshvara has many, many other forms as well. Especially popular in East Asia is the eleven-headed, thousand-hand Guanyin. This and other forms can be found in convert American Buddhism depictions but are on the whole considerably less common than the two forms described above.

by male deity images, Kwan Yin is a welcome alternative; for women who have left Catholicism she is a warm reminder of the Virgin Mary, yet without the same negative implications for women's sexuality. Kwan Yin represents to convert women an affirmation that they too have a place in Buddhism. For both women and men, Kwan Yin's female gender makes her more approachable than the Buddha or Manjushri.

Beyond gender, two closely connected aspects of the bodhisattva make her particularly appealing to convert Buddhists. First is her status as the embodiment of compassion, arguably valued even more highly than wisdom by these practitioners. Second is her ability to take on any form in order to help those in need. This is a characteristic of her compassionate activity, which is implicitly tied to her gender by Americans (women are often assumed to be the more caring and helpful sex by Americans, Buddhist or otherwise), and together these qualities of adaptable female compassion stand out as uniquely Buddhist contributions to religion.⁵⁷

Finally, Kwan Yin is valued because she not only embodies these valued traits, but, unlike ancient goddesses such as Athena or Isis, she has an enormous body of worshippers in the modern world. Adherents of the Kwan Yin movement thus do not feel they are attached to an abstract Goddess artificially imagined in order to balance out the male vision of God, or to the dead cult of a lost religion, but instead they see themselves as co-practitioners with hundreds of millions of others around the world. The sheer

⁵⁷It is not my wish to argue that such qualities or analogous figures are in fact absent in non-Buddhist religions. I am simply reporting the attitudes and feelings of American Buddhists, who largely believe Kwan Yin to be uniquely relevant in these respects. On the matter of Avalokitesvara's flexible compassion being a female trait, as often alleged by American consultants, it is worth noting that in the chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* that most embodies this idea the bodhisattva is considered *male*. The willingness to help others in any situation was a trait of this bodhisattva before it was transformed into a female in China—in fact, the male into female transformation was likely a manifestation of this adaptability—but American Buddhists consistently derive her compassionate mutability from the fact of her femaleness, reversing the arrow of history. The definitive work on this history is Chun-fang Yu. *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokitesvara*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

number of Kwan Yin devotees in East Asia enables new devotees in the U.S. to feel that they are in solidarity with a large group, rather than scattered individuals subsumed in an American culture that overwhelmingly affirms the male image of deity.

Kwan Yin has been present in American Buddhism since the arrival of the Chinese in the late 1840s. But her ascension in convert circles dates much more recently. While we can see traces of her in earlier decades, the Kwan Yin movement really began to snowball in the late 1980s and 1990s. A number of publications are particularly relevant here. First is a 1988 reprint of *Bodhisattva of Compassion: The Mystical Tradition of Kuan Yin* by John Blofeld. Although originally published in 1977, the 1988 edition made a far larger impact because it was produced by Shambhala Publications, the preeminent English-language Buddhist press. Blofeld's book rambles over the Buddhist landscape exploring various aspects of Kwan Yin, but primarily it is fascinated with the bodhisattva's female aspect and her worship in China. The book was widely quoted, including an excerpt in a special section devoted to Avalokiteshvara in the spring 1996 issue of *Tricycle*, the primary Buddhist magazine for English readers.⁵⁸

In 1997 Sandy Boucher published *Opening the Lotus: A Woman's Guide to Buddhism*. Boucher's book specifically singles out Kwan Yin as an ideal object of devotion for American Buddhists. She describes how she herself came to be a devotee of the bodhisattva in 1982, when a friend took her to the Nelson-Atkins Museum specifically to introduce her to Kwan Yin.

In the museum we entered a high-ceilinged room empty except for a splendid statue of a woman. She was about life size, with Asian features, dressed in

⁵⁸John Blofeld. "Kuan Yin." *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. vol. 5, no. 3, (Spring 1996): 30-31. The appearance of this special section indicates the growth of devotion to Kwan Yin. Predictably, the Nelson-Atkins Kuanyin is one of the images used to illustrate the section.

gorgeous loose red trousers, a gold robe, wearing a jeweled crown, many bracelets, and long dangling earrings. She sat with one leg up, knee bent, foot on the seat on which she sat, her arm balanced casually on this upraised knee. She braced herself with her other arm. Her eyelids were nearly closed, as if we had come upon her in some sort of relaxed reverie.

“How beautiful!” I burst out.

“Yes,” my companion said. “This is Kwan Yin.”

“Kwan Yin,” I repeated. I had never heard those words before, had known nothing of this female figure, even though I had begun Buddhist meditation the previous year. . .

Her serenity and power gradually reached out to me, engaged my senses until it held me there before her, filled with something like happiness and sorrow all mixed together. Mysteriously the space between us had become palpable; indeed the whole cavernous room seemed vibrant in her presence. . .

She had come from that distant past on the other side of the world to sit, as tranquil as a lake on a windless day, here in a museum on the Great Plains of America. I was grateful for her presence.

As I drove east the next day, leaving the expanse of the Great Plains behind and entering the more densely populated industrial part of the Midwest, I kept a postcard of Kwan Yin, bought at the museum, on the car seat next to me. Sometimes I glanced at her, and without understanding why or how, I knew that I had set out upon a relationship with a being who embodied something profound, at once deeply female and universally human.⁵⁹

This image in the Kansas City museum seems to have the power to transfix viewers.

They also project onto it what they want to see, because Boucher, like many others, was mistaken about the one thing she most valued about the statue. As stated earlier, although admittedly rather androgynous in with its supple form and pursed lips, the Nelson-Atkins Kuanyin is male.

Boucher followed up in 1999 with *Discovering Kwan Yin, Buddhist Goddess of Compassion: A Woman's Book of Ruminations, Meditations, Prayers, and Chants*. The book, which opens with a quote from Blofeld's work, is a manifesto of sorts that asserts through numerous examples the importance of the bodhisattva in the lives of many American women, Buddhist and otherwise. She proudly proclaims that

⁵⁹Sandy Boucher. *Opening the Lotus: A Woman's Guide to Buddhism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1997: 57-59.

As the feminine reasserts itself in Western spirituality, a towering female figure has arrived on our shores from Asia. Her name is Kwan Yin. She is the most revered goddess in all of Asia, and Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese immigrants naturally brought her with them when they came here. But her presence has also reached beyond the immigrant communities to enter the lives of countless European-Americans.⁶⁰

Boucher now leads workshops on Kwan Yin around the country. Other recent Buddhist works on Kwan Yin include *Kuan Yin: Myths and Revelations of the Chinese Goddess of Compassion* by Martin Palmer et. al. and *Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World* by Christina Feldman, and a host of New Age titles that purport to channel or otherwise reveal secret teachings of the bodhisattva goddess.⁶¹

Material and visual culture and marketing are another fruitful site to examine for evidence of the Kwan Yin movement. The Nelson-Atkins Museum Guanyin has appeared on the cover of many publications in the past ten years, including a translation of *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and *Shambhala Sun*, the most important English-language Buddhist periodical after *Tricycle*.⁶² When Shambhala sought to launch a new quarterly to directly compete with *Tricycle* they chose the Nelson-Atkins Guanyin to grace the

⁶⁰Sandy Boucher. *Discovering Kwan Yin, Buddhist Goddess of Compassion*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999: 1.

⁶¹Martin Palmer, Jay Ramsay, and Man-Ho Kwok. *Kuan Yin: Myths and Revelations of the Chinese Goddess of Compassion*. London and San Francisco: Thorsons, 1995; Christina Feldman. *Compassion: Listening to the Cries of the World*. Berkeley: Rodmell Press, 2005. Feldman's book received wide exposure through excerpts in *Shambhala Sun* and *The Best Buddhist Writing of 2006*. A partial list of New Age titles include Quanyin (through Dan Klatt). *Experience Unconditional Love This Year*. Sedona, AZ: Cellular Publishing, 1999; Penelope Genter. *Returning Home: A Workbook for Following Your Path to Ascension—Channeled Lessons from Mother Mary, Merlin, and Quan Yin*. Cedar Crest, NM: MMB Publishing 2002; Hope Bradford and Lena Lees. *The Living Word of Kuan Yin: The Teachings & Prophecies of the Goddess of Compassion & Mercy*. Charleston, SC: BookSurge Publishing, 2006; and dozens of more general books on goddesses and female spirituality.

⁶²Padmakara Translation Group. *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Boston and London: Shambhala Publications, 1997; *Shambhala Sun*, vol. 14, no. 5 (May 2006).

cover of their initial issue (figure 3.1).⁶³ Innumerable other depictions of Kwan Yin have also appeared on or in materials intended for convert Buddhists.

Kwan Yin is also sold directly as a painting, photograph, or statue. Often one can simply go to the nearest gardening store to find not only Buddhas but also Kwan Yins. There are a number of specialized merchants, most connected to actual American Buddhist communities, which sell meditation cushions, incense, Buddhist statuary, and other goods. The largest is DharmaCrafts, run by the Kwan Um (i.e. Kwan Yin) lineage of Korean convert Zen. Their large glossy catalogs contain many pages of Kwan Yin statues for sale, including reproductions of the Nelson-Atkins Kuanyin.⁶⁴ Zen Mountain Monastery's Dharma Communications also offers multiple Kwan Yins, as do other popular merchants such as Samadhi Cushions, Ziji, Neko-Chan, and Amida.⁶⁵ Some of the large Buddhist presses sell images of Kwan Yin, such as Shambhala Publications.⁶⁶

One of the interesting phenomena turned up by attention to material culture is the prevalence of Kwan Yin devotion among Vipassana (Insight Meditation) practitioners. Textbook descriptions of Buddhist traditions would suggest that Kwan Yin should not be present in the Vipassana movement, which is derived from reformist trends in modern Theravada Buddhism. Not only is Theravada Buddhism supposedly uninvolved in the worship of transcendent bodhisattvas, but the Vipassana movement specifically is alleged

⁶³*Buddhadharma: The Practitioner's Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Fall 2002).

⁶⁴DharmaCraft catalogs in my collection run from 2001 to 2007. All contain multiple pages devoted solely to Kwan Yin figures, as well as scattered other Kwan Yin products on other pages. See for instance *DharmaCrafts: The Catalog of Meditation Supplies*, Spring 2006. DharmaCrafts.com lists three Kwan Yins among their bestselling products, making Kwan Yin the most popular image they offer.

⁶⁵Dharma Communications offers both prints and statuary reproductions of the Nelson-Atkins Kuanyin as well as other versions of the bodhisattva. See for instance *The Monastery Store: Dharma Communications Fall & Winter 2006 Catalog*, 2006. For the other vendors see www.samadhicushions.com, www.ziji.com, www.neko-chan.com, and www.ami-da.com.

⁶⁶See www.shambhala.com for listings of their many Kannon scrolls, for instance.

to be particularly aniconic and disdainful of more “religious” elements in Buddhism. Yet Kwan Yin is venerated by converts committed to Vipassana practice, such as Sandy Boucher and Christina Feldman, and appears regularly on the altars of Vipassana centers and individual practitioners in America. Wendy Cadge notes, for instance, that Kwan Yin was specifically introduced to the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center in order to balance the male images of the Buddha; it is her female gender that they value⁶⁷. Similarly, in my fieldwork in Richmond, VA, many Vipassana practitioners told me that they had Kwan Yin statues on their home altars.

The Jizō Movement

The Kwan Yin movement is important to understanding the Jizō movement and water baby ceremonies for several reasons. First, it demonstrates a growing interest in transcendent bodhisattvas on the part of both convert Buddhists and non-Buddhists. This interest, sparked initially by Kwan Yin, provides an opening for additional figures such as Jizō. The avenues of transmission established by the Kwan Yin movement—books on single bodhisattvas, images sold through Buddhist supply catalogs, workshops or projects devoted to a specific figure, and so on—are followed by subsequent movements. Avenues not yet taken by Jizō, such as Kwan Yin’s widespread adoption by elements of the New Age movement, point to potential future developments in the Jizō movement. Most intriguing, the adoption of Kwan Yin by participants in the non-Mahayana Vipassana movement suggests the possibility of the Jizō movement impacting convert strains of Theravada Buddhism as well. This potentially could lead to the creation of Theravada water baby ceremonies. Whether they would remain largely as-is or would be

⁶⁷Cadge 2004: 62.

substantially changed in the process of leaving the realm of Mahayana Buddhism is an open question. It is worth noting that the first venue in which Yvonne Rand publicized her water baby ceremonies was *Inquiring Mind*, a Vipassana periodical. Also noteworthy is the participation of convert practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. One example is Kimberley Snow's account of her participation in one of Yvonne Rand's ceremonies described in *In Buddha's Kitchen*.⁶⁸ Perhaps convert Vajrayana water baby ceremonies will become yet another development of *mizuko kuyō*.

Secondly, these figures are often closely associated by Western Buddhists. Both are described as healers, comforters, and figures of compassion. The Kwan Yin movement makes a direct impact on the Jizō movement by encouraging more feminine depictions of Jizō—many of my consultants intentionally or inadvertently used the pronoun “she” in describing Jizō, and Jan Bays switches between “he” and “she” frequently in *Jizō Bodhisattva*. There is a tendency among Americans to think of Jizō as androgynous-leaning-female rather than male-leaning-androgynous as typically understood in Japan, a phenomenon that appears not only in use of the feminine pronoun and conceptual pairings of Kwan Yin and Jizō, but also in material culture, such as the decidedly female-looking garden Jizōs sold by Great Vow Monastery and used by a number of Zen centers for their water baby ceremonies.

A third reason for paying attention to the Kwan Yin movement is that while this dissertation focuses on Jizō as the preeminent water baby bodhisattva, Kwan Yin plays a role in the ceremony. Most centers include the *Enmei Juku Kannon Gyō*, a chant dedicated to Kwan Yin, in their water baby ceremonies, and images of Kwan Yin are often present in “Jizō gardens” at American Zen centers. Although with less frequency

⁶⁸Snow 2003: 78-82

than Jizō images, these Kwan Yin images do regularly receive offerings and veneration as alternative figures to Jizō. Those who prefer Kwan Yin—perhaps they are already her devotees, or perhaps they wish to pray for help with their lost pregnancies to a female figure—are encouraged to direct their attentions during the water baby ceremony to this figure instead.⁶⁹ Devotion to Kwan Yin thus plays a role in the spread and development of water baby ceremonies, albeit a minor one compared to that of Jizō.⁷⁰

While Kwan Yin enjoys greater overall popularity in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist circles in America, she also has a far longer and stronger history in American Buddhism and is a more frequent object of devotion in Asia than Jizō. She is a female figure depicted as a goddess or queen and thus fills a void in Buddhism, attracting a natural constituency of women. Jizō, on the other hand, is a male monk with few flashy incarnations who received very little attention for most of Zen's history in the USA. Jizō does not appear frequently in convert Buddhism prior to the rise of the water baby ceremony. When he did appear, it was primarily as a sort of patron saint of and *for* children. For instance, Rochester Zen Center developed a celebration for the children of the community and shaped the festivities around the figure of Jizō, with candy, stories, and so on. Jizō was not often presented as a bodhisattva for adults, however, who make up the overwhelming majority of members of the convert Buddhist community.

This began to change, however, in connection to the water baby ceremony during the 1990s. As documented above, Jizō had a connection to death and ritual from the

⁶⁹This is not an original American adaptation. *Mizuko* Kannon is a common figure in contemporary Japan, though outnumbered by *mizuko* Jizō.

⁷⁰At present, no convert Zen temple performs a water baby ceremony dedicated solely to Kwan Yin rather than Jizō. But because her popularity is significantly greater than that of Jizō, it is conceivable that the Kwan Yin movement may eventually co-opt the water baby ceremony and begin to present post-pregnancy loss rituals that exclude Jizō entirely.

beginning for Yvonne Rand, the foremost proponent of the water baby ceremony, and her rituals for pregnancy loss have always centered on this bodhisattva. It is largely from this initial source that the interest in Jizō has grown. Knowledge of Jizō and the water baby ceremony have gone hand-in-hand, with interest in one naturally leading to awareness of the other. Just as Kwan Yin has a particularly prominent promoter in Sandy Boucher, Jizō plays a major role for Jan Bays, whose particular interest in Jizō originally stems from participation in Rand's ceremony. Jizō has a strongly noticeable presence in Bays' community, not least because her monastery houses a collection of more than 1,000 Jizō figures of various shapes and sizes and performs the water baby ceremony at least four times a year. Zenworks, the Buddhist supplies service run by Bays' community, annually sells approximately 300 home-crafted Jizō images in more than a dozen different styles, including *mizuko* Jizōs and related designs (figure 3.2).⁷¹ Her book *Jizo Bodhisattva*, which includes full instructions on holding water baby ceremonies, helped introduce the bodhisattva to many Americans just as Boucher's *Discovering Kwan Yin* has done with that figure.

However, while providing the historical impetus for the Jizō movement, the water baby ceremony is now only one manifestation of this rising American interest in the bodhisattva. For example, in 2005 Bays' community carried out a project that dramatically contributed to the meteoric rise of this bodhisattva in the consciousness of American convert Buddhists. After a visit to Hiroshima in 2002, Bays decided to return three years later on the sixtieth anniversary of the atomic bombings and present 270,000 Jizōs to the Japanese, one for every person who died in the first year from the Hiroshima

⁷¹Zenworks is in fact alternately known as Gentle Jizōs. Jan Chozen Bays. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery abbess. 20 January 2007, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

and Nagasaki bombs.⁷² She called on Buddhists and sympathizers everywhere to create Jizō images, pray for peace, and send their Jizōs to her for presentation in Japan. Publicized both by word of mouth and convert Buddhist associations such as the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, the project was successful beyond anyone's expectations. At least 100 Buddhist temples and meditation groups from all fifty states, as well as twenty countries, contributed more than 400,000 Jizōs.⁷³ Bays led a forty-person pilgrimage group to Japan and gave Jizōs away as a gesture of peace and reconciliation on the anniversary of the American attacks, and since the anniversary the remaining Jizōs have toured as exhibits in the United States, Japan, and Europe.

As with Kwan Yin, the wider interest in Jizō can be seen by the bodhisattva's presence in Buddhist supplies catalogs. Not only Zenworks but also DharmaCrafts, Dharma Communications, and many others now offer Jizō statues for sale. Some come from the workshop of Zenworks while others are imports from China, Taiwan, Japan, or, less frequently, are American-made. The material culture of Jizō is often on display in Jizōs for Peace pictures, cloth panels, or banners that hang in many convert Zen temples (figure 3.3).⁷⁴ Jizō also appears in the ceremonies of non-Buddhists, as will be further discussed in chapter five.

In conclusion, the Jizō movement originated in the water baby ceremony, and though now encompassing more than just this ritual, continues to spread interest in both the bodhisattva and the water baby ceremony specifically (figure 3.4). The Kwan Yin

⁷²Jan Chozen Bays. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery abbess. 20 January 2007, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

⁷³Jan Chozen Bays. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery abbess. 20 January 2007, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

⁷⁴Zen Community of Oak Park, for instance, displays not only panels and pictures but even kimonos covered in Jizō images that were created for the Jizōs for Peace project.

movement also contributes indirectly to the spread of information about Jizō and Buddhist pregnancy loss rituals. Together they show a growing demand for bodhisattva-related merchandise and practices among Americans, especially convert Zen Buddhists but also others as well. This is a shift from the earlier decades of convert Zen, when Western interest was mostly concentrated on the historical person of the Buddha and discounted cosmic saviors.

The Process of the Ceremony

In order to understand the water baby ceremony, we will first need to get a sense of it “from the inside.” Now that the background of the ceremony has been presented, we can move on to a description of the actual ritual. This section presents a narrative of the water baby ceremony held at Great Vow Monastery in Clatskanie, Oregon, on Saturday, November 4, 2006. Here I attempt to give as full a description of the events of the ritual as possible, based on participant-observation of the ceremony and extensive fieldnotes written immediately after the ceremony concluded. In part, this chronicle allows us to form a sense of how a “typical” water baby ceremony proceeds at American Zen centers.

But the offering of a template narrative for this or any ritual must be interrogated before we go further. First, it must be noted that the format of the ceremony at Great Vow differs in some particulars from that at other convert Zen centers. In fact, no two Zen temples in America perform the ceremony in precisely the same manner. Therefore, the narrative will be interspersed with observations about how other groups perform the ritual, creating a more comprehensive understanding of the various approaches taken to this ceremony. Furthermore, the production of any ritual is always specific and unique.

No matter how tightly controlled and pre-planned, rituals in actual practice always go “off script” to some degree: outsiders barge in by accident, priests fumble and drop ritual implements, cell phones ring, sick participants disrupt proceedings with loud coughing, and so on. Perfectly executed rituals exist only on paper. Thus this description of the water baby ceremony, even a specific ceremony conducted on a particular date, can only offer a broad suggestion of what the experience of any given ritual will be like.

Secondly, the author’s positionality must be explored. All sightings of human activities, religious or otherwise, are made only from one person’s particular vantage point. This has implications for what is observed and what is overlooked, even before the active process of selection and refinement of data begins. Researchers are not privy to the inner thoughts and emotions of consultants during rituals, and must rely on surface observation and later consultation in order to develop an opinion about what seems to have taken place. In an attempt to work through this problem, several other attendees, both priests and laypeople, were consulted afterwards to get their feelings and impressions about the ceremony. But comprehensive reports of human activities are impossible no matter how many accounts are collected. And while asking consultants to review one’s reportage and make suggestions for alterations allows a certain degree of power sharing between the researcher and the community under study, ultimately the choice of how this and other ceremonies are represented rests with the author—a man at a ceremony especially intended for women, who does not identify as a Zen Buddhist and has been fortunate enough not to experience the death of a child. In the following narrative I do not emphasize my own experience, as my goal is primarily to present an account of the ritual, not an autobiographical vignette. But these are nonetheless the

observations and reflections of one man, with one angle of view, subject to influences both known and unknown in the process of spinning a tale.

The ceremony took place on a rainy Saturday afternoon in autumn, at a former public school that has been partially converted into a Zen monastery. This was the fourth water baby ceremony held at Great Vow that year; the previous one was conducted twelve weeks earlier, in mid-August, while the next one took place eleven weeks later, in mid-January.⁷⁵ An hour before the arrival of outside participants, a room was already prepared for the first part of the ceremony (figure 3.5). Near the entrance to the monastery, this high-ceilinged room with light-colored cement walls was once the school's music room. It is now called "the musical zendo" by the current inhabitants, who use it to store marimbas and other instruments that they play in local parades. Besides musical instruments, the walls are lined with cabinets, maps, and chalkboards. On a counter by the entrance lay books about grieving and pamphlets from organizations dedicated to counseling parents who have lost children. The room is carpeted and has three sofas, and multiple chairs were brought in for the ceremony. In the middle of the room sat a round table covered with cloth, yarn, thread, and additional materials for making bibs and other offerings; in the center of the table a copy of the abbess' book *Jizo Bodhisattva: Modern Healing and Traditional Buddhist Practice* was prominently placed. Toward the back wall a low table in a corner held tongue depressors, construction paper, and other materials as well. Also at the back of the room was a small table with a wooden altar on top, enshrining an image of Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, a common patron of Zen. A second small table, slightly more prominently placed but still on the margins of the room, was covered with red cloth and supported a large white

⁷⁵I also attended the January 2007 ceremony.

figure of Jizō made by the monastery. Also on this table was a book of photographs showing Jizō statues and the offerings made for them, and nearby on a stand a memorial book for the ceremony lay open.

The first three people—two men and a boy of about twelve—arrived together at 1:35 p.m. for the 2 p.m. ceremony. A robed resident priest met them at the door. They introduced themselves to her, explaining that they were familiar with Zen Buddhism but had never visited the monastery. One man declared that he wanted to buy a couple of Jizō statues and was told to wait until after the ceremony. They were given tea and allowed to wait in the dining hall.

By 1:45 several more people had arrived, and the abbess took the opportunity to provide a tour of the monastery, ending up at the room for the water baby ceremony. At two o'clock sharp the ceremony got underway. In the beginning there were fourteen participants, including myself, plus the abbess and a female priest who acted as an assistant facilitator; a fifteenth participant arrived about a half hour later.⁷⁶ Eight of the attendees were men, nine were women, and ages ranged from twelve to mid-60s. All attendees were white except for one Native American female participant and the co-facilitator, whose parents are of Philippino heritage. The two priests wore formal robes, but everyone else was dressed casually. None of the attendees, other than the two ritual leaders, had been present at the previous ceremony in August. This was an average attendance level for the ceremony, both at Great Vow and other centers in general, though the percentage of male attendees was higher than at many such ceremonies. Occasionally water baby ceremonies at Great Vow had attracted as many as thirty-five

⁷⁶To clarify, in this chapter I use the term “participant” to indicate people at the ceremony other than the two ritual leaders. “Attendee” is used to indicate anyone, whether priest or layperson.

participants, while some had only a handful—and rarely, at other centers, ceremonies held by special private request have had only a single participant plus the ritual leaders—but twelve to fifteen is normal.

We sat in a circle on the sofas and chairs. Jan Chozen Bays, the abbess, stood and introduced herself, beginning a twenty-five minute explanation of the ceremony. “This ceremony is based on the *mizuko kuyō* in Japan. At the same time, we have adapted it for our own needs in America.” She narrated how she first heard about the water baby ceremony from Yvonne Rand, and participated in the ritual at Green Gulch Farm Zen Center as a way to deal with the pain of being a full-time child abuse investigator.

Bays explained that ceremonies for children who have died go back many centuries in Japan, and that the water baby ceremony, which is the core of this ritual, dates from the end of WWII, when abortion became common. She described a water baby as someone who died before being born, whether from abortion, miscarriage, or some sort of accident. She emphasized the water imagery, pointing out how in Japan people are cremated after they die and their five elements return to the earth and from there to the sea. “They may merge with the water and be part of the rain falling on us today.” Japan is surrounded by water and gets most of its sustenance from water, and babies come from water, she said:

In Asia there is a different understanding of life and death than in the West. Here we think of life as beginning at a specific moment: at conception, or after conception. And we think death happens at a certain moment. But in Asia they understand that birth and death are processes, with no exact beginning or end. We can think of it like waves on the ocean. A person appears as a single wave which arises, changes, and returns to the ocean in the course of things. But a wave is never apart from the ocean, and whether it is in the form of a wave or has merged and disappeared into the ocean, it is always water. With this kind of thinking we

can understand how the Japanese were able to think of incidents such as abortion as returning water to water because the causes and conditions were not right for it to be a wave at that time, and how they might then go on to pray for that wave—that baby—to come again when the time was right.⁷⁷

Next, Bays picked up the photo book and began to point out various pictures as she explained that Jizō is the bodhisattva of travelers, women, children, and those who die before being born. All eyes were on her, with many people nodding their heads as she described how Japan offered a more humane and intelligent approach to pregnancy loss than America. Bays began passing around many photos of Jizō. “Jizō can appear in any realm to offer aid,” she said. She explained the process of making offerings for Jizō, calling them “tokens of remembrance,” and told the participants to write the name of the person they were honoring in the memorial book, along with the person’s age and cause of death. We were also invited to write a message on the bibs or plaques we were about to make. The boy asked if he had to memorialize a specific person. Bays replied no, that it could be general. “In the past, people have done it for abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, SIDS, and children who died young. Some have also done it for adult children, or for kidnapped children lost through divorce. One man did the ceremony for his pet turtle that he left in the sun as a child, and still hadn’t forgiven himself for. There have also been cats and dogs, and people have done it for the victims of the tsunami, or for their own lost childhood due to abuse.”

After thirty minutes, just at the end of the abbess’ explanation, the last participant straggled in. Bays took her outside for a few minutes to recap the explanation of the ceremony, while the rest of us prepared to make offerings. A couple of people did not

⁷⁷Bays employs a partial script for the ceremonies, which I have access to, making the reconstruction of quotes a more viable project.

start to make things right away: rather, they sat on the floor for a few minutes in silence, apparently meditating. Some other centers actually include a scheduled period of meditation in their water baby rituals.

Most people began by making bibs or hats. The favored color was red. Participants used patterns to cut cloth, paper to make pinwheels, and tongue depressors to make memorial tokens with messages and names on them. A few made dolls out of clothespins. Many people sewed buttons on to their bibs or wrote messages. The more technically adept participants—in general, the women—were able to make several items, while others struggled to produce a single bib.

Throughout the period of sewing, the participants all remained silent. Nonetheless, communication still occurred between some participants. A man stroked his wife's hair and rubbed her back; two young women who arrived together surreptitiously gestured to each other in sign language. The Native American woman sighed deeply from time to time and sniffled as if she was trying to hold back tears. Occasionally someone got up and went out to the bathroom. Some people drank tea. Every twenty minutes or so Bays spoke up and asked us to hold the person we were memorializing in our thoughts. Although nothing was read aloud during this time, some Zen centers will read a poem to set the mood.

The silence of the sewing marks the Great Vow ceremony as exceptional, because at most other American Zen centers participants are encouraged to talk. However, there are strict rules: people may voice their feelings and say a little something about the child they are remembering, but they are not to engage in conversation. There is no replying to another person's words. In essence, the leaders at these other ceremonies seek a series of

short, expressive monologues, rather than dialogue between participants. Usually, the leader must prompt the other participants by offering his or her own feelings—others then feel more comfortable and empowered to share as well. In a few cases, participants actually go around the circle stating their names and giving a somewhat more extensive explanation of why they came to the ceremony. These ceremonies are more likely to restrict participation to actual members of the Zen community and family members.

After ninety minutes had elapsed, Bays began to explain the process of the second part of the ceremony, to be conducted outside in the Jizō garden. We spent several minutes finishing up our tokens and writing in the memorial book as Bays and her assistant gathered some additional personnel to hold rain coverings. Then the abbess solemnly led us single-file through the monastery and out through a back door. The assistant priest took up the rear, and both rang small hand-held bells every few seconds. Outside, most participants opened umbrellas and maintained the single line as we walked through the rain, up a path, and a short distance into the woods. All around us little figures lurked in the leaf litter and tree branches: Jizōs, several dozen of them, adorned with old clothing and deteriorating ornaments from previous ceremonies (figure 3.6). In all, the slow walk took about five minutes.

In a slight clearing below the trees we assembled in another circle, standing this time, while a small table was set up and altar implements placed on top. Three men from the monastery—including Hogen Bays, the abbot and husband of Chozen Bays—joined us to hold a tarp over Bays and the altar. She passed out sheets of paper covered in plastic, containing the chants for the final part of the ceremony. When everyone was ready, Jan Bays began the opening invocation, calling out in a sing-songy chant voice:

Because of cause and effect, reality is shown in all its many forms.
To know this fully liberates all suffering beings.
All beings appear just as we all do, from the One, and pass away as we all do,
after a few flickering moments of life, back to our Original Pure Nature.
Truly our lives are waves on the great ocean of True Nature which is not born
and does not pass away.
In gathering today we remember children who have died
and express our love and support for their parents and friends.
Here these children are in complete repose, at one with the mystery that is our own birth
and death, our own no-birth and no-death.

And together, we launched into the *Heart of Perfect Wisdom Sutra*, performed in English:

The Bodhisattva of Compassion, from the depths of Prajna Wisdom,
Clearly saw the emptiness of all the five conditions,
Thus completely relieving misfortune and pain,
Know then:
Form is no other than emptiness,
Emptiness is no other than form.
Form is exactly emptiness, emptiness exactly form.
Sensation, conception, discrimination, awareness are likewise like this.
All creations are forms of emptiness, not born, not destroyed,
Not stained, not pure, without loss, without gain. . .

Next we chanted the *Enmei Juko Kannon Gyō* three times. At Rochester Zen Center, the ritual leader actually buries the offerings from previous ceremonies during the chanting, but many centers simply leave the bibs and other clothing on their statues permanently, letting them fall apart and return to the earth naturally. A noteworthy departure from this script is that Yvonne Rand, whose water baby ceremony has been so influential, confines her chanting to repeated invocations of the *Heart Sutra* mantra (“Gate, gate, paragate, parasamgate, bodhi svaha!”).

Finally we chanted the Jizō mantra nine times: “Om Ka Ka Ka Bi San Ma E Soha Ka.” As our voices died away, Bays began a chant to dedicate the merit of the chanting:

Vast ocean of dazzling light,
marked by the waves of life and death
the tranquil passage of great calm embodies the form of new and old, coming and going
in chanting the *Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra*
the *Enmei Juku Kannon Gyō*
and the *Jizō Dharani*
we dedicate our love and prayerful thoughts to. . .

Bays began to intone the names of those being remembered.⁷⁸ Almost all of those being honored were fetuses or babies, but the list also included a pre-teen, a young adult, and some more abstract mass categories, such as “all children who have died because of war.” Some of the unborn were given full names, while other parents had chosen to simply designate their lost pregnancies as “water baby.” At many ceremonies the fetus or child being remembered is given a Buddhist name as well, but this is left out at Great Vow, apparently because it can make non-Buddhists uncomfortable.⁷⁹ Bays next asked the participants to silently or out loud say the names of people, either on or not on the list, if they wished. One woman called out a name, but it was drowned in the sound of the falling rain. After a few moments of silence, Bays continued:

. . . and all beings in the Dharma worlds.
The bright sun of wisdom shines forever, banishing the dark night of ignorance.
Let all karma be wiped out and the mind flower bloom to bring the spring of
enlightenment.
May we all practice, realize, and manifest wisdom and compassion together.

⁷⁸I have a list of the names read aloud at this ceremony. However, I do not feel it is appropriate to publish these names, especially since permission cannot be obtained from every participant involved.

⁷⁹American Zen Buddhists refer to this as a “Dharma name,” called *kaimyō* in Japan. As discussed in the previous chapter, such names are typically given to the deceased in Japan, converting them into a sort of posthumous monk. The unborn and young children did not receive such names in pre-modern times, but now *kaimyō* can be purchased as part of *mizuko kuyō* at many temples.

The final merit dedication began. Although it was not printed on the hand-out, several other people joined Bays, such as participants with previous Zen experience who already knew the commonly chanted text.⁸⁰ Next, Bays lit a number of incense sticks. One by one the participants approached the altar, bowed, and took a stick from Bays. He or she then raised the stick to their forehead, stuck it upright in the burner, waved their bibs and tokens through the smoke, and bowed again. The abbess had explained that this action purifies the tokens, and that in Asia spirits are believed to eat smells.

After leaving the altar, each person went off into the woods in search of a figure to dress and give offerings to. Most were Jizō figures, but the forest garden also included two statues of the Virgin Mary and two of Bodhidharma, the semi-legendary founder of Zen in China. Each participant spent a few minutes alone with their chosen figure, in some cases praying or talking softly to it. While the dressing took place after the chanting, at some other Zen centers it is performed before the service portion of the ceremony. Some centers do not keep Jizō figures outside year-round, meaning they must be carried out to the site by participants before the service can be conducted. Also, some cluster the statues together around the altar and have participants one by one come up and dress them in front of the group, rather than wandering off to choose a statue and spend a few moments alone with it. Although not part of this rainy Great Vow ceremony, some temples include a washing of the Jizō statue as part of the ritual.

Slowly, the participants trickled back to the clearing to re-form our circle. Bays read aloud the story of Kisa Gotami, a woman of the Buddha's time who went mad after

⁸⁰Some centers also chant the four bodhisattva vows to close their rituals. This is a disputed practice in the water baby ceremony because some ritual leaders feel it is too strongly Buddhist and thus excludes non-Buddhist participants. Here we have an interesting case of Buddhists changing their own liturgy specifically to adapt to the needs of outsiders.

her baby died. This story is very popular in American Buddhist circles and is recited during water baby ceremonies at several temples. The tale describes how, carrying her dead child on her back, Gotami went to the Buddha to ask him to heal the boy. The Buddha told her he could only do it if she brought him a mustard seed from a household where no one had ever died. Gotami went from house to house in the village, but at every turn she found only families who had experienced the death of a child or adult. Eventually she understood that her grief was shared by everyone and she was able to bury her baby, enter the nun's order, and eventually become enlightened.

Returning to the water theme, Bays closed the formal part of the ceremony with a few remarks about how the rain was our loved ones returning to greet us, and read a poem by an American entitled "Jizō the Sky is Crying." We bowed to one another and one by one began to head back to the monastery; at some centers, participants bow more formally to the altar and then to one another. Approximately twenty minutes had passed since the procession outside. Not everyone returned immediately—one woman lingered for several minutes in front of her Jizō, while a couple stood huddled by theirs for about five minutes. Back inside, people drank tea, munched brownies, and admired the monastery's extensive Jizō collection. Several people bought Jizō statues. The woman who had stayed outside for a while approached and talked to Bays, then broke down sobbing. The couple talked to Bays as well, and the woman cried while her husband listened. Many people said how grateful they were for the ceremony. Eventually the participants began to leave, but some lingered until it was nearly time for the evening meditation period, three and a half hours after the water baby ceremony had begun.

Exportation: Water Baby Ceremonies Beyond America

There is one final channel to explore in tracing how Jizō and his post-pregnancy loss rituals have come to the United States. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the water baby ceremony has been modified from *mizuko kuyō* in many ways to adapt it to American convert Zen temples. While having roots in Japan, it is now a distinctly American Buddhist practice. But even as the ceremony has only recently been created and settled into place at a number of American centers, it is already being transmitted abroad to new communities of Buddhists in other countries.

Sunyana Graef, who leads water baby ceremonies at Vermont Zen Center, is the spiritual head (but not the resident leader) of the Toronto Zen Centre. Having learned the ritual from her, the Toronto temple now holds water baby ceremonies that follow the same general format as those in America. Graef also maintains a Zen temple in Costa Rica, known as Casa Zen. She holds water baby ceremonies in this majority Roman Catholic country where abortion is illegal. Future international sites likely to perform water baby ceremonies include New Zealand, where Amala Wrightson has established a Zen temple, and Poland, where Sunya Kjolhede and Sevan Ross both have ties.⁸¹

Both the Canadian and Costa Rican temples received their water baby ceremonies directly from the United States, not Japan, and the format (and accompanying logic) of the ceremonies is the same as the American rituals. We see here an example of the emergence of a significant phenomenon in American Buddhism: while still very much a missionary field for Asian Buddhists, the United States has also become the launching pad for missionization of new countries with uniquely American forms of Buddhist

⁸¹In fact, one of Ross' priests at Chicago Zen Center is Polish and led a water baby ceremony at the temple in 2006, as well as participating in previous ones. Should he return to Poland as a Zen missionary—a likely scenario—he may be called upon to perform water baby ceremonies there.

practice. In the twenty-first century the United States both imports and exports Buddhism. It will be interesting to see if the Canadian, Costa Rican, and other ceremonies eventually depart in noticeable ways from those of the United States. Such differences could point to aspects of the ceremony that are more specifically American, as well as shed light on unique elements of Canadian and Costa Rican Buddhism. It is to the consideration of these ceremonies as *American* forms of Buddhist practice that we now turn in the next chapter.

“WE NEED TO FREE OURSELVES:”

ADAPTATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF CONVERT *MIZUKO KUYŌ*

Although it was only January, I was grateful for the shade of the old trees overhead as I sat in the Zen Center of Los Angeles’s backyard. Across the little round lawn table from me sat Wendy Nakao Roshi, the leader of this convert Zen temple. From time to time we could still hear the music and car horns of the mostly Latino neighborhood of the temple, but in the backyard there were also birdsongs and light wind to set a more serene mood. Nakao Roshi, with her soft voice and easy laugh, was eager to tell me a favorite story about a Jizō statue that used to stand right nearby. “During the years of Maezumi Roshi he had a little Jizō, a really sweet one, under this lemon tree,” she said, gesturing to her right.

And every morning he’d pass and he’d offer incense. And I don’t remember exactly when this was, but at some point the Jizō’s head came off and rolled down the driveway! [laughs] And then eventually we found the head. But by that time—you know, we’d kept the body because we wanted to put it together—but it was a funny, funny story because finally somebody threw the body away and then the head was found. And we went looking for the body and the body was gone. It was really a wonderful story. [laughs] But eventually we lost both pieces. [laughs] It was quite a wonderful story, to keep looking for the different parts of the Jizō.

I found this quite amusing and laughed myself, wondering at the many stories I’d heard in the course of my research. “Did the headless Jizō remain here on display?” I asked.

“Yeah, for a while we just left the headless Jizō!” she replied, bursting into laughter again. “Isn’t that amazing?” We laughed together at the thought of Jizō’s head rolling away and his body standing guard week after week. Then, just as quickly as she had started, Nakao stopped laughing and looked me directly in the eyes. Her tone was calm and serious. “You know, that was the practice of that Jizō.”¹

In this chapter we will explore how convert Zen communities understand their rituals for pregnancy losses. Many aspects of American Zen water baby ceremonies maintain continuity with Japanese *mizuko kuyō* rituals. In other ways, however, the process of emulating Japanese Buddhist post-pregnancy loss rituals in American convert temples has resulted in significant alteration and adaptation, both conscious and unintentional. Among the most important is the re-orientation from placating the *mizuko* spirit to psychologically healing the mother. Another area of interest is how these Buddhists wish to use the water baby ceremony in a manner that echoes the practice of this Jizo: as a ritual that allows them to “get out of their heads” and simply let the body take over for a time. These and other changes are interesting in themselves, but are also of deeper importance for what they can reveal about wider aspects of American Zen thought, practice, and self-understanding. Therefore, in this chapter we will examine each in turn.

Then, we will consider what the water baby ceremony says about the place of ritual in American Zen. Why has ritual been largely overlooked and why is it on the rise? We will also consider four key elements of the water baby ritual—place, objects, bodies, and emotions—and examine how they point to new narratives in the study of Zen in

¹Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Personal interview with Zen Center of Los Angeles abbess. 22 January 2007, Zen Center of Los Angeles.

America. In doing so, we will find that even as these communities change *mizuko kuyō* to fit America, they are themselves changed by the ritual in ways that sometimes run counter to their expressed ideals.

From Mizuko Kuyō to Water Baby Ceremony: Changes in Ritual Practice

The first changes to pay attention to are organizational logistics related to the water baby ceremony. First, it is noteworthy that in all cases American Zen communities do not charge fees for water baby ceremonies. Nor are participants expected to pay money for supplies, such as bibs, votive plaques, statues, and so on. The Zen centers provide materials for making offerings free of charge or ask participants to bring cloth and thread. The centers also allow the use of temple Jizō statues during the ceremony; alternately, participants may elect to bring in and use their own Jizōs, but this is not required or expected. With one simple alteration the entire situation of *mizuko kuyō* goes from being associated with profiteering and exploitation in Japan to a non-exploitative service offered to the community in America. This change happens because American Zen practitioners want the ritual to be available to anyone who needs it, and because they are generally opposed to the idea of mixing commerce and religion.² This contrasts with the Japanese situation, where virtually all religious services—from a short visit to pray at a shrine, to a full *mizuko kuyō*—involve monetary donations. In Japan, paying money, even if only a few yen, is the way in which religious practitioners demonstrate the

²Sevan Ross. Personal interview with Chicago Zen Center abbot. 14 March 2006, Chicago Zen Center, Evanston, IL.

authenticity of their sincerity and respect.³ But for American Zen adherents, accepting money from participants cheapens religious activities and implies greed and insincerity.

This does not mean that money is completely divorced from American water baby ceremonies. Leaders sometimes suggest that participants consider providing a voluntary donation after the ceremony. In many cases, the temples that put on the ceremonies also sell related books or statues that can be purchased after the ritual. Putting on water baby ceremonies increases the exposure of the Jizō movement in the USA and therefore helps those who benefit from it financially, such as Great Vow Monastery with their extensive product line of home-made Jizō figures. And since some people's first exposure to Zen comes through participation in the ceremony, and they may subsequently go on to become full-fledged Zen practitioners, holding these open ceremonies does over time contribute to greater membership and therefore increased revenue from member dues. On the whole, however, water baby ceremonies are probably a roughly even trade-off in terms of money, since the donations received, modest amount of books and statues sold, and small number of new members gained are balanced by the many hours spent planning and performing the ritual, as well as the considerable initial outlay for Jizō statues and the unrecouped costs of materials for making offerings.

A second important organizational change relates to restrictions on who can observe and participate in water baby ceremonies. In Japan, restrictions on outsiders attending a *mizuko kuyō* vary. In most locations I was readily allowed in as an observer of the ceremony, in some cases before I had a chance to identify myself as a researcher. Many such ceremonies are held in public places where no real policing of attendance is

³For a very full discussion of the place of money in Japanese religion, see Ian Reader and George J. Tanabe, Jr. *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998.

possible. I was usually allowed to take photographs, digital movies and audio recordings. I was never asked if I had a *mizuko* to memorialize. I was not required to participate. Even the people sponsoring the *mizuko kuyō* did not have to participate: most just paid a priest and then silently watched as he performed the ritual.

By contrast, participation in American water baby ceremonies is severely restricted. In order to attend, a person *must* be a full participant—sewing, chanting, and so on. Observers are strictly prohibited, and no one is allowed to photograph or record the ceremony—I was not even allowed to surreptitiously take notes while participating. Some leaders, such as Yvonne Rand, go further, insisting that all participants first discuss their participation with her prior to receiving permission, and only those who wish to memorialize a young or unborn child are admitted.⁴ Sometimes ceremonies have been held for women only, with no male participation allowed.⁵ These restrictions are intended to heighten the effectiveness of the ceremony by preventing the distraction of outside observers, as well as insulating participants who may feel uncomfortable about strangers knowing that they have had an abortion. The restrictions serve to ensure that, even if one has not met the other participants before, there can be a reasonable assurance that everyone has had a similar experience and that therefore there will be no judgments against those who participate. Also, the fact that all participants have had similar experiences is seen as making the ritual more meaningful and efficacious.

⁴Jan Chozen Bays. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery abbess. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR. Zen Center of Los Angeles also restricts its water baby ceremonies to temple members.

⁵Yvonne Rand. “The Buddha’s Way and Abortion: Loss, Grief, and Resolution.” *Inquiring Mind* (Fall 1993): 21.

This restriction has some practical consequences. For one, in Japan *mizuko kuyō* is available every day and often at no prior notice. Anyone who feels a need for such a ritual can simply walk in to a temple and request services. In America, water baby ceremonies are held infrequently and typically are announced well in advance, sometimes with a requirement for pre-registration. Even if the ceremony is initiated at the request of a grieving layperson or couple, it is often scheduled for some time in the future and preceded by announcements to the community in the hopes of attracting more participants. This is in part because the temples are unprepared to do these rituals readily, and because they feel that doing it alone is far inferior to listening to and talking to a group of others who have had the same experiences.⁶ Thus the American restrictions intended to ensure the integrity of the ceremony and privacy of participants also make it somewhat less accessible to the public and decrease its frequency.

The first difference in the ritual itself that we may observe is the addition of *zazen* meditation.⁷ *Zazen* is not a common component of *mizuko kuyō*, but it is present in many of the American Zen water baby ceremonies, either as part of the ceremony itself or as a spontaneous activity on the part of individual participants. The addition of *zazen* to such ceremonies is hardly surprising, since, for the majority of adherents, Zen in America is formulated around the idea of personal meditation practice or spiritual/mystic experience as the core of Buddhism.⁸ To hold a Zen ritual in America without any meditation, especially one that explicitly includes reference to traditional savior figures, is potentially

⁶Sunya Kjolhede. Personal interview with Windhorse Zen Center abbess. 17 June 2006, Windhorse Zen Center, Alexander, NC..

⁷Amala Wrightson. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center priest. 29 December 2002, Rochester Zen Center.

⁸Robert H. Sharf. "Sanbōkyōdan: Zen and the Way of the New Religions." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 22, nos. 3-4: 417-419.

to suggest that something other than one's own effort is involved in proper Buddhist practice. While some are comfortable with this, for others this flies in the face of American Zen's fundamental self-understanding, and the incorporation of meditation into the ceremony makes it fit more easily into the Zen temple's procedures. On an even more basic level, for many Americans Zen practice is *zazen*. It is the default to which Zen practitioners revert automatically, causing it to be included in ceremonies as often by habit as by conscious attempts to enforce a "self-reliance" orientation in the ritual.

Parallel to the addition of *zazen* is the relative downgrading of prayer; prayer is an integral part of *mizuko kuyō*, including formal rituals presided over by a priest and especially in more informal rites conducted by solitary women in graveyards or before Jizō statues. Prayer—understood as petitionary communication directed at an exterior entity—is a fraught issue for American Zen practitioners, many of whom assert that prayer is not a Buddhist activity. Again, it borders uncomfortably on a model of religious practice that places the practitioner in an inferior position, asking for assistance from an outside force. Even in a ritual such as the water baby ceremony that is structured around the idea of petitioners seeking help from Jizō, attempts are made to reduce this aspect of the ceremony. While participants do write messages of love or sorrow in some ceremonies, there is little beseeching made toward Jizō or water babies; we can note that there is less reason to actively pray to a bodhisattva primarily conceived as a symbolic archetype that represents aspects of your own nature, as described later in this chapter.

The dual location of the ceremony is another important change from the usual Japanese model. In Japan and the Japanese-American temples described in chapter two, *mizuko kuyō* generally takes place in a single location, be it the temple worship hall, a

mizuko Jizō shrine, or a cemetery plot; at all of these locations the action takes place in front of and oriented toward Buddhist statuary. By contrast, virtually all of the American ceremonies are two-stage events, with the majority of the time spent away from altars and images. The actual chanting before the Jizō statue, reading of names, and presentation of offerings is definitely the smallest portion of the ceremony. Most of the time accorded to the water baby ceremony is spent during the sewing and talking first stage. For those centers with tea after the chanting, even less time is proportionally spent in front of Jizō. Jizō is thus almost peripheral for much of the ceremony, an abstract presence that provides the catalyst for the ritual but not necessarily its heart.⁹ Rather, one could argue that this longer first portion, with its shared space of group solidarity, productivity, and emotional catharsis displaces the bodhisattva icon as the focus of the ritual.

This sewing and sharing portion is intriguing, especially since it is absent from Japanese rituals. Japanese people rarely sit in circles during religious rituals, and never do so during *mizuko kuyō*.¹⁰ The form is entirely American, a direct cultural adaptation to fit the preferences of Americans who find circles egalitarian, aesthetically appealing, and conducive to sharing sentiments with others.¹¹ In Japan, lay participants collectively face the altar or image, while the priest sits or stands with his back to the “congregation.”

⁹In actual practice, Jizō statues are frequently present in the room during sewing. But they are nonetheless not the focus of concern during this stage, as demonstrated by the body postures of participants that orient inward toward a circle of fellow mourner-practitioners, rather than toward the statues. In fact, one of the main reasons that statues are present during this stage is simply so that sewers can take measurements for the bibs and other clothing they are manufacturing. It is not uncommon for a woman to approach a Jizō, examine its size and shape, and then proceed to sit down with her back to it while she sews a bib or hat.

¹⁰There is, however, the practice of *hoza* found in Risshō Kōsei-kai, described in chapter two. In the postscript we will consider the meaning of this apparent convergence between a Japanese Buddhist New Religious Movement and convert American Zen.

¹¹Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Personal interview with Zen Center of Los Angeles abbess. 30 June 2006, Zen Center of Los Angeles.

Likewise, in America water baby participants sew their own bibs and manufacture offerings to present in the second portion of the ritual. This is not part of the ritual in Japan, where *mizuko kuyō* does not involve a period of sewing or manufacturing offerings. Rather, Japanese women typically buy their bibs from the temple itself, or purchase them elsewhere and bring them to the ritual site.¹² Nevertheless, proponents of the water baby ritual routinely—erroneously—describe Japanese women as sewing bibs as part of *mizuko kuyō*; virtually no ceremony fails to include mention of this “fact.”¹³ Conversations with American Zen practitioners suggest that they are unaware that Japanese women do not sew their own offerings, including even those minority of Americans who have observed aspects of *mizuko kuyō* in Japan. This major element of the water baby ceremony seems to have arisen in large part from ignorance of the Japanese precedent—Americans saw that there were bibs, assumed that they were manufactured during the ceremony, and proceeded to do so themselves. Having done so, they then spiritualized the practice, creating a religious rationale that asserts the healing properties of manufacturing your own offerings.

A second likely source for this addition of sewing into the ceremony is the precedent set by the creation of *rakus*. Sewing is already present as a valorized practice in American Zen centers: when a practitioner prepares to receive lay ordination (*jukkai*), he or she is instructed to sew a *rakusu*, a small apron-like cloth adornment that

¹²This does not mean that Japanese women never sew hats or other items at home and then leave them on Jizō statues. But this is a far cry from actually manufacturing offerings on-site as part of the process of a ritual.

¹³Melody Ermachild. “A Ceremony for Aborted & Miscarried Children.” *Buddhist Peace Fellowship Newsletter*. (Summer 1990): 28.

represents the robes worn by Buddhist monks.¹⁴ This process typically takes days, weeks, or months of labor. Because several people often take *jukkai* at the same ceremony, and because laypeople typically need assistance in sewing an unfamiliar religious garment, it is common for groups of American Zen practitioners to gather and sew their *rakusus* at the same time. This arrangement mainly comes about in part through brute necessity: American Zen centers lack the resources (staffing, time, material resources) to conduct frequent *jukkai* ceremonies, thus they hold them infrequently and bunch several people together in one ceremony, and Americans do not know how to sew *rakusus*, so they often do it together where they can get advice and feedback on their work. A second source for these sewing groups are twentieth century reformist strains of Zen that sought to popularize the practice of sewing robes. The Japanese nun Kasai Jōshin was a follower of one of these movements and passed the practice on to the San Francisco Zen Center in the 1970s.¹⁵ From there it has spread widely through American convert Zen, giving rise to the idea that sewing your *rakushu* expresses Zen ideals of self-sufficiency, attention, and commitment. Participants in these sewing groups bond with one another through the shared practice and discussions that take place during sewing, leading to greater group cohesion at the *jukkai* ceremony and afterwards.¹⁶

All of this takes place in a partial vacuum of knowledge about Japanese Zen practice. First of all, *jukkai* as part of practice is, proportionately, a far less common

¹⁴Stephanie Kaza. "Becoming a Real Person." *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, 20 (2005): 49. Monks too sometimes wear *rakushus* in place of their formal robes.

¹⁵Diane E. Riggs. "Fukudenkai: Sewing the Buddha's Robe in Contemporary Japanese Buddhist Practice." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 31, no. 2 (2004): 323.

¹⁶Many of the observations about *jukkai* here and below come from fieldwork and conversations conducted at Zen centers around the country, particularly at Richmond Zen Group, in Virginia, and Chapel Hill Zen Center, in North Carolina.

event in Japanese Zen than in American Zen: the average Japanese Zen devotee receives *jukkai* during the Buddhist funeral rites.¹⁷ Non-priestly American Zen practitioners (the large majority of Zen adherents) are generally ignorant of this fact, though some long-time priests are aware of the Japanese situation. In the American situation, *jukkai* becomes an important practice during one's lifetime as a way of demonstrating one's commitment to the religion. This is a more pressing concern for Americans, who unlike the Japanese are mainly converts to Zen and subsist in a cultural environment that does not reinforce their religious identities. Among other functions, *jukkai* undertaken during life helps Americans relieve anxieties about personal and group identification, and offers them a way of attaining greater status within Zen communities, where *jukkai* is often an unspoken demarcator between "serious" practitioners and dilettantes. This differs from the Japanese Zen practice, where *jukkai* is mainly used to render a deceased layperson into a sort of monk and thereby cause them to be posthumously transformed into a Buddha, and if undertaken during life, is often contextualized as a merit-generating practice that confers benefits on the practitioner and his or her family.

Second, once again contrary to American assumptions, the Japanese who do take *jukkai* during their lifetimes, as well as clergy who take full ordination, do not usually participate in groups to sew their own *rakusus*. *Rakusus* and clerical robes are either purchased from Buddhist goods merchants or, less often, received as donations from groups of laywomen who sew the robes on behalf of the ordinand and then offer them as a way to make merit. The sewing groups that produce *rakusus* for their own use,

¹⁷Hozan Alan Senauke. "A Long and Winding Road: Sōtō Zen Training in America." *Teaching Theology and Religion*, vol. 9, no. 2 (2006): 129.

introduced by Kasai, are a small minority practice with little precedent in pre-modern Japan, a fact that is generally unknown by American Zen converts.

To return to the issue of sewing bibs and other clothing for Jizō at water baby ceremonies, it is possible to conjecture a likely connection between sewing *rakusus* and this component of the ceremony. American Zen centers are already used to the idea of sewing items for practice, and the meanings they give to this process for *rakusus* show up in their explanations of why bibs are sewn for Jizō. Furthermore, the bibs sewn for Jizō statues are strikingly similar in basic appearance to *rakusus*, and when placed on the monastic Jizō figures, the appearance of a monk wearing a *rakusu* is arguably more immediate than that of a baby or young child wearing a bib. Proponents of the ceremony are aware of this visual effect and have commented on it in interviews, increasing the likelihood of a direct connection between *rakusu*-sewing and the later development of Jizō bib-sewing.¹⁸ This also probably influences the form the bibs themselves take, since patterns are recommended by priestly leaders of the ceremony, who have already sewn a *rakusu* at some point. Thus partial knowledge of Japanese practices related to robes feeds into ignorance about the production of *kuyō* offerings and supports the (unwitting) creation of entirely new models of ritual practice.

This change in ritual practice—adding in a long period of communal sewing while seated in a circle, away from the main site—leads to additional, significant changes in the meaning and function of the overall ceremony. At most centers, participants are encouraged during this sewing period to verbally express their feelings and reasons for performing the ritual. The protracted nature of the time needed to sew is conducive to

¹⁸Amala Wrightson. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center priest. 29 December 2002, Rochester Zen Center.

self-searching and leaders claim that it naturally leads to emotions “welling up” that can then be released into the shared space. Weeping often occurs during this process, and the sharing of these emotions aloud with others is presented as a major motivation for the ritual in the first place, a phenomenon we will return to in greater detail later in this section. For now, it is worth noting that in Japan *mizuko kuyō* does not include a segment where participants are encouraged to express their feelings or reasons for conducting the ceremony to strangers. Crying happens sometimes but is not a common phenomenon at Japanese *mizuko* rituals.¹⁹ Americans who discussed the ritual assumed it was highly emotional in Japan as well as America—they were generally not aware that Japanese practitioners infrequently engage in weeping or similar emotive displays.

Bibs are not the only material items associated with the water baby ceremony that display a degree of difference in comparison to *mizuko kuyō*. American Zen ceremonies do not use *tōba*, the stupa-shaped slivers of wood on which Japanese priests write calligraphy; these are one of the most common elements of *mizuko kuyō* and indeed *kuyō* of all types in Japan. Americans also do not use *ihai*, the inscribed memorial plaques that in some sense provide a substrate for the deceased person’s spirit to live in, nor do they use *ema*, the painted votive tablets used to send messages to the realm of gods and spirits. In fact, *ihai* and *ema*, primary forms of material culture for Japanese Buddhism, are generally absent from American Zen. However, the messages written on bibs and tongue depressors and in memorial books do serve a roughly analogous function.

¹⁹During fieldwork in Japan I never saw anyone cry during *mizuko kuyō*. The most common attitude seemed to be a calm seriousness. Priests agreed that emotions were not typically expressed overtly during the ceremonies, though there are sometimes exceptions. I do not mean by this to imply that Japanese women and men do not feel strong emotions during *mizuko kuyō*, only that such emotions, if present, are infrequently given expression through weeping and no particular avenue for their expression is sought through *mizuko kuyō*, whose regular format includes no segment devoted to such expression. Other evidence, such as interviews with lay participants, messages written on *ema*, and the occurrence of weeping in Japanese-American *mizuko kuyō*, do suggest that some participants feel a range of strong emotions.

The roles and relationships of priest and laity are altered in the American ceremonies. In Japan, it is the ordained Buddhist priest who transfers merit to the *mizuko*. He is the one who has the authority, the ritual initiation, the preceptual purity, and the experience to perform the rite correctly and produce the desired result. In general practice, he is also the one who does most or all of the merit-generating chanting, while laypeople look on or sporadically try to keep up with his rapid chant pace. Laypeople do sometimes, though infrequently, participate in the merit-dedication chants; priests always do so. In American ceremonies, every member of the group performs the same chants and mantras, and often the merit dedication is done together as well. Even when, as at Great Vow Monastery, the ritual leader performs part of the merit dedication solo, such rituals conclude with communal merit dedication. Unordained laypeople who have participated in abortion are put more or less on the same level as priests and there is no implication that these two types of participants generate different amounts of merit. The participatory nature of practice is stressed here: the water baby is only effective if someone actively performs it—no one can do it for you. The Japanese logic is nearly opposite: the priest is necessary but the layperson is not, and in fact when Japanese become too elderly to travel to temples where their *mizuko* are enshrined they may continue to send money so that *kuyō* will be performed by the priests in their absence.

Even when the same elements are used in Japanese and American rituals, we need to be attentive to subtle differences in use and different ways of understanding them. For example, the *Hannya Shingyō* (*Heart Sutra*) is a commonly chanted text in both countries. However, in Japan the sutra as performed is difficult for many Japanese to understand. As T. Griffith Foulk explains in the official Sōtō liturgy book for Americans:

[Sutras] are written and recited in classical Chinese, albeit using Japanese phonetics (*on yomi*), which means that the chanting is incomprehensible to the average listener. Most well-educated Japanese can read classical Chinese to some extent, so the chanting may be understood if they also have a written text to follow or if, having memorized the text by chanting it many times, they can visually recall the Chinese characters as they are intoned. When sutras are studied, they are usually read in Japanese translation. While many of the teachings and beliefs expressed in them are very important for the Zen tradition, the main reason for chanting sutras in liturgical settings is not to broadcast their meaning but rather to produce spiritual merit (*kudoku*) for subsequent ritual offering and dedication to a variety of beings and purposes. . . Dharanis (also called mantras) are magical spells: strings of sounds that are deemed sacred and powerful, although they often have little or no discernible semantic value.²⁰

Use of the *Heart Sutra* in Japanese Buddhism is often talismanic in nature, with no expectations that its doctrinal content be understood: laypeople copy out single characters to gain merit, and it is not unusual for bibs offered to *mizuko* Jizō to have the entire sutra written on their front—these sutra bibs are not intended for reading (and many Japanese would be unable to do so) but for their magical and meritorious powers.²¹

By contrast, the *Heart Sutra* is performed in English in America specifically so that everyone can understand. This moves the sutra from being a meritorious or even magical text to one with a teaching role. Americans are not only supposed to perform the sutra, they are to learn from it. The ceremony is not allowed to be “merely” one of forms and expressive gestures, but is made to include didactic elements that help reconcile the ambivalence many American Zen practitioners feel about “empty ritual.” We can see this further in the case of Great Vow Monastery, where the abbess has gone so far as to alter the wording of the sutra in order to carry a meaning that she hopes participants will carry

²⁰Griffith T. Foulk. “About Soto Zen Liturgy.” *Soto School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice*. Tokyo: Sotoshu Shumicho, 2001: 153.

²¹Reader and Tanabe include a particularly interesting discussion by the former head of the Sōtō Zen sect on the magical efficacy of the *Heart Sutra*. See Reader and Tanabe 1998: 76.

away with them.²² Tinkering with chanted texts can decrease their effectiveness as merit-generating engines according to mainstream Mahayana thought; the change here suggests that merit is not a primary concern and takes a subservient position to the communication of specific theological ideas. On the other hand, the *Enmei Juku Kannon Gyō* and Jizō mantra are not translated and thus remain unintelligible. Explanations for using them include that they serve to focus attention—compared to *zazen* by my consultants—and that they evoke the energies of Kannon (Kwan Yin) and Jizō.

New Orientations: From Fear of Spirits to Healing the Self

Direct changes to the performance of water baby ceremonies versus their *mizuko kuyō* antecedents are not the only notable alterations. Perhaps even more significant is how Americans dismiss the idea of spirit attacks. In Japan, fear of spirit attacks are one of the primary reasons for *mizuko kuyō*; as R.J. Zwi Werblowsky noted, “In fact, the key words to be found in all Japanese manuals for *mizuko kuyō*. . . are *osore* (fear), *tatari* and *sawari* (envious revenge), and *shizume* (pacification).”²³ But in American Zen discourse on the water baby ceremony, these ideas are completely left out. The priests do not publicize their events by suggesting that people need to exorcize or pacify water baby spirits, or that they will take care of physical symptoms or bad luck. In fact, none of them seriously believe that spirit attacks are even possible, and some are unaware that this exists as a motivating factor in Japan. In the same way, the laypeople I spoke with were dismissive of this idea:

²²For instance, she changed the sutra to read that nothing is *born* or *dies*, rather than *created* or *destroyed*, an obvious allusion to the ceremony’s genesis as a rite for pregnancy losses.

²³R.J. Zwi. Werblowsky. “*Mizuko Kuyō*: Notulae on the Most Important ‘New Religion’ of Japan.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, volume 18, no. 4 (1991): 301.

Jeff Wilson: In Japan there is an idea that the spirits of dead babies can actually attack and harm the living. In some ways that makes the water baby ceremony almost like an exorcism. Is there anything like that idea here?

Lisa Johnson: No.

Wilson: Do you think that's a possibility, that the spirit of a deceased fetus could harm the living?

Johnson: Do you mean the whole spirit thing?

Wilson: Yes.

Johnson: [snort of derision] No. Do you mean that it might really happen, or that people might think it is happening?

Wilson: Do you think that could in fact ever happen?

Johnson: No.

Wilson: Did anything that anyone said or did during the ceremony suggest that any Americans might think it could happen?

Johnson: I don't think so.²⁴

As one female priest at Rochester Zen Center explained, "we live in a rationalistic society which doesn't believe in ghosts. And ghosts don't fit into Buddhism at all. They have no place in it. It's really not part of the worldview of Buddhism. And I don't think it's part of the way most Westerners think about things, all those ideas about malevolent spirits."²⁵ The aborted or lost fetus has been transformed from menacing to harmless in the reproduction of *mizuko kuyō* in America.

We can certainly take some issue with the assertion that ghosts are absent from Buddhism. All Asian Buddhist traditions contain significant amounts of ritualization and concern around ghosts and what Robert DeCaroli calls "spirit-deities."²⁶ From the oldest accounts of the Buddha's activities in India to the spirit boom in contemporary Japan, the deceased and elemental spirits have been one main focus of Buddhism. Indeed, in

²⁴Lisa Johnson [pseudonym]. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center member. 3 November 2005, Rochester Zen Center.

²⁵Amala Wrightson. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center priest. 29 December 2002, Rochester Zen Center.

²⁶Robert DeCaroli. *Haunting the Buddha: Indian Popular Religions and the Formation of Buddhism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004: 18.

Japanese Zen the funeral and ongoing memorials for a deceased person (both formal periodic ones at temples and daily rites performed before the home *butsudan*) are the primary form of religious practice, far outstripping meditation or other activities. And Zen clerics' competency at performing exorcisms (along with such things as faith-healing, rain-making, and rituals to save women from hell) is precisely one of the main factors in the schools' successful growth and popularity.²⁷ It is instructive, therefore, to observe the unanimity with which American Zen practitioners approach this issue. From my interviews I learned that some American Zen adherents do believe in spirits; many do not, while others leave the possibility open but in actual practice never think about them. But all converts interviewed for this project and every publication on the water baby ceremony agree that the dead pose no threat to the living and that there is no need for religious intervention to ward off disaster or misfortune.

Related to this development is a significant shift in the rhetoric on the woman's sinfulness. In Japan, this is a basic part of the *mizuko kuyō* phenomenon, where abortion is described as a violation of Buddhist morality and even miscarriage and stillbirth may be seen as reflecting faults of the mother. Furthermore, the associations of death, illness, and blood with pregnancy loss render it a polluting event in the context of Japanese religion, necessitating purification. But in America the Zen teachers involved with the water baby ceremony are careful not to suggest that the participants might be immoral or impure in any way. Even if they do not agree with abortion, they seem not to see any usefulness in linking it to rhetoric about the woman's culpability.²⁸ Thus, what in Japan

²⁷See Duncan Ryūken Williams. *The Other Side of Zen: A Social History of Soto Zen Buddhism in Tokugawa Japan*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

²⁸Rand 1993: 21.

is a strongly shame-based practice a becomes relatively nonjudgmental one in America—the only judgments are the ones the woman brings to the ceremony herself, which are neither encouraged nor discouraged by the clergy. *Mizuko kuyō* loses its aspect as a critique of contemporary female sexual or reproductive practices, therefore, and is abandoned as a method to control or direct female agency regarding these issues. Rather, water baby ceremonies encourage and affirm women's agency and right to make difficult decisions.

One of the most commonly alleged differences between American convert Buddhism and its Asian antecedents is the role of women in re-shaping Buddhism along feminist lines. Despite the frequent allegation of difference, there are remarkably few scholarly studies of how exactly the women's movement has changed American Buddhism, other than impressionistic assertions that women occupy a greater proportion of leadership roles and have developed a “more feminine” style of teaching and nurturing their communities. It is as if the impression is so strong that no one feels a need to actually demonstrate in concrete terms how women are specifically altering Buddhism.

With an examination of the water baby ceremony, we have a case study tailor-made to explore this impact. In Japan the *mizuko kuyō* is often associated with right-wing politics and frequently has a misogynistic tone. Male Buddhist priests, such as Hashimoto Tetsuma of Shiunzan, have been active in promoting *mizuko kuyō* as a practice that reminds women of their shame and places them in a proper position of submission and humility.²⁹ By contrast, in America the Zen purveyors of water baby ceremonies are mainly champions of women's equality and advocates of liberal political

²⁹See Hardacre 1997 for discussion of Hashimoto and the general misogynist attitude of *mizuko kuyō*.

views.³⁰ While some American men have led water baby ceremonies—all of whom are themselves pro-choice on the abortion issue and liberal in political orientation, and led the ritual after prompting by laywomen—it is women (both ordained and lay) who have taken the lead in introducing the ceremony into their own communities, publicizing it to others, and acting as ritual facilitators. The average leader of a *mizuko kuyō* in both Japan and Japanese-American temples is a man; the average leader of a water baby ceremony is a woman. All in all, in America the ritual appears to appeal to an entirely different segment of society, one arguably diametrically opposite from that in Japan. The American women driving the spread of the water baby ceremony all hold feminist views to some degree or another, and in their reproduction of this Japanese ritual they reconstitute it as empowering, nonjudgmental, non-punitive, and supportive of women's power over their bodies and lives. Fetuses are no longer potential antagonists and mothers are conceptualized as mourners, not criminals or murderers.

If American water babies are non-threatening, then what exactly are their qualities? And who is Jizō, if he is not a supernatural savior needed to pacify and rescue fetal spirits? Perhaps surprisingly, American Zen adherents who had gone through the water baby ceremony—including leaders of the ceremony—often had difficulty articulating the concept of a water baby when asked directly. Sometimes, the water baby was described as a spirit or being who had died and/or was trapped in another existence. More commonly, however, the existence of such an entity was questioned or contextualized in particular ways. Water babies were frequently described as “energies”

³⁰Every convert consultant I interviewed affirmed a pro-choice attitude and supported women's equality and a liberal political orientation. Some rejected the label of “liberal” but did so in the context of rejecting political and other labels generally; nonetheless even these consultants admitted to agreeing with “liberal” issues more frequently than “conservative” ones, as understood in mainstream American politics.

or treated in non-anthropomorphic ways, such as stressing the “water” imagery over that of a baby or individual entity. Many consultants had never given serious thought to what the concept “water baby” referred to, indicating that their reasons for participating in the ritual were not strongly connected to a desire to do something for such beings.

By contrast, most people were more confident in their understanding of Jizō. For some, Jizō played, at least in part, the role of protector or savior, helping beings in need:

Jeff Wilson: Is Jizō an actual entity on some level?

Ryushin Creedon: There have been times [I’ve felt that way]: we used to rent a house down the road from the Zen center in Larch Mountain. It was a short little half hour walk if you weren’t taking a car. So occasionally I would walk back at night, and being from the city, when I’m all of a sudden in the country there’s all sorts of things in my head that are going to jump out and get me: cougars and bears and everything. So how I would soothe myself would be to imagine two large seven-foot Jizōs walking behind me, like my bodyguards: big, blue, carrying their staves, *cintamani* jewels, and just walking behind me, and I would just do the Jizō mantra as I was walking and I would feel more at peace. So that’s one way that I see Jizō. There have been times when I have done bowing practice, doing 100,000 bows, and there have been times when I’ve been doing it very vigorously and starting to get back pain, starting to get knee pain, and I’ll imagine when I am starting to come up, Jizō reaching over and helping me up. And then I’ll feel lighter as I do that. That’s very vague to know whether this thing that I can’t see, whether it’s physically lifting me up or whether it is mental, but I do know that it does help.

Wilson: So you do feel some help?

Creedon: Yes.

Wilson: And you didn’t get eaten by cougars.

Creedon: Right!³¹

Nonetheless, this role tended to be confined to specific segments of the water baby ceremony and was not the dominant way that Jizō was usually talked about. Much more

³¹Ryushin Creedon. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery priest. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR. *Cintamani* jewels are wish-fulfilling gemstones often held by Jizō figures. It is interesting that Creedon imagines Jizō to be blue. This may be a crossover from the lapis-colored Yakushi Nyorai—the so-called Medicine Buddha—or perhaps even an iconographic assimilation of Krishna from Hindu mythology.

often, Jizō was described as a role model to be emulated by the practitioner.³² American Zen is often allergic to supernatural savior figures, and usually stresses that only one's own practice and experience are efficacious.³³ Jizō was often described as an aspect of oneself, such as the practitioner's Buddha-nature or compassion:

The way that we always talk about the bodhisattvas is that the bodhisattva is me. It can only be me. Of course, we have all the qualities of all the bodhisattvas, but we tend to have more of one than the others perhaps. We just tend to manifest in the world in particular ways, you know. And so for me those who really naturally seem to be Jizōs, and I ask them to really study Jizō, and really look at what that manifestation is in your life. So it's not that you become Jizō, you are Jizō. You yourself are Jizō. Jizō only is alive through you, really.³⁴

This sometimes meant that Jizō was an archetype, essentially a fictional character designed to represent subtle parts of the human personality or Buddhist practice. Just as often, this was conceptualized as “energy,” though this energy was described in highly nebulous terms, leaving open the question of whether to take such ideas literally or metaphorically.³⁵ Perhaps it is best to say that both modes were present: Zen adherents generally felt that unseen, impactful (and typically non-anthropomorphized) forces do pervade the universe and lurk within the body and mind, but also used this terminology to speak more abstractly about the power of vows, intentions, and feelings.

Bodhisattvas are interpreted in a wide variety of ways in Japanese Zen, and all of the above ideas can be found in some form. The degree of emphasis on some

³²Bays 2002: 224-228.

³³Robert Aitken. *The Practice of Perfection: The Paramitas from a Zen Buddhist Perspective*. Washington D.C.: Counterpoint Press, 1994: 204-205.

³⁴Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Personal interview with Zen Center of Los Angeles abbess. 30 June 2006, Zen Center of Los Angeles.

³⁵Bays 2002: 215.

interpretations is quite different than in America, however. Jizō is for most Japanese people an actual savior—in the case of children and the unborn, the supernatural protector par excellence. He is beseeched for help by millions daily, and in the *mizuko kuyō* is often expected to actively rescue lost spirits and remove them to the Pure Land. He is believed in as an actual living—if nonetheless transcendent—entity first and foremost in Japan. Presumably few Japanese Zen participants would state that they are praying to or getting in touch with their “inner Jizō” or “Jizō energies” via *mizuko kuyō*.

Most of the differences between Japanese *mizuko kuyō* and American water baby ceremonies documented so far lead toward what is the most important change of all, the key to understanding not only why the ceremonies take on an altered form but why American Zen practitioners have adopted this ritual in the first place. In Japan, the basic point of the *mizuko kuyō* is to placate the *mizuko*, apologize to it and try to make amends by dedicating merit on its behalf. Ultimately, the spirit who has been wronged—whether it is imagined as actively disgruntled or merely the victim of unfortunate circumstance—is the focus of the ritual. While some participants hope to derive benefit from the performance of *mizuko kuyō*, the ceremony is designed to benefit the *mizuko* ghost. Again, the example of elderly patrons who pay for *mizuko kuyō* to be performed in distant temples is relevant, as it clearly shows that the focus is the spirit being memorialized, and there may be no lay participants in the ceremony at all.

In America, on the other hand, the focus of the water baby ceremony is completely reoriented. Here, the point of the ceremony is the mental and spiritual health of the grieving mother (and/or father). This came out clearly in conversation with the abbess of Zen Center of Los Angeles:

Jeff Wilson: In the Japanese context, there's a feeling that maybe these *mizuko* beings can haunt people, that they're trapped in-between somehow.

Wendy Nakao: I don't know if these beings are trapped. I think the thing is that for us, we're trapped. We're trapped in our abortion, or the death of our child. That's really for me what is being liberated.

Wilson: So it's really more of a ceremony for the people who are participating in the ritual, not for the ghosts.

Nakao: Yeah. I think so. Of course, you can't separate yourself from the child that's been aborted. So they're really together. But I would say the emphasis is more on "we need to free ourselves."³⁶

This is the crucial fact to grasp in understanding these rituals, and it differs on the most basic level from how *mizuko kuyō* is approached in Japan. As another female promoter of the ceremony described, "It's about creating a space in which one can experience what one is feeling. Because one can experience it and live it, it's no longer ruling them. It's no longer a burden. It's something that has its own life beyond you. . . that's why we have ceremonies, in order to create a space for these very, very powerful, very deep, primal things we feel, and often don't know we feel and can't give shape to."³⁷ For this woman, the water baby ceremony does not accomplish the exorcism of the wrathful fetal spirit or the alleviation of the mother's bad luck. Rather, the result is an opening to powerful and hidden emotions akin to that sought through seated meditation. Or, as we will discuss shortly, through psychotherapy.

That the grieving participant, not the water baby, is the new central focus of the ritual can be most easily seen in the range of persons being memorialized in the ritual. Most participate in the water baby ceremony to remember an abortion, miscarriage,

³⁶Wendy Egyoku Nakao. Personal interview with Zen Center of Los Angeles abbess. 30 June 2006, Zen Center of Los Angeles.

³⁷Amala Wrightson. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center priest. 29 December 2002, Rochester Zen Center. LaFleur also noted the importance of the lack of fear and participant-orientation in his brief analysis of Aitken's proto-water baby ceremony. See LaFleur 1992: 191-201.

stillbirth, or the death of a young infant, such as through Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. But having adopted the ritual, many priests are willing to allow other uses if there is felt to be a need. Thus, some people participate in the water baby ceremony to memorialize deceased adult children, who also receive normal funeral rites. More unexpectedly, some participate in the ceremony to honor runaway children, children given up for adoption, children lost through post-divorce custody disputes, or adult children alienated from their parents. And yet others participate on behalf of their own “lost childhood” or “all children in the world.”³⁸ In many of these cases there are certainly no fetal spirits to direct merit toward because the subjects are still alive, while in others there are no beings—living or dead—to speak of at all. In all of these cases, the ceremony is solely for the benefit of the participant; most of these would not be considered to require the performance of *mizuko kuyō* in Japan. Even when there are indeed fetuses and young children as the imagined water babies, proponents are clear that it is the parent who is the main object of concern in the ritual. The point is to produce healing for these mourners.

Meditation, ritual, and psychotherapy are closely aligned in American Zen thought. While some consultants took pains to explicitly state that the water baby ceremony is not therapy, the connections are clear. All consultants used psychotherapeutic language to describe the ceremony, employing such terms as “repression,” “unconscious” and “subconscious,” “neurosis,” “healing,” “defenses,” “processing,” “taboo,” “active listening,” “working through,” “catharsis,” and “aversion,”

³⁸Great Vow Monastery remembrance book, unpaginated. This is a memorial book in which water baby ceremony participants write the names, ages, and causes of death of those they are remembering. I have a copy of this book containing every water baby ceremony performed by the Zen Community of Oregon from 1994-2007. I also have a copy of a similar memorial book employed by Rochester Zen Center, in which water baby ceremony participants write messages to their *mizuko*. Along with messages written on offerings left in the Jizō garden of Great Vow Monastery, these books have provided an important source of insight into how participants understand the ceremonies, what sort of losses they seek ritual help for, and other significant questions for this project.

as well as terms originating in psychotherapy that are already common currency in American Buddhism, such as “ego.” Actual forms of therapy and famous therapists were often referenced in conversation, particularly Carl Jung—hardly surprising since Jizō is persistently explained as an “archetype” by American Zen adherents.

Historian Eva Moskowitz has traced the rise of psychotherapy as a model for American self-understanding in her book *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment*. Moskowitz describes a “therapeutic gospel” with three key tenets that rule contemporary American culture: 1) happiness is the supreme goal in life, 2) problems once thought to be political, economic, or educational are now believed to be psychological, and 3) psychological problems lie at the base of our unhappiness and failures, problems that must be addressed on the individual and corporate levels.³⁹ As she says, “Today a psychological point of view dominates our political, economic, and cultural life. . . The therapeutic gospel celebrates all that promotes self-realization and condemns all that promotes psychological harm. . . [Thus] the therapeutic gospel assumes that mental health and happiness require that we become aware of the underlying and often hidden emotions that determine our outlook.”⁴⁰

We can clearly see the presence of this therapeutic gospel in the water baby ceremonies. In explaining the effectiveness of the water baby ritual, consultants always said that it allowed hidden emotions to come into the conscious mind, where they could be acknowledged, expressed, and released. They also frequently said that this was one common purpose for meditation practice, which involves deep introspection to discover

³⁹Eva Moskowitz. *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001: 2-3.

⁴⁰Ibid. 6-7, 23.

and “work through” places where people are “stuck,” “attached,” or “conditioned.” In many cases, consultants said that during meditation practice emotions connected to past pregnancy losses had bubbled up unexpectedly, and they then sought relief through the water baby ceremony, where they could process these developments in a more active manner than simply sitting with them.⁴¹ From a certain vantage point, much of the water baby ceremony could be interpreted as a series of psychotherapeutic exercises performed in a religious venue. For instance, the sewing of bibs, making of memorials, and drawing of pictures appears as a type of art therapy, while sitting in a supportive circle of fellow sufferers seems rather similar to group therapy. As previously discussed, this sort of circle sitting and group expression is absent from Japanese Zen and *mizuko kuyō* in general. Rather, there are indications that this element was adopted by Americans from self-help and 12-Step programs, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, that have roots in modern notions of therapy, with further influences from so-called “Native American talking stick circles” popular in many New Age groups.⁴²

The striking degree to which water baby ceremonies display the marks of influence from elements of American culture—such as psychotherapy, liberalism, modern skepticism, and non-Buddhist religious and self-help groups—suggests a need to re-think the assumption that converts seek to divorce Zen from “cultural baggage” and articulate a somehow purified and more authentic Buddhism, sometimes claimed to be closer to the Buddha’s original intention than the Asian traditions that evolved over the

⁴¹Norma Crest [pseudonym]. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery member. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

⁴²“Healing Circle for Abortion.” Zen Center of Los Angeles, undated, unpaginated. This is the script for Zen Center of Los Angeles’ water baby ceremonies. I was able to obtain copies of the actual scripts used for these ceremonies from approximately half of the convert Zen centers performing these rituals.

millennia after his death.⁴³ Rather, it seems that in rhetorically attacking the baggage of Japanese-American immigrant Buddhism, commentators sometimes over-emphasize the handbag of Japan while missing the suitcase of American culture. In quite explicit terms, what many Zen leaders are seeking is not to de-culturalize Buddhism but simply to re-culturalize it for a new society, as the founder of the Zen Community of Oak Park states:

We've received wonderful things from the Japanese, and we've also received things that aren't particularly helpful. And I think that some of that maturing is happening as Western Buddhists are having some discernment around what is cultural and what isn't, and being able to separate the two. And in that process I think what's also happening is that Zen is kind of marrying with science and psychology and social justice.⁴⁴

In reflecting on the adaptations that have been made in the water baby ceremony, we can suggest that it is not simply that these changes were made, consciously or unconsciously, by the mainly female priests who have developed the water baby ceremony in America. It can be argued that these changes were necessary for the ritual to be accepted and utilized within a convert Zen milieu. Currently, if the *mizuko kuyō* were offered as-is by a convert Zen temple without these sorts of Americanized adaptations, it likely would not appeal to the membership and would fail to attract support for its continuance. Furthermore, it might have even greater difficulty attracting non-Buddhists, a significant clientele for the ceremony at many Zen temples.

Re-Assessing the Place of Ritual in American Zen

⁴³James William Coleman. *The New Buddhism: The Western Transformation of an Ancient Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: 218.

⁴⁴Robert Joshin Althouse. Personal interview with Zen Community of Oak Park abbot. 13 March 2006, Zen Community of Oak Park, Oak Park, IL.

“Branching streams flow on in the dark,” wrote Chinese Zen patriarch Sekito Kisan in his classic text *Sandōkai*.⁴⁵ In ways recognized and unrecognized, American practitioners have often branched away from the stream of Zen that has flowed to them from Japan. Historian of American Zen Victor Hori has gone so far as to coin a general rule: “Americanization occurs under the guise of a sincere belief that one is following Japanese Zen tradition.”⁴⁶ At the same time, the rivers of Zen flowing through America have themselves branched off in many unnoticed directions from the master narratives of scholars writing about Western Buddhism. Now that we have examined how the water baby ceremony arrived in American Zen centers, how it is conducted, and what modifications have been made to fit it into an American context, we can consider the implications of the ceremony for both the future of American Zen and the future of academic historiography of Buddhism in the West.

The water baby ceremony is a rapidly growing phenomenon in a form of religion that has often been depicted as anti-ritualistic. How are we to understand this? Is Zen more amenable to ritual than many have described? Has there always been more ritual in American Zen centers, but it was overlooked or downplayed? Has there been a change in American Zen communities, so that they have become more open to ritual and incorporated more ceremonies into their temples and meditation centers? Has American culture itself changed to become more “ritual-friendly?” All of the above, I believe.

⁴⁵Shitou Xiqian and *Cantongqi*, respectively, in Chinese. See Shunryu Suzuki. *Branching Streams Flow in the Darkness: Zen Talks on the Sandokai*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001: 10.

⁴⁶G. Victor Sōgen Hori. “Japanese Zen in America: Americanizing the Face in the Mirror.” *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Edited by Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998: 55.

The assertion that Zen does not involve ritual, or is opposed to ritual in its basic orientation, cannot be supported by a look at actual Zen activities, either historical or contemporary. Zen, whether in Japan or in another country where it is widely practiced (such as China, Korea, or Vietnam), is dominated by ritual activity. For example, Duncan Williams, in his study *The Other Side of Zen*, has done a terrific job of retrieving the actual practice of early modern Sōtō Zen Buddhism. As he points out, the main activities of Zen priests were “praying for rain, healing the sick, or performing exorcistic and funerary rites,”⁴⁷ not *zazen*. In fact, “the vast majority of ordinary Sōtō Zen monks and laypeople never practiced Zen meditation, never engaged in iconoclastic acts of the Ch’an/Zen masters (as described in hagiographical literature), never solved *kōans*, never raked Zen gardens, never sought mystical meditative states, and never read Dōgen’s writings.”⁴⁸ Thankfully, the work of recent scholars on Asian Buddhism seems to be making some impact on historiographers of American Zen. While one can still find numerous popular accounts of Zen as “unritualistic,” academic studies of Zen in the United States are now more likely to acknowledge to some degree the presence of ritual as a normal part of Zen practice.

If Zen has always had ritual as a basic component, how is it that earlier historiographers failed to account for it? In part, the blame must be laid upon the heavy stress given to *zazen* in American Zen communities. This practice is marginal in everyday Japanese Zen, but it is the *raison d’être* for nearly all American Zen groups.

⁴⁷Williams 2005: 3.

⁴⁸Williams 2005: 4. For a quick but excellent record of some of the most important publications that have forced a re-evaluation of the actual prevalence of ritual in Zen, see note 2 of Williams, on page 133. Like Williams, this study is heavily indebted to the work of such scholars as Bodiford, Faure, Buswell, and Foulk, as well as Williams himself.

Most American Zen practitioners are attracted to Zen as a way to perform meditation, and the convert groups that have spread across the continent since the middle of the twentieth century all take extended silent seated meditation as their primary communal activity. American Zen has perpetuated a belief that meditation is not just the core but the only necessary aspect of Buddhism, that *zazen* is not ritualistic, and that crazy-wise spontaneity—often directly contrasted with “empty ritual”—is the essence of Zen.

Reliance on American Zen rhetoric deflected attention away from other elements of Zen practice that were nonetheless present from the beginning. This is true both of outsiders who took Zen rhetoric at face value and insiders already indoctrinated to focus on *zazen* to the detriment of other practices. This dynamic is clear, for instance, in the reflections of one of my consultants, a long-time member of the Rochester Zen Center:

. . . the focus was really on sitting meditation practice and *sesshin*. When we first came here in August of 1970, we had a child, so that kind of gave us a whole different kind of path than virtually everybody else. [laughs] There were a couple of other families but mostly everybody was young, single, and just gung-ho for sitting and doing *sesshin*, and Roshi loved that. . . [my husband] went to a seven-day *sesshin* in August, a seven-day *sesshin* in September, a seven-day *sesshin* in October, a seven-day *sesshin* in November, and then in December he was in the hospital with [a medical condition]. It was really stressful! [laughs] So that was obviously the focus, especially in the 70s and 80s. I mean, you just went to as many *sesshins* as you could, you sat morning, noon, and night. People walked down the street with their eyes down, they were very serious. . . people were just manic [laughs] about practice—formal meditation practice. But that does not mean that actually in those early years we didn’t develop a lot of ceremonies—we did! We developed a lot of ceremonies. It was a very rich ceremonial year, and that was the start of sort of adapting Buddhism into what was already here, such as the ceremonial life of American culture. For instance, Thanksgiving is a very big ceremony for us here in America. New Year’s is another big one. We adapted and kind of transmogrified [laughs] the existing ceremonies into something that had meaning for us as well. Halloween was a big one. And then of course we had Wesak which was uniquely Buddhist. And we used to do a kind of Buddha’s birthday ceremony. . . There are ceremonies for lots of different things. And we’ve done plays of the Buddha’s life, and in the early years we had some incredibly creative people. We did this real big piece of

theatre in the 70s, it was music and singing. . . Not everybody goes to *sesshin*! And if they don't, what happens here is that they feel that their practice is less than valued. That because there's this model of staff where you dedicate your life for however long to this constant going to *sesshin* and however many hours of sitting a day, that somehow that's the only way, the only valid way to practice.⁴⁹

Furthermore, we must interrogate the notion that *zazen* is not ritual. An activity typically performed according to a repetitious community schedule and for an exact set amount of time, whose bodily postures and orientations are rigidly prescribed, carried out by a group in a religious setting with a religious goal, accompanied by bells, drums, incense, and bowing, with special equipment, connected to a set of religious legends and myths, followed by communal chanting of venerated texts, and often with a designated leader wearing clerical garb and carrying out additional devotions in front of an altar—surely this is the very description of a model ritual. That Zen practitioners in America have generally been unwilling to admit as much seems to be linked to at least two phenomena. The first is the classical Protestant critique of Catholic ritual (and often by extension, ritual in general) as the meaningless and corrupt development of scheming priests, antithetical to the intent and practices of the religious founder, that substitutes mere gestures and formality for genuine spiritual feeling and belief. This view has had force in American religion since the time of the British colonies, and though its grip on our culture has diminished somewhat with the rise of pluralism and other factors, it was still operative during the first waves of convert Zen in the 1950s and 60s.⁵⁰ This was also a time of rising countercultural attitudes that in some ways took the Protestant orientation

⁴⁹Regina McMaster [pseudonym]. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center member. 6 November 2005, her home, Rochester, NY. It is worth noting that nearly all these early ceremonies and celebrations mentioned come from outside Zen Buddhism. Most are standard American holidays given a Zen gloss; Wesak is the Southeast Asian celebration of the Buddha's birth, awakening, and death.

⁵⁰Sydney Ahlstrom, ed. *Theology in America: The Major Protestant Voices from Puritanism to Neo-Orthodoxy*. Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967: 25-26.

even further, searching for authentic religious experience outside of the framework of Christian dogma and practice altogether. Savvy Zen missionaries and spokespersons, such as Suzuki Daisetsu and Philip Kapleau, marketed Zen as pure experience and a process of self-understanding, deflecting attention from *zazen*'s ritual aspects.

A second reason for this failure to identify *zazen* as a ritual seems to have been a perceived linkage of ritual and ceremony, so that ritual was associated with ceremonies such as the Catholic Mass. Because *zazen* is mainly a quiet practice that can be interpreted as individualistic rather than communal, it lacks some of the more grandly ceremonial aspects that have drawn the ire of persons influenced by the Protestant critique. Moreover, with a shortage of qualified priests, limited schedules, few dedicated sites for practice, a dearth of ritual implements, and incomplete knowledge of common practices in Japanese Buddhism, early convert Zen communities naturally did not include many of the ceremonies that drive Zen in Japan. A situation where few ceremonies were performed, quietistic *zazen* was emphasized, and pure experience was championed as the uniquely defining characteristic of Zen, led to a perception that Zen was unritualistic by *nature*, rather than by contingent American *circumstance*, and created feedback pressure not to acknowledge the ritualized elements of meditation and other practices.

So, to a certain degree and relatively speaking, early convert Zen practitioners really were temporarily *less* involved in certain types of ritual compared to both their Japanese parent lineages and many other American religious groups, and they simultaneously failed to perceive the ritual nature of those practices they did engage in. But while the perception of Zen as non-ritualistic has remained strong for some, over the years the frequency, variety, and impact of ritual in American Zen communities have

increased significantly. All of the flagship Zen institutions—those large and stable enough to own their facilities and support one or more permanent teachers—now perform a weekly, monthly, and yearly cycle of ceremonies and rituals.⁵¹

We have accounted for why ritual did not seem to be part of Zen in earlier decades, but why is American Zen now filling up with ritual? A number of factors seem to be in play here. One is that many Zen communities now have sufficient size and resources to perform rituals that would have been difficult or impossible in earlier, leaner times. Ritual on anything beyond the most basic scale tends to require a certain minimum of free time, usable space, specialized equipment, and participants. These were often not available to Zen centers during their formative periods. Material culture is particularly relevant here: historically, many Buddhist implements have had to be imported from Asia at considerable cost. But now with a flourishing industry of American Buddhist products—from meditation cushions to Jizō statues—access to such items is far greater and reasonably-priced instruments can be found.

A second factor is that with the growth of Zen in America has come greater knowledge of Asian Zen, including the dawning awareness of the common role of ritual in Japanese religious life.⁵² Some Zen practitioners are critical of what they see as

⁵¹Again, I want to stress that I am not asserting that earlier American Zen lacked ritual entirely. But a study of the newsletters and calendars of Zen centers in the 1960s and 70s, versus those of today, reveals a far larger and more varied contemporary array of regularly scheduled rituals and ceremonies. These differ somewhat according to lineage but commonly include *zazen*, *oryoki*-style meals, celebration of the births and deaths of founders, Vesak, Segaki, New Year's, devotions to bodhisattvas such as Kannon and Jizō, *jukkai*, Coming of Age ceremonies for teens, atonement ceremonies, Sunday services, and many other rituals. And, increasingly, the water baby ceremony. Segaki is an autumnal ritual centered around helping hungry or wandering ghosts. American Zen communities often assimilate it to Halloween, and as with the water baby ceremony, there is sometimes identification of hungry ghosts as aspects of the practitioner rather than actual entities—perhaps a somewhat less flattering reinterpretation than the assertion that the enlightened bodhisattva Jizō is your own self!

⁵²The growth of Buddhist Studies has contributed to this increased knowledge—many consultants had read William LaFleur's *Liquid Life*, for instance.

watering down of the tradition as it crosses into an American milieu, and ritual appears as an important element that helps maintain and express Zen attitudes and forms. Here we see the need for a corrective in the narrative of Buddhism's adaptation in America. It is possible to imagine that adaptation involves a progressive unidirectional shift over time away from Asian elements and toward phenomena seen as more "Western" or "American," such as away from ritual and toward meditation, away from belief in spirits or karma and toward skepticism, and so on. But in fact, the scale slides in both directions and the process is considerably more complex and less teleological. Attention to the growing favor toward ritual in American Zen highlighted by the water baby ceremony suggests that the timeline can in some cases be read as becoming *more* Japanese over time, rather than less, as Americans learn more about Japan and reassess the possible babies thrown out with the bathwater (or perhaps never put into the bath in the first place).

One of the ironies of studying Buddhism in America is the eventual realization that *ignorance*, the bugaboo of Buddhism, is at least as responsible as *understanding* for the creative development of distinctive forms of Buddhism that allow Zen and other groups to become acculturated and grow. For instance, not knowing that Japanese Zen practitioners don't make bibs or engage in cathartic circle sessions, Americans readily conjure up entirely innovative "traditions" and then retro-project them on to an Asian parent lineage that they both deeply value and sometimes only partially comprehend. This further complicates the trope of adaptation in Buddhism's transmission to the West. Adaptation is often not a process of taking a pre-existing model and changing it to meet a different cultural understanding. Instead, it involves inventing new forms from whole

cloth—pardon the pun—and then perhaps modifying them later to better reflect Asian models when knowledge of Japanese practices increases.⁵³

A third factor in the increase of American Zen ritual is the emergence of positive valuations of ritual itself within these communities. My consultants expressed appreciation for ritual in the abstract as a positive activity, one needed in order to communicate teachings on a somatic level, to honor and remember major figures in the lineage, to effect real healing, to psychologically usher participants into new stages of life and commitment, and to mark for the community important milestones or bring attention to communal values and desires. Many cited the water baby ceremony as a ritual that fulfilled one or more of these needs. While some consultants professed to have appreciated ritual since the beginning, many others indicated that they had gradually come to a rejection of the earlier anti-ritualism in American Zen. Factors in this turn of opinion included greater distance from the negative religious experiences of childhood, exposure to ritual in other Buddhist lineages (such as Tibetan Buddhism) or in trips to Asia, and the emergence of new concerns not addressed directly by seated meditation, such as unresolved emotional issues, growing awareness of one's mortality, and the death of temple members or family. One frequent story told in many slight variations was of the consultant as a headstrong young meditator who defiantly eschewed "smells and bells," yet over years and decades learned to love Buddhist ritual as it became more familiar and comfortable, augmenting or even supplanting *zazen* as their primary orientation in practice. Some indicated that the very anti-ritualism of earlier American

⁵³We can note here that it is very difficult to distinguish "liberal" and "conservative" groups in such a situation. Is an abbot who resists importing normal Japanese rituals because they've never been done at his center a liberal who is changing a Japan-based tradition or a conservative who clings to the forms that have been standard at his temple for a generation?

Zen had eventually driven them to investigate ritual as a potentially useful side of Buddhism; according to Buddhist psychology aversion is ultimately as dangerous as attachment, and the rejection of ritual and many aspects of Zen other than meditation began to seem extreme or somehow indicative of deeper issues to some consultants.

These changes have parallels in other convert communities. For example, Wendy Cadge found a similar dynamic at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center:

In the early days, the teachers and lay practitioners at CIMC focused only on meditation practice, believing that any other branches of the Theravada Buddhist tree were just the sapwood and would only get in the way. Over the years, however, the teachers and practitioners have come to realize that the tree cannot survive with only the heartwood and have gradually introduced other branches through rituals and ceremonies, regular gatherings to take the precepts, and holiday gatherings. These branches, they increasingly believe, support the meditation practice, and combined with meditation can lead to the complete end of suffering in this lifetime.⁵⁴

We should recognize that one piece of this puzzle of ritual's rise is the proliferation of Zen in America, which drives inevitable change. As Zen grows it adds to its client base by serving new niches; meditation simply cannot meet the wishes of all people potentially interested in Zen. Experiments such as the Kwan Yin movement provide other ways for Americans to interact with Zen. Furthermore, with the increase in the number of Zen centers there is greater opportunity for different expressions and models. When Zen was concentrated in a small number of central sites—San Francisco Zen Center, Rochester Zen Center, Zen Center of Los Angeles—it could be more easily policed. But today most small cities and even many rural areas have Zen groups, and voices that were subaltern now speak. Women and priests amenable to ritual lead

⁵⁴Wendy Cadge. *Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004: 197.

temples in many locations. There has been a parallel explosion in the number and visibility of media venues available for championing ritual and other previously marginalized aspects of Zen, including the internet and many print publications, such as *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* and *Buddhadharma*. The very success of convert meditation-oriented Zen guarantees the emergence of post-meditation developments.

The role of women in promoting a more ritualistic Zen is also related to a wave of scandals that shook American Buddhism, especially Zen, in the 1980s and 90s. Virtually every major convert lineage—including the San Francisco Zen Center, Zen Center of Los Angeles, Minnesota Zen Center, Kwan Um school, and Shambhala—experienced crises related to male leaders (often married or allegedly celibate) inappropriately having sex with students, extravagantly spending temple funds, or similar misuses of power.⁵⁵ Many students, disillusioned by all-too-human flaws on the part of supposedly enlightened masters, left Buddhism altogether, while others formed breakaway lineages or sought to dramatically restructure the way American temples were governed. One significant outcome of this turmoil was a dramatic increase in the attention paid to female Buddhists' issues, including a concerted effort by many groups to put women into leadership positions that were often unavailable to them before. Most of the women priests described in the previous chapter came to their current leadership positions in the wake of the biggest crises in American convert Zen. They thus brought not only new perspectives but also a particular determination to find ways to offer Zen forms that were gentler, more sensitive to practitioners' needs beyond the meditation cushion, and less given to

⁵⁵ Perhaps the paradigmatic case was that of Richard Baker's infidelity and exploitation of students at San Francisco Zen Center. One useful study of this situation is Michael Downing's *Shoes Outside the Door: Desire, Devotion, and Excess at San Francisco Zen Center* (2001).

the strict hierarchical duality of master and pupil. Communal rituals offered one attractive avenue of such exploration.

Finally, American Zen does not operate within a vacuum. Despite the lingering Protestant critique, the profile of ritual in American religion has risen steadily since the 1970s.⁵⁶ While internal forces account for much of the rise of ritual in American Zen, we should also be attentive to the ways in which other American groups have adopted an increasingly favorable attitude toward ritual—this is particularly important because American Zen practitioners are frequently involved in other religious communities as well, from which they receive ideas, attitudes, and even practices. For instance, one common area of member overlap is with the New Age movement, which is highly positive toward ritual and ceremony. As scholar of American religion Sarah Pike notes, “Neopagan and New Age rituals heal by externalizing suffering and loss and helping individuals to process painful aspects of their lives within a supportive group setting.”⁵⁷ A more succinct description of the water baby ceremony could hardly be imagined.

Places, Things, Bodies, Feelings: Other Sightings of American Zen

The water baby ceremony highlights many elements of Zen that have not been sufficiently examined in previous studies. In particular, four tightly interwoven themes stand out as particularly prominent in this ritual and require closer attention: place,

⁵⁶Attributable in part to the explosion of religious diversity in the second half of the twentieth century and concerns over the corrosive effects of modernity, this reevaluation and approval of ritual is at least partly owed to the emergence of Ritual Studies itself. See Catherine Bell. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997: 257-258; 263-265. American Protestantism too has seen a major return to ritual practices during this period. See Randall Balmer and Lauren F. Winner. *Protestantism in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002: 200-202.

⁵⁷Sarah M. Pike. *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004: 98.

material culture, body, and emotion. Against images of Zen as an aniconic, self-controlled, and mind-oriented sect, the ritualization of pregnancy loss reveals the presence of other experiences of Zen. Cast into particularly high relief by the water baby ceremony, once these alternate narratives are recognized we may begin to perceive how they manifest in other aspects of American Zen as well, providing a better-rounded picture of the true life of convert Zen centers.

Place: the water baby ceremony requires certain types of places for it to be performed. The first thing to note is that water baby ceremonies take place at Zen temples. They are rarely carried out at homes, hospitals, public parks, or cemeteries, all sites that could potentially be used for the ritual. Producing the ceremony at a temple ensures a certain level of privacy and control over the proceedings, and makes it easier to assemble resources and draw on the labor of the Zen community for assistance. It also imbues it with greater force by connecting it with the sacred nature of the site.

The next thing to note is that at these temples, the ritual is usually conducted in two different locations: a sewing room and a Jizō garden. The rooms for sewing are not dedicated to this activity: they are libraries, storage rooms, worship halls, or other spaces normally used for other purposes. It is the ceremony itself that forms the important part of the “ritual container” during the sewing, not the walls and ceiling. No rites are conducted to mark out the space of sewing or special boundaries established—American priests feel no need to demarcate an inner, pure space for this portion of the ceremony.⁵⁸

⁵⁸We should also note that there is one prominent space that is rarely utilized for water baby ceremonies: the *zendō*. This space is typically reserved for meditation, the ritual activity at the heart of American Zen. And unlike the Japanese-American temples, little ritualization takes place in the *hondō* for one simple reason: whereas most Zen temples in Japan have *hondōs* but not *zendōs*, all convert Zen groups in America have a *zendō* but only a tiny portion has a *hondō*.

The second portion of the ceremony takes place in a more specific location: a garden with Jizō figures. During this part of the ritual, where Jizō is directly approached, given offerings, and merit is dedicated to lost children, there is a need to be out of doors, close to the soil, as the participants move symbolically from the constrained space of the sewing room into the freedom and open air of the garden. Whereas the sewing portion is done indoors for purely practical reasons (it is easier to sew without the interference of weather), even in pouring rain, bitter cold, or oppressive heat the offering will take place outside if possible. A type of birth takes place as the indoor womb is left for the outside world and Jizōs standing in for the unborn are encountered in a place of life and growing things. At the same time, this birth is a type of death and funeral, as the offerings are left behind to rot and return to the earth and the difficult emotions expressed in the ritual are left behind in the pastoral environment of the garden.⁵⁹ While the first part of the ritual could be performed in practically any large-enough space at the temple, the second part requires that Zen centers interested in carrying out the ritual set aside a plot of ground that can be specifically maintained as a Jizō garden. This garden then becomes a place of memory, returned to by some participants to reconnect with the beings symbolically laid to rest there or the feelings expressed on that site during the ritual.

Material culture: the water baby ceremony cannot be performed without *stuff*. The core of this ritual is the manufacturing of bibs, hats, capes, toys, and messages to be presented to a child-like statue simultaneously representing a powerful bodhisattva and a lost child. The interaction with objects during the ceremony is held to have tremendous healing power by proponents. By making an item of clothing they are able to do something on behalf of their lost loved one, and by writing out messages a form of

⁵⁹Rochester Zen Center actually buries the dilapidated remains of former offerings during the ceremony.

communication with the dead takes place. Dressing the statue, the participants appropriate the identity of parents caring for their children (figure 4.1). The Jizō image provides a stand-in for a child who is gone and perhaps was never present to begin with, a proxy that can be seen and felt.⁶⁰ Pregnancy losses thus are moved from the realm of the imagination into the perceptible world, just as the participant's grief and sadness are moved from the shadows of the heart out into the shared circle of the ceremony.

Participants don't just see and touch bibs and statues. Incense is used to purify the offerings; sutra books help guide participants through the chants of the ceremony, which are punctuated by ringing bells; tea and cookies are strategically employed during the final phase of the event in order to comfort participants, and perhaps encourage them to linger and complete the process of expressing the feelings provoked by the ceremony. Thus all five senses are attended to by material objects in the course of the ceremony, providing a full experience that lasts in the mind, considered the sixth sense in Buddhism.

The need of material objects for the ceremony creates new developments at American Zen centers. Most of those that perform such ceremonies regularly had to first make or purchase Jizō statues, increasing the presence of icons and raising the profile of figures associated with the water baby ceremony. The increased demand has contributed to a greater supply—as reported in the previous chapter, Buddhist supply catalogs now carry Jizō statues, including ones specifically intended for the water baby ceremony.

Material objects are also a site of noticeable hybridity in American Zen, where even within the context of the supposedly thoroughly Buddhist water baby ceremony other influences appear and alternate understandings of the ritual are suggested. Many

⁶⁰At the Chicago Zen Center Jizō statues are actually wrapped in swaddling clothes and brought home to be placed in a crib for a month before being returned to the temple.

Jizō gardens, for instance, house more than just Buddhist figures. One frequent inhabitant of such gardens is the Virgin Mary, whose statues can be found festooned with the same red bibs and memorial tokens left during water baby ceremonies (figure 4.2). From the strictest temples to the most liberal about pre-screening participants and delineating what the ritual is for, it is common to find Mary statues provided for participants as alternatives to Jizō. Mary is female and a mother; more importantly, she is Christian, and many participants at American Zen centers are Christians. As demonstrated by the objects associated with the water baby ceremony, Zen centers are entangled with other religious communities and seek to minister to Christians and other non-Buddhists, going so far as to purchase Christian statuary and make a permanent place for non-Buddhist icons on their grounds.⁶¹ Messages left on tokens by participants speak of God, angels, heaven, and other non-Buddhist concepts, suggesting that many participants utilize the rituals strategically, taking part in Buddhist ceremonies when an equivalent ritual is unavailable in their own religious tradition.⁶² The water baby ritual thus shows a religiously pluralistic attitude on the part of American Zen, which is willing to include outsiders and even accommodate their beliefs and objects of devotion. As one priest whose temple does bi-annual water baby ceremonies said, “For this June, what will be put out will be that anybody can come to this, as long as we have enough Jizōs. Sounds silly, but it’s true, it’s limited by the number of Jizōs we have. These [non-

⁶¹Great Vow Monastery’s Jizō garden houses two Virgin Mary statues because the first was so popular that it was being smothered by water baby offerings. A second statue was placed in the garden specifically to provide comfort to a greater number of Christian participants, and the abbess points out this statue to participants and encourages them to worship in front of it if they wish. Kojun Hull. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery priest. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR

⁶²It may also be that like some of the women in the Japanese-American temples discussed in chapter two, who sometimes go to an unfamiliar temple so their own priests won’t know that they have had an abortion, some non-Buddhists seek out water baby ceremonies not because they cannot get help in their own churches but because they do not want their pregnancy losses known.

Buddhists] can come, anybody can come. To me, the fulcrum is the loss. The fulcrum is not Buddhism. I'm always going to tip it to the loss, it's the loss that counts."⁶³

And while material culture becomes a place for building bridges to the non-Buddhist community, it also functions at times as a site of potential conflict and antagonism with outsiders. For example, the Zen Community of Oak Park wanted to build a Jizō garden behind its temple (a converted house in a residential Chicago suburb) and store the ashes of cremated babies in hollow Jizō statues. This is a common practice in Japan, where virtually every temple has a cemetery, whether the temple is located in the inner city, suburbs, or rural countryside. Japanese-American temples usually house remains as well. But the board of directors at the Oak Park temple determined that they would run afoul of very strict codes regulating the handling and use of human remains in their area, and ultimately scrapped the plan.⁶⁴

Body: accounts of Buddhist practice tend to stress the mental effort of meditation. In contrast, the mind is put on the backburner in some ways while the body moves to the forefront in the water baby ceremony. The space of the ritual is populated by sitting bodies; the hats and bibs are painstakingly manufactured by loving hands that then dress and caress little statues. While the leader occasionally exhorts participants to recall their lost children, most instructions are specifically about physical activities. Participants are led through a series of actions: sewing, writing, walking, standing, bowing, chanting, and presenting gifts. Bodies are carefully stage-managed in orientations designed to evoke or

⁶³Sevan Ross. Personal interview with Chicago Zen Center abbot. 14 March 2006, Chicago Zen Center, Evanston, IL.

⁶⁴Robert Joshin Althouse. Personal interview with Zen Community of Oak Park abbot. 13 March 2006, Zen Community of Oak Park, Oak Park, IL.

reinforce different elements of the ceremony: point them inwards in a circle to get them to talk, face them toward the altar to make them pay homage to Jizō.

Consultants often proclaimed that “mind and body are not two” and attempted to disclaim dualistic concepts that pit the mind and body against one another as separate or even antagonistic. Nonetheless, it was striking how strongly they felt about the importance of physicality in Zen and specifically that it is in and through the body that the water baby ceremony effects its healing. Repeatedly, grief is reported to be something carried within the body, a hidden festering that must be cleansed by actions that work on the body and thus on the underlying emotions. During the ritual the body may seem to take over while the mind disappears altogether, as one laywoman described:

Jeff Wilson: Is there a specific moment in the ceremony that stands out for you as the central part of where that change really happens?

Norma Crest: For me, I would say it was the making of something. It was almost like I was watching my hands make something. Yes, I was really watching. They were working on their own. It wasn't like my brain was saying “Do this”—it just sort of developed.⁶⁵

The effects of the ceremony were almost invariably reported in somatic terms, especially as “lightening,” the release of tension, a sense of being cleansed, and feelings of energy moving within the body.

At least in part the stress on the body was consciously part of a strategy to correct a perceived imbalance in their communities. Many consultants use the water baby ritual to implicitly criticize aspects of American Zen that they disagree with. For instance, most felt that the body was or had been discounted in Zen practice in favor of ideas of the disembodied, enlightened mind. Some described this as a “patriarchal” mindset linked to

⁶⁵Norma Crest [pseudonym]. Personal interview with Great Vow Monastery member. 5 November 2006, Great Vow Monastery, Clatskanie, OR.

notions of control and aggression and contrasted it with a more “feminine” approach that respected the body—in the process they turned the misogynistic tendencies of Japanese *mizuko kuyō* upside-down.⁶⁶ Thus the pro-female, bodily practices of the water baby ceremony were subtly contrasted with and even at times set in opposition to the pursuit of *satori* in the *zendō*. Or, we might say, in opposition to certain interpretations of the *zendō*, because these consultants also emphasized the physicality of *zazen* and activities such as prostrations, an increasingly popular practice in convert Zen communities.

Emotion: if there is one element even more central to the water baby ceremony than the body, then it is emotion. Yet emotion is a difficult subject for many American Zen practitioners, some of whom view meditation as a way to destroy or control negative emotions. Desire and anger are frequently described as poisons, two of the three basic evils of the human condition that lead to suffering and whose elimination is the goal of Buddhism. Displays of strong emotions are subtly but persistently discouraged at most convert Zen centers. Strong emotion can be taken as an indicator of inadequate religious practice and contrasted with the perfectly calm, self-possessed image of the Buddha seated in quiet meditation. Emotion may be seen as disruptive of practice—it is hard to meditate when someone is crying, laughing, or cursing nearby—and expressions of negative and even positive emotions seem to make many convert practitioners uncomfortable. We can see this in the disapproving initial reactions of some of my consultants to the water baby ceremony:

Jeff Wilson: Do you recall your reaction when you first heard about [Zen water baby ceremonies]?

⁶⁶Sunya Kjolhede. Personal interview with Windhorse Zen Center abbess. 17 June 2006, Windhorse Zen Center, Alexander, NC.

Lisa Johnson: *"Oh please! This is so fricking touchy-feely I can't believe it!"*⁶⁷

Into this atmosphere of emotional restraint, the water baby ceremony enters as a countervailing force. According to proponents, this ritual exists to heal the wounded hearts of grieving parents and to purge or diminish feelings that arise in the wake of abortion, miscarriage, and losses of pregnancies or young children. Consultants and published accounts of the ritual emphasize the presence of grief, loss, sadness, regret, and in some cases anger or shame in connection to the water baby ceremony. These emotions are negatively valued and viewed as a threat to mourners' physical and mental health, as well as dangerous to one's marriage and inter-personal relationships; we might point out that they are not, however, usually directly described as threatening to one's spiritual state. During the ceremony these negative emotions are brought into attention and acknowledged, a process believed to be healing, and new expressions of positive feelings—especially love, gratitude, and hope—are encouraged.⁶⁸ From the memorial book at Rochester Zen Center, here is one example:

My child,
I am so deeply sorry that I had to make the choice not to give you life—please
forgive me. May Jizo Bodhisattva guide you on your way and may we both attain
the most profound understanding so we may together lead others to
understanding. I accept full responsibility for the choice I made and now give
you the love I couldn't give you then. Your name is _____.
In gratitude,
Your mother⁶⁹

⁶⁷Lisa Johnson [pseudonym]. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center member. 3 November 2005, Rochester Zen Center.

⁶⁸Emily Kennett [pseudonym]. Personal interview with Rochester Zen Center member. 2 November 2005, Rochester Zen Center.

⁶⁹Rochester Zen Center water baby memorial book, unpaginated. I have omitted the name given in the ceremony to this aborted fetus.

Emotions are not just referred to in the water baby ceremony: they often manifest in dramatic displays. People cry, shake, sometimes completely break down and have to leave. Consultants described seeing “explosions” of emotion during ceremonies and that the ritual was “heartrending.”⁷⁰ Some wept themselves in recounting the pain of others they had witnessed during past ceremonies. At one ritual the participants were all women who had abortions; the level of deep hurt surprised the male leader of the ceremony:

It was just unbearable, the pain was. . . I had no idea how much there was around this. I was shocked. And also how much of a stigma there is around it. And I heard women saying that they had lived with this all their lives. It was a secret that they couldn’t talk about. And they really thought that they were the only bad person in the world with that, that they sort of carried it with an enormous amount of burden, thinking that they had done something terribly wrong and they couldn’t talk about it with anyone.⁷¹

Still, he affirmed the rightness of their emotions. “Grief is a wonderful, rich part of our human experience. It’s OK to cry, it’s OK to be sad.” Unlike the normal subdued emotionality in American Zen, emotional expression is encouraged in these ceremonies.

The water baby ceremony thus aligns in some ways with the predominant attitude of controlling or removing emotion (the point, after all, is to manage grief that has become unhealthy), and at the same time pushes back against it. For most of my consultants the ritual suggests that emotions cannot be directly controlled by mental effort or meditation but must be released by fully experiencing them. Attachment and anger are contextualized as natural—perhaps not desirable, but nonetheless part of the process of life itself, aspects that are only overcome by paradoxically embracing them

⁷⁰Sevan Ross. Personal interview with Chicago Zen Center abbot. 14 March 2006, Chicago Zen Center, Evanston, IL

⁷¹Robert Joshin Althouse. Personal interview with Zen Community of Oak Park abbot. 13 March 2006, Zen Community of Oak Park, Oak Park, IL

and allowing them to pass on their own. With the issue of emotion, once again the water baby ceremony becomes a site of subtle resistance to the logic of the *zendō*.

We should not misunderstand this resistance as simply that of laypeople resisting the orthodox interpretations of priests, or of women resisting the institutional power of men. While my female consultants did express criticism of interpretations of mind-oriented, anti-emotional, meditation-centered Zen that they viewed as widespread and dominant, my male consultants did so as well. Furthermore, many of the people expressing such critiques of the *zendō* are themselves priests and even founders and leaders of their own temples, who in other contexts put extremely heavy stress on *zazen*.

This phenomenon should be viewed in two ways. First, there is *some* direct resistance to priests and male leadership in these critiques, especially on the part of female lay consultants at older Zen temples. In other cases the critiques seem to be the rehearsing of past battles—leaders voicing resistance to earlier authorities are rehashing old roles of rebellion, often with the memory of the above-mentioned scandals in mind, with a certain amount of disconnect with their present situation as the new authorities. But a second interpretation of this resistance is that it is itself a performance that explores the boundaries of acceptable American Zen behavior without fundamentally changing the meditation-orientation of convert communities. Water baby ceremonies provide an occasional vessel for the expression of emotions that are deemed inappropriate for the *zendō*, thereby allowing the *zendō* to remain the constant presence in Zen practice. When a female Zen priest laments the lack of attention to body and emotion in Zen and performs a water baby ceremony in the garden outside, she is fleshing out the Zen experience and at the same time not changing or challenging the paradigm of practice in

the *zendō* itself. Rather, alternate approaches to Zen are being advanced as infrequent corrective measures that heal damaged practitioners and put them back into a state fit to carry out calm, concentrated *zazen*.

Summing up, and not forgetting the many adaptations made in the process of adapting *mizuko kuyō* reviewed earlier in this chapter, I nonetheless suggest that the emergence of the water baby ceremony can be taken to represent a new stage in the development of American Zen, one which in some ways moves in an opposite direction from the primary features identified in the current literature on Zen in the United States. This new stage builds on ritual practices that go back to the beginnings of convert Zen, but as a confluence of forces have converged in the late 1990s and 2000s, a change in quantity has resulted in a change in kind, and American Zen has been partially reinvented in significantly more ritualistic modes than those displayed in earlier decades. Even as the *mizuko kuyō* is disciplined along psychological and anti-supernatural lines within convert Zen centers, it adds to the increase of ritual in American Zen, reveals a hesitant step toward greater engagement with cosmic savior figures and Buddhist spirit culture, and points to a re-valuation of emotional needs within what has heretofore been a rather subdued and controlled upper middle class religious culture. It clearly highlights the importance of women—both priests and laypeople—in changing aspects of American Buddhism. Still often a far cry from the way in which Zen is practiced and understood in Japan, American Zen is nevertheless moving in some ways toward a greater resemblance to its parent lineage as it incorporates ever more ritual and gently displaces the meditation cushion as the sole location of true Zen practice. Thus, while *mizuko kuyō* has been altered to make it conform to an American understanding of Zen, it is also part of a series

of changes that alter what American Zen is, pushing it closer to Asian forms. The end result could be that some future ritual transplantations will not need to go through the same process of adaptation.

Attention to space, objects, bodies, and emotions in the water baby ceremony—and likely other places in American Zen as well—leads to seeing that, rather than a single set of coherent attitudes or logic, Zen practitioners both embrace and reject feelings, love and resent meditation, value and ignore their surroundings. They want freedom from emotions and freedom to feel emotions; they want to become stoic Buddhas and to remain living human beings; they want mental clarity and full embodiment; they want to just sit and also to engage in elaborate religious celebrations and rituals. They want to get over their lost children and they want to never let them go. They disapprove of abortion and want to keep it legal. They disbelieve in ghosts and send messages to their dead; they disclaim the supernatural and pray to cosmic bodhisattvas. They want spontaneity and formality. They are feminists who import anti-woman rituals. They want a tradition outside words and letters and they want to study and chant holy scriptures. They want a Zen adapted to American culture and an authentic representation of the ancient tradition. They want to be modern and progressive and they want to practice precisely as the Buddha himself did in long-lost India. Ultimately, these are more than seeming contradictions. They are the stuff of lived religion, of Buddhism as it crosses into a new cultural arena, of a story of Japan and America that will continue to shift and change as long as Americans seek meaning in the religion of the Buddha.

“WITHOUT BIBLICAL REVELATION”:
RHETORICAL APPROPRIATIONS OF *MIZUKO KUYŌ*

“Well before I came to my faith in Christ, I traveled to Tokyo,” explains actress and long-time Cover Girl model Jennifer O’Neill. As she further recounts in her evangelical post-abortion manual *You’re Not Alone: Healing Through God’s Grace After Abortion*, “I found myself taking a tour bus out into the countryside to visit one of the largest Buddhist temples.”¹ It’s no mistake that this passage starts out with passive verbs and the assurance that she wasn’t yet born again. They serve to safely bracket her exposure and interest in a non-Christian practice she discovered on that fateful trip: *mizuko kuyō*. Disclaimers in place, she can now proceed to passionately describe *mizuko*, which at this temple are represented by children’s pinwheels:

When I arrived at the temple, *the image before me stopped me dead in my tracks*. It was not the magnificence of the temple or the manicured grounds and gardens surrounding the intricate architecture that caught my attention. Rather, it was the backdrop of the location that stirred my curiosity. Speckled across acres of property, as far as the eye could see surrounding this incredibly ornate temple, were little pinwheels, no bigger than six inches tall, all stuck in the ground. There were literally thousands and thousands of these tiny, odd structures planted over the rolling landscape. I can only describe these pinwheels as perhaps something you’d put in your bicycle wheel or on top of your hat when you were a kid (at least in my day and age).

What was more curious than the pinwheels themselves was what was propped next to each little pinwheel—groupings of mementos, empty picture frames, knitted baby booties. It was very odd to me, as I didn’t understand their significance. With not a clue about what I was observing, I couldn’t quench my curiosity until I finally found someone who spoke English who

¹Jennifer O’Neill. *You’re Not Alone: Healing Through God’s Grace After Abortion*. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2005: 142.

explained to me that I was viewing the burial ground for the Japanese aborted babies. *It took me a moment to catch my breath, I was so stunned.* All my emotions surrounding my own abortion flooded back as I tried to digest the display of love and loss that spilled across the field before me. My mind suddenly filled with the images of babies who might have filled the empty picture frames. *Paralyzed*, I stared at the spinning landscape, trying desperately to marry the tenderness of the moment to the savagery of abortion.

Yes, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Back home in those days, I had never seen abortions recognized with mementos. Worse, I had never heard of any recognition of loss at all concerning the millions of our aborted babies. Remember, we who have had those millions of abortions were told that it was “nothing” that we were carrying. . . just a problem to discard. So what was this thing I was looking at? I remember thinking that Buddhists believe in reincarnation, so perhaps this display of recognition and love may have emotionally eased the expectant mother’s and father’s loss. . . a loss made by their own decision to abort their babies. I’m speculating—but what I do know is that they were allowed to openly grieve and honor their children taken by abortion, for whatever reason.

Grieving is part of surviving loss and is an integrally crucial part of the healing process. Grieving is not a step you can skip if you want to heal.²

Frozen by this Buddhist scene, O’Neill reflects on her own anguish over abortion and wishes that America provided religious recognition of pain such as hers. Even though she stops short of explicitly recommending *mizuko kuyō*, her description, one of the longest and most vivid passages in the book, provides such clear visual imagery that readers seem to be invited to mentally encounter the field of *mizuko* just as she did. Later on in the book she explicitly tells her readers to ritually memorialize their aborted children.

This scene is a window into a totally other realm than what has been discussed so far in this dissertation: the presence of Jizō bodhisattva and *mizuko* in the imagination and rhetoric of non-Buddhist Americans. As knowledge of Jizō is reaching the very different religious world of North America, he is being selectively called upon to speak to traditions outside of Buddhism. This chapter is dedicated to rhetorical usages of *mizuko*

²O’Neill 2005:142-143, emphasis added.

kuyō by non-Buddhist Americans. A survey of both general and religious literature over the past three decades reveals a persistent fascination with *mizuko kuyō* among segments of the wider American culture, particularly those invested in the rancorous debate around abortion issues. My investigation has turned up well over one hundred published works by non-Buddhist Americans that discuss the Japanese practice of *mizuko kuyō*, most of them written in the 1990s and 2000s.³ Additionally, many of these articles were republished repeatedly in other forums (including some of the most important and widely read pro-life and Christian publications) and continue to circulate informally among networks of pro-life activists and women dealing with pregnancy loss.

Discussion of *mizuko kuyō* is being employed by both pro-life and pro-choice advocates as proof of their cause, sometimes to attack their opponents, sometimes to reach out to the other side in search of common ground (a phenomenon that receives greater attention in the next chapter). *Jizō* and *mizuko kuyō* have appeared in articles, books, and sermons by American Catholics, Evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Jews, Mormons, Neo-pagans, and others, including secular feminists and bio-ethicists. In fact, *Jizō* and *mizuko kuyō* have been drawn into the American debates surrounding issues as diverse as abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, birth control, infertility, stem cell research, cloning, genetic engineering, and laboratory use of human tissue.

In investigating these American Christian and other appropriations of Buddhist elements in this chapter, I uncover some of the paths that Buddhist practices and ideas take into non-Buddhist settings. There has been much speculation about Buddhism's increasing impact on American culture over the past several decades, but little sustained

³This number excludes the many scholarly works by Americans on *mizuko kuyō* or abortion in Japan. It also excludes works by Buddhists (American or otherwise) describing the ritual to non-Buddhist audiences, of which I have encountered many dozens. It also does not include republications of articles in new venues.

attention to the channels of influence and how non-Buddhists are actively disseminating selected information about Buddhism. Historiography on the transmission of Buddhism to the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by scholars such as Thomas Tweed and Richard Seager has shown the important role that non-Buddhists once played.⁴

But as the story of American Buddhism evolves into the later twentieth and twenty-first centuries to include significantly more actual Buddhists—both American converts and new Buddhist immigrants—the current historiography seems to lose sight of the continuing importance of non-Buddhists in the story. In fact, there has been a significant historiographical shift—especially in works focusing on the present or recent history—from attention to “how Buddhism arrives here” to “who here can claim a Buddhist identity and to what extent.”⁵ This is good and necessary work, to be sure. But there is still much work to be done on how non-Buddhists *today* are making considerable contributions to knowledge and attitudes about Buddhism in America. Perhaps we might do well to expand Jan Nattier’s description of “import Buddhism” to observe how non-Buddhists package and disseminate elements of Asian Buddhism for consumption by other non-Buddhists, with no intention of conversion to any sort of formal Buddhist

⁴See for instance Thomas Tweed’s *The American Encounter with Buddhism, 1844-1912* and Richard Seager’s *The World’s Parliament of Religions*.

⁵I do not wish to suggest that these are wholly unconnected concerns. For instance, Nattier’s threefold typology of import, export, and baggage Buddhists is explicitly based on interpreting types of Buddhists according to the channels through which they receive their connection to Buddhism. Nonetheless, the conversation has largely moved to dissecting ever finer distinctions within the acknowledged Buddhist communities of America, leaving relatively little room for studies of the continuing and changing roles that non-Buddhists play in disseminating information about, and shaping attitudes toward, Buddhism in America.

practice or adherence.⁶ The closest that current historiography comes to noting the role of non-Buddhists in contemporary American Buddhism are a few suggestive lines in one of Thomas Tweed's articles on night-stand Buddhists. Tweed makes brief allusion to people he calls *Buddhist opponents* and *Buddhist interpreters*, terms that could be applied to many of the figures whom we will meet in this chapter.⁷ Certainly they are closer approximations of many of the actors in our story, whom, as we will see, do not fit comfortably in the more widely used category of *Buddhist sympathizers*. But until this present work, his suggestions have remained largely pointers to investigative paths not taken.

In this chapter I also show how the American debate over abortion has grown beyond the simple dichotomies of conservative Christians vs. liberal Christians or secular pro-choice advocates to include Buddhist ideas and practices in the conversation. The meanings of these Buddhist ideas and the ways these practices are to be used are the subject of dispute, however. As we will see, these developments result both from America's continuously expanding religious diversity and the transpacific flows of people and media which bring Americans to Japan and Japanese ideas to America. Jizō, the traveling bodhisattva and friend of children and grieving mothers, has begun to minister to a new flock of non-Buddhist Americans.

Channels of Knowledge and Appropriation

⁶See Nattier's "Who is a Buddhist? Charting the Landscape of Buddhist America" in Charles S. Prebish and Kenneth K. Tanaka, eds. *The Faces of Buddhism in America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

⁷Thomas Tweed. "Night-Stand Buddhists and Other Creatures: Sympathizers, Adherents, and the Study of Religion." *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*. Edited by Duncan Ryuken and Christopher S. Queen. Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1999.

Jennifer O'Neill encountered *mizuko kuyō* while traveling in Japan, the ritual's homeland. Many other Americans have likewise stumbled across this seemingly alien religious approach to abortion and pregnancy loss by accident while working or vacationing in Japan. Since 1945, American travel to largely Buddhist Japan has increased steadily, with hundreds of thousands of tourists, students, and businesspersons visiting the country each year. Japan's lovely historic temples are a major draw, and *mizuko Jizō* are among the most common and prominent sights throughout the country, whether at major temples or roadside shrines. Many Americans pass by these colorfully-decorated little statues without a second thought; others, however, pause to examine them. Sometimes a guide explains their purpose, or a pedestrian stops to offer a friendly explanation. Popular English guidebooks on Japan frequently carry information about *mizuko Jizō*, including the Lonely Planet, Fodor's, Frommer's, Rough Guide, and Insight Guide series.

Hase Kannon Temple (Kamakura): Although this temple is famous for its 9m (30-ft.) tall Kannon of Mercy, the largest wooden image in Japan, it's most memorable for its thousands of small statues of Jizo, the guardian deity of children, donated by parents of miscarried, stillborn, or aborted children. It's a rather haunting vision.⁸

Based on the accounts of American travelers, there seem to be a number of temples where tourists most frequently come face to face with *mizuko Jizō*, especially Hasedera Kannon-dō in Kamakura and Zōjōji in Tokyo (figure 5.1). Each of these temples is heavily involved in *mizuko kuyō*, and displays hundreds of *mizuko Jizō*s at any given time. It is this visual tableau, as much as the unfamiliar concept of *mizuko* and *Jizō*, that seems to provoke American tourists' curiosity—a possibility suggested not only by the numerous and detailed descriptions of *mizuko Jizō*s, but also by the frequent inclusion of

⁸Beth Reiber and Janie Spencer. *Frommer's Japan*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2004: 7.

large photographs of row upon row of *mizuko* Jizōs in American articles that mention Japanese abortion or miscarriage memorials (figure 5.2).

A striking similarity between many American travelers' accounts is the effect of their initial exposure to the idea of *mizuko* and Jizō. Time and again, the American tourist surveys a field of hundreds or thousands of *mizuko* Jizō statues, intrigued but unsure of their meaning. Informed by a companion or passerby, she or he is suddenly stuck fast in their tracks, arrested by the disorienting knowledge that the Japanese memorialize their abortions and miscarriages in such a public and religious way. We see this "*mizuko* arrest" in O'Neill's description at the beginning of this chapter, for instance. Notice her language: "the image before me stopped me dead in my tracks. . . It took me a moment to catch my breath, I was so stunned. . . I tried to digest the display of love and loss that spilled across the field before me. My mind suddenly filled with the images of babies who might have filled the empty picture frames. Paralyzed, I stared at the spinning landscape. . ." ⁹ This freezing effect is often followed by a rush of emotion—wonder, grief, thankfulness, or some combination of the three. Though these visitors are not Buddhist, the image haunts them, and they feel compelled to paint the scene for readers and friends later on. Sometimes this simple encounter with the unexpected is sufficient to transform their feelings around abortion and other pregnancy losses; sometimes the moment goes further and the American visitor actually conducts a brief *mizuko kuyō* by leaving a talisman, ritually washing a statue, and/or saying a prayer over one of the *mizuko* Jizōs, a phenomenon we'll explore further in the next chapter.

⁹O'Neill 2005: 142-143. Other examples of American tourists who encounter *mizuko kuyō* unexpectedly in Japan include Lutheran minister Ruth Gabrielson's "A Prayer for the Water Children" in the Advent 1992 issue of *Aeropagus*, "Cultural Differences. . . or Honesty?" by J. Patrick Conroy in the April 2003 issue of the *Cincinnati Right to Life* newsletter, and Rabbi Ellen Lippmann's sermon "What About the Woman?" delivered to Kolot Chayeinu in Brooklyn on April 23, 2004.

A second class of Americans who encounter *mizuko kuyō* in Japan are missionaries and theologians who have deliberately arrived in the country to spread and support Christianity (figure 5.3). They too are often brought up short by the unfamiliar practices and ideas around *mizuko*, and must articulate a response that explains the phenomenon without suggesting too strongly that their own religion is somehow inferior or deficient in the face of this Buddhist phenomenon. This dynamic can be seen in the narrative of Thomas P. O'Connor, an American Maryknoll Catholic priest who served for many years in Japan:

In my first springtime outing to view the cherry blossoms several years ago I had an unusual experience. Some friends took me to a small country temple in Oita Prefecture to see the mountain cherry blossoms. . . we turned a corner and beheld quite a sight! There were several hundred tiny statues on the hillside, a veritable army of *Jizo-Bosatsu* climbing up the bank. Rank upon rank, they stood straight and silent like soldiers in formation. This was my first encounter with *mizuko-kuyo*, or memorial services for deceased infants. . . Several years later I visited Hasedera in Kamakura and again was overwhelmed by the cascade of metal and stone *Jizo* statues flowing down every hillside. . . in each local area I received a different explanation of the reason for the practice, or witnessed a different reaction by Japanese friends. I found these reactions interesting and as I pursued the negative feelings toward the practice was informed that many of the services are performed for aborted souls. Suddenly the tremendous increase in statues made sense.¹⁰

O'Connor, like O'Neill and many others, is struck by the visual tableau and unusual practice of *mizuko kuyō*. As a missionary writing for a Christian audience in Japan and dedicated to moving Japan from a Buddhist to a Catholic base, he feels a need to contextualize it in a way that clearly proves the superiority of Christianity:

If one considers the plight of the dead from the view of Christian anthropology, there appears to be no necessity for consoling spirits; and moreover, in the hullabaloo raised in the practice of these memorial services and corresponding advertisements, a much more serious and basic issue of humans being-in-the-world is in danger of being overlooked.

¹⁰Thomas P. O'Connor. "Consoling the Infants: For Whose Sake." *Japan Christian Quarterly*, vol. 50, (Fall 1984): 206.

This problem is the question of abortion. . . Although abortion is legal and socially acceptable, the propagandists on behalf of *mizuko-kuyo* play on the emotion of fear, stressing the anger and potential threat of revengeful “murdered” souls. . . The result is the recent public display of infant memorials throughout the whole country. . . the type of Buddhism in Japan that recognizes the true problem tends to deal with the visible superficialities. Through a variety of ceremonial activities it responds to the immediate needs of these women in need.

Christianity,
 intent on transmitting the teachings of Jesus and the message of Jesus’ cross and resurrection, is not willing to participate in a questionable practice even if its immediate results bring happiness and consolation for some and generates great new revenues for religion. . . For the above reasons and others, *mizuko kuyo* is not a practice within Christianity. Christians should teach that infant’s souls are received into the eternal life of God, and being consoled by this merciful God find themselves strengthened to actively engage in bettering the world. . . To seek to spiritualize the evil consequences of human injustice and remedy them with mere ceremonies is to ignore the challenge of conversion and change.¹¹

O’Neill and O’Connor were not in Japan specifically because of *mizuko kuyō*, and their published descriptions come years after their encounters with Jizō. Information on *mizuko kuyō* also reaches Americans who never visit Japan. One major source is articles about *mizuko kuyō* in mainstream newspapers and magazines, written by reporters who have observed the ritual in Japan or read about it. For instance, Sheryl WuDunn’s article “In Japan, a Ritual of Mourning for Abortions” appeared in 1996 in *The New York Times*. WuDunn describes men and women who perform regular *mizuko kuyō* for abortions carried out years earlier, connecting the ceremony to a range of emotions: sadness, fear, grief. She seems most intrigued by the phenomenon of public mourning despite

¹¹O’Connor 1984: 208, 213-214. Another example of American missionary priests in Japan who must respond to *mizuko kuyō* are the frequent appearances of the ritual in the writings of Anthony Zimmerman, such as “Grieving the Unborn in Japan” in the February 1996 issue of *The Catholic World Report* and “Memorial Services for Aborted Children in Japan” in the April 1989 issue of *All About Issues Magazine*. On the other hand, non-American priests sometimes describe *mizuko kuyō* to outsiders in American Catholic periodicals, such as John Nariai’s “The Pro-life Struggle in Japan” in *New Oxford Review*, March 1997 and Michael Molloy’s “The Healing of Mizuko Jizo” in *Columban Mission*, May 2005.

abortion's legality and near non-controversial nature in Japan.¹² Martha Shirk shows a similar fascination in her 1997 *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* article "Temples Show Japan's Ambivalence Toward Abortion." She pays particular attention to the offerings mourners leave—a plastic Donald Duck, a teddy bear, a pinwheel, a windsock—and takes note of the money temples make from the ritual. Nonetheless she concludes that *mizuko kuyō* satisfies "an emotional or spiritual need for thousands of women who have undergone abortions."¹³

Considering the attention that American scholars have given to *mizuko kuyō*, it serves as no surprise that many non-scholars first learned about the ritual through reading academic treatments of the subject. By far the most commonly cited source for information on *mizuko kuyō* is William LaFleur's *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* (1992), followed by Helen Hardacre's *Marketing the Menacing Fetus in Japan* (1997). A variety of articles are also sometimes referenced, especially Elizabeth Harrison's articles "Women's Responses to Child Loss in Japan: The Case of Mizuko Kuyō" and "Strands of Complexity: The Emergence of *Mizuko Kuyō* in Postwar Japan," and Bardwell Smith's "Buddhism and Abortion in Contemporary Japan: *Mizuko Kuyō*

¹²Sheryl WuDunn. "In Japan, a Ritual of Mourning for Abortions." *The New York Times* (January 25, 1996). Other articles on *mizuko kuyō* in major periodicals include "Dispelling an Abortion's Bad Karma" in the March 1993 issue of *Harper's Magazine* and "Beliefs" by Peter Steinfels in the August 15, 1992 edition of *The New York Times*. Sometimes *mizuko kuyō* is included in American articles not solely about the ceremony—a good example is the photos and captions of *mizuko Jizōs* in "Japanese Women" in the April 1990 issue of *National Geographic*.

¹³Martha Shirk. "Temples Show Japan's Ambivalence Toward Abortion." *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* March 18, 1997. Other articles on *mizuko kuyō* in more locally-prominent news outlets include Jay Sakashita's "Buddhist Rite Gives Solace for Abortions" in the May 26, 2001 edition of the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. Sakashita notes that readers can request *mizuko kuyō* at a number of Buddhist temples in Hawaii, one of the few instances of awareness of the ritual in Japanese-American communities.

and the Confrontation with Death.”¹⁴ These and other scholars also have brought information about *mizuko kuyō* to the wider American community via lectures and other public appearances. An example is LaFleur’s guest spot on NPR’s *To the Best of Our Knowledge* in 2002, where he told the amazed interviewer about how *mizuko kuyō* can serve to knit together family bonds damaged by the act of abortion.¹⁵ LaFleur’s frequent appearance as a chief source of information for non-scholarly works on Japanese Buddhist abortion-recognition is particularly intriguing because of his stated intention that *Liquid Life* contribute in some way toward re-orienting the American abortion debate and provide a resource for entrenched pro-life and pro-choice partisans to discover common ground.¹⁶ As the discussion later in this chapter shows, LaFleur’s ideas have indeed been at least partially taken up, and there is evidence that he has made an impact—though not necessarily the impact he sought—on ideas and practices swirling around abortion in America.

Besides general articles that mention or describe *mizuko kuyō*, some particular venues with targeted audiences have been vigorous in disseminating information about Japanese Buddhist attitudes toward pregnancy and pregnancy loss. Not surprisingly, publications that deal with abortion as an issue have repeatedly brought *mizuko kuyō* to the attention of the American public. But perhaps there will be some surprise that both

¹⁴Elizabeth Harrison. “Women’s Responses to Child Loss in Japan: The Case of Mizuko Kuyō.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (Fall 1995) and “Strands of Complexity: The Emergence of Mizuko Kuyō in Postwar Japan.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (1999); Bardwell Smith. “Buddhism and Abortion in Contemporary Japan: Mizuko Kuyō and the Confrontation with Death.” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* (1998) [republished in *Buddhism, Sexuality, and Gender*, edited by Jose Ignacio Cabezon, SUNY Press, 1992].

¹⁵Jim Fleming. Program 02-01-27-A “I’m Sorry.” *To the Best of Our Knowledge*, Madison: Wisconsin Public Radio, 2002.

¹⁶LaFleur 1992: 216-217.

pro-life and pro-choice venues promote knowledge of *mizuko kuyō*, and pro-life Christians and pro-choice feminists are equally as likely to make reference to the ritual.¹⁷ Thus, we find Richard John Neuhaus, Catholic priest and major architect of American Neo-Conservatism, editorializing about *mizuko kuyō* in a 1994 issue of *First Things*, one of the leading journals for conservative religious discussion of “culture war” topics. For Neuhaus, the grief of Japanese *mizuko kuyō* serves as a damning cross-cultural indictment of America’s individualistic approach to abortion laws.¹⁸ Meanwhile, we also find feminist Eve Kushner discussing the ritual in her 1997 book, *Experiencing Abortion: A Weaving of Women’s Words*. In her account, *mizuko kuyō* is also used to critique American culture, but this time it is to point out that only “New Age or Eastern” religions, not those of “mainstream America,” choose to ritually acknowledge abortion or even death in general.¹⁹ From these partisan platforms readers may then spread the information further by discussing it in sympathetic local forums. For instance, in their

¹⁷A note here about the usage of loaded terms like “Christian,” “feminist,” “pro-choice,” and “pro-life.” In actual practice these terms are far from mutually exclusive. Many Christians are feminists and vice versa; polls suggest that most Americans hold a mixture of views that simultaneously seek to limit abortion and to keep it legal. Thus we encounter articles such as pro-life feminist Catholic Anne Maloney’s “You Say You Want a Revolution? Pro-Life Philosophy and Feminism” in the Fall 1995 issue of *Studies in Pro-Life Feminism*, which uses *mizuko kuyō* to critique pro-choice feminists. For the sake of clarity, I have most often chosen in this chapter to follow the lead of each author in how she chooses to present herself, unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise. Thus when an author positions herself as first-and-foremost a feminist, I refer to her as such, and don’t usually seek to interrogate her denominational affiliation unless it has some particular significance. If an author presents herself as a Christian voice on an issue, then that is the label by which I most readily refer to her.

¹⁸Richard John Neuhaus. “The Public Square.” *First Things*, vol. 45 (August/September 1994). Other examples of pro-life (generally Christian) periodicals carrying *mizuko kuyō*-related articles include Joan Frawley Desmond’s “Apologizing to the Babies” in the Winter 1997 issue of *Human Life Review* (itself a reprint of an article on *mizuko kuyō* in *First Things* the previous year), and Mormon scholar Camille S. Williams’ at times caustically sarcastic “Feminism and Imaging the Unborn” in the pro-life anthology *The Silent Subject: Reflections on the Unborn in American Culture* (1996).

¹⁹Eve Kushner. *Experiencing Abortion: A Weaving of Women’s Words*. New York and London: Harrington Park Press, 1997: 76. Additional examples of left-leaning or specifically pro-choice venues that have discussed *mizuko kuyō* include Pro-choice Connection’s website, Naomi Wolf’s “Our Bodies, Our Souls” in the October 16, 1995 issue of *The New Republic*, and Dayna Macy’s “Unspeakable Losses” in the April 15, 1998 edition of *Salon*.

flyer “He Who Frames the Question, Wins the Argument!,” New Jersey-based evangelical Gateway Pregnancy Centers offers a quote on *mizuko kuyō* as evidence that abortion is a religious concern, not merely a personal choice.²⁰

Another source of *mizuko kuyō* information that reaches targeted audiences is publications that cater to grieving parents in the wake of the death of a child, especially those that specifically center on post-abortion or post-miscarriage grief. Anthropologist Linda Layne, in her book *Motherhood Lost: A Feminist Account of Pregnancy Loss in America*, describes the rise and evolution of this phenomenon:

I discovered that the first pregnancy-loss support groups had been established in the United States in the mid-1970s and that during the 1980s such groups spread quickly about the country. By 1993 there were over nine hundred pregnancy-loss support groups, and similar groups had been established in Canada, Australia, Israel, Italy, England, West Germany, South Africa, and the Virgin Islands (SHARE 1993).

By 2000 the number of pregnancy-loss support groups had dropped to 709 and of those thirty to forty did not offer peer support. The drop in numbers is due in part to the fact that one large organization that had offered peer support changed its policy and now offers only one-on-one support (Cathi Lambert, personal communication, 2000). Another reason may be that people are getting better support in hospitals at the time of their loss, and this care often includes a one-on-one follow-up session (Lambert, personal communication, 2000). The advent of pregnancy-loss support websites may also be a factor. . .²¹

Layne lists numerous factors that supported the ongoing development of support networks and resources for parents (mainly mothers) who experienced pregnancy loss,

²⁰[Anonymous]. “He Who Frames the Question, Wins the Argument!” (flyer) Elizabeth, NJ: Gateway Pregnancy Centers (1999?): 1. Gateway Pregnancy Centers are evangelical Christian operations that essentially function as “stealth” anti-abortion centers: they purport to provide non-judgmental information and services for pregnant women, but in practice hold to a strict pro-life agenda and steer callers and visitors away from facilities that include abortion among their treatment options. Gateway is only one example of this flourishing American phenomenon, which typically have a conservative Christian connection.

²¹Linda Layne. *Motherhood Lost: A Feminist Account of Pregnancy Loss in America*. New York: Routledge, 2003: 9. These pregnancy-loss support websites are yet another major channel through which non-Christian Americans learn about *mizuko kuyō*. They will receive extensive exploration in the next chapter.

including the importance of psychology and counseling, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross's work on death and dying, and of course Roe v. Wade and the emergence of abortion as a major topic of discussion and emotional and religious investment.²² She specifically notes that fetal imaging put increased emotional pressure on American women, echoing arguments related to *mizuko kuyō* that we first encountered in Hardacre's work in the introduction.

One result of all this fermentation around pregnancy loss is the emergence of a new American literary genre—the post-pregnancy loss manual, often further divided into post-abortion or post-miscarriage manuals. We've already encountered one example earlier in this chapter, *You're Not Alone: Healing Through God's Grace After Abortion*, wherein born-again Christian Jennifer O'Neill describes her abortions and the traumatic effect they had on her life, and recommends that similarly-damaged readers heal by taking Jesus Christ as their personal lord and savior before performing their own post-abortion rituals. Naturally enough, these manuals are a prime source for *mizuko kuyō* information, even when they are penned by conservative Christians or secular feminists.²³ In their manual *The Healing Choice: Your Guide to Emotional Recovery After an Abortion*, pro-choice doctors Candace De Puy and Dana Dovitch equate *mizuko kuyō* with the Catholic sacrament of reconciliation, and offer it as a template for American women to create their own “cleansing” post-abortion rituals.²⁴ In some cases, these

²²Layne 2003: 13-19.

²³Again, these two poles of “conservative Christian” and “secular feminist” are somewhat ideal types, and they do not exhaust the variety of participants in this phenomenon. For example, *Return to Spirit*, a set of “independent study guidebooks for spiritual development” that draw mainly on New Age materials and sentiments (including elements of Hinduism, Transpersonal Psychology, and Buddhism), give step-by-step instructions in how to perform a private *mizuko kuyō* as part of one's post-abortion healing. See Stone 1997.

²⁴Candace De Puy and Dana Dovitch. *The Healing Choice: Your Guide to Emotional Recovery After Abortion*. New York: Fireside, 1997: 150, 200-201.

manuals are distributed by the wider networks or organizations studied by Layne that specialize in post-pregnancy loss support. Exhale, a non-affiliated but basically pro-choice organization that runs a counseling hotline and internet site, directs women to Goat-in-the-Road Zendo, an American Zen Buddhist temple providing regular water baby ceremonies that was discussed in chapter three.²⁵

Mention of Goat-in-the-Road's water baby ceremonies brings us to another significant factor in the spread of knowledge about *mizuko kuyō* to non-Buddhist American circles: the role of American Buddhists themselves in promoting the ritual to others. As noted in the previous chapter, the American Zen groups performing water baby ceremonies have in many cases allowed non-Buddhists to participate in these ceremonies—sometimes the ceremonies have even been prompted specifically by the requests of non-Buddhists. Because of the high percentage of health and psychology professionals in convert Zen groups, as well as the feminist stance of most of these communities, Zen teachers who advocate for the ritual are often aware of the pain involved in pregnancy loss and are already plugged into local or national networks that offer support to women (and men) who have experienced abortion, miscarriage, or a similar crisis.²⁶ Thus, these teachers and their students sometimes place information about *mizuko kuyō* and Jizō in the newsletters and journals of post-abortion or similar organizations, speak at conferences and workshops, and minister to non-Buddhists who seek out their services—services and pastoral counseling these non-Buddhists often feel they cannot receive in their primary religious traditions. Consider Kim Kluger-Bell's

²⁵Exhale. "After Abortion Resources" (www.4exhale.org/resources.php), 5/26/06.

²⁶Wakō Shannon Hickey. Personal interview with Kojin-an Zendo (of Oakland) priest. 21 May 2005, Café Driade, Chapel Hill, NC.

widely popular *Unspeakable Losses: Healing From Miscarriage, Abortion, and Other Pregnancy Losses*:

It was a rainy day and everyone had to cram together in a small meeting room instead of being able to wander freely through the gardens, finding a private corner in which to work. We were all together in that overheated room, so many of us that when my husband and I had arrived there were no seats left and we had to sit on the floor in the oddly silent room. Having gotten lost on the way to the Zen Center—it was our first visit here—we arrived at the end of the priest's instructions for preparing the tiny red bib we were to place around the neck of the Jizo statue of our choice in the ceremony that would follow.

All I knew was that this Jizo ceremony was for anyone who had lost a baby through abortion, miscarriage, or death after birth, and that it was intended to honor both those who had died and those who were still living. The flyer had advised us to bring a small piece of red cloth, scissors, a needle and some red thread.²⁷

Kluger-Bell goes on to extensively describe the ritual and relay her positive feelings toward it as a helpful solution to the general silence and non-ritualization around pregnancy loss she perceived in American culture. Her encounter with water baby-promoting Buddhists in America is essentially the fulcrum point on which her entire book is balanced.

My interest here is primarily on the non-Buddhist channels through which Americans receive information about *mizuko kuyō*. But we should not overlook the fact that many non-Buddhists do in fact read Buddhist materials with some regularity. Fifty percent of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*'s estimated 200,000 readership is non-Buddhist; the magazine has repeatedly discussed abortion and *mizuko kuyō*, including an article by William LaFleur and another by *Tricycle* founding editor Helen Tworkov that set off a flurry of letters to the editor, some of them from non-Buddhists. Likewise, Jan Bays' *Jizō Bodhisattva: Modern Healing and Traditional Buddhist Practice* appears to

²⁷Kim Kluger-Bell. *Unspeakable Losses: Healing from Miscarriage, Abortion, and Other Pregnancy Losses*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1998: 119.

have attracted attention outside of American Buddhist circles.²⁸ In some cases, these seemingly non-Buddhist readers may be—to use Thomas Tweed’s label—“night-stand Buddhists”: Americans of secular or non-Buddhist proclivities who nonetheless read Buddhist materials and incorporate them into their personal practices from time to time.²⁹ In other cases, the individuals involved seem to have so tenuous a connection to Buddhism that they fall outside even this liberal definition.

One final category of sources deserves to be mentioned. Non-Buddhist American interest in *mizuko kuyō* is not confined solely to essays and books—at times Japanese Buddhist abortion rituals appear in artistic endeavors as well. Wendy MacLeod’s play *The Water Children* debuted in New York City in 1999 to positive reviews from *The New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, and *The Village Voice*. Written in the wake of MacLeod’s reading about *mizuko kuyō* in *Harper’s Magazine* and an encounter with William LaFleur at an on-campus speaking engagement, the play explores the ambivalent feelings of a pro-choice actress hired to play a regretful mother in a pro-life commercial. Megan, the protagonist, meets many different characters from the landscape of the American abortion wars, and when she finds herself unexpectedly pregnant, she wonders whether to keep it or abort as she did years earlier. Her dilemma is finally resolved when she visits Japan and, emulating real life American tourists (as we will see in the next chapter), performs an informal *mizuko kuyō* at a temple. The spirit of her aborted child appears and says he’d like to be born this time, giving the unmarried Megan the

²⁸This claim is based on the prevalence of references to Bays’ *Jizo Bodhisattva* in the works of non-Buddhists. For just one example, see Mark Hill, Reaching Toyko, 2/19/06. Bays is one of the American Zen teachers who has placed articles or invitations to water baby ceremonies in non-Buddhist post-pregnancy loss support forums, such as *Brief Encounters* and *Loss Journal*.

²⁹Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero, eds. *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

confidence to go ahead and become a mother. The audience learns not only about the practice and philosophy of *mizuko kuyō*, but is told that Megan's aborted child didn't resent his "return" to the spirit world.³⁰

The Water Children has been performed in San Francisco, Denver, Los Angeles, and many other cities in the eight years since its debut, introducing theater-goers in various parts of the country to *mizuko kuyō*. Another way in which a play like *The Water Children* informs a wider audience is through reviews. In each town where the play is performed reviews appear in local newspapers, explaining the concept of *mizuko* and thus potentially reaching a far larger number of people than those who actually buy tickets and show up for a performance.

Visual artists have found inspiration in *mizuko* Jizō shrines, and art exhibits displaying variations on the idea have appeared in a number of American cities. For example, as *The New York Times* art critic Holland Cotter noted in 2003:

The combination of devotion and commerce [that *mizuko* Jizōs] represent is the theme of Yoko Inoue's "Liquidation," an installation that turns Five Myles into a kind of Jizo shrine. In this case, most of the figures are abstract, made from disposable plastic water containers adorned with hand-knitted caps and bibs inscribed with sutras. They are set against a projected video that alternates shots of thousands of Mizuko monuments in tiers at Japanese shrines, with others of individual figures set by the sea as if keeping watch or awaiting passage.³¹

This idea had already been tried, in a different form, the previous year by two art students at Washington University in St. Louis (figure 5.4). Rachel Ray-Hamaie and Ruth Reese constructed a "Mizuko Shrine" out of hay bales, mud, and other materials, and invited the public to spend the next five weeks "grieving, mourning, and healing."

³⁰Wendy MacLeod. *The Water Children*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1999.

³¹Holland Cotter. "Yoko Inoue [Review]." *New York Times*. (5/9/03): E2:39.

As with the garments put on Jizō statues in American water baby ceremonies, the “Mizuko Shrine” was designed to “biodegrade and return to the earth.”³²

Novels are yet another site of information about *mizuko kuyō*, with the ritual or concept sometimes playing an important role in the plot development. In Wendy Harris’ modern fantasy novel *Inventing Memory*, the young protagonist Wendy is upset after her abortion, especially by the attitudes of pro-life picketers at the clinic she visits. But she is able to participate in a healing ritual after a friend describes the practice of public grieving for water babies in Japan.³³ In *The Professor’s Daughter*, Emily Raboteau (daughter of African-American Religious History scholar Al Raboteau) spins a thinly veiled tale based on her relationship with her famous father and her biracial heritage. At a party, the protagonist learns of *mizuko kuyō* and relates it to a prayer offered by her mother at the time of her brother’s death.³⁴ And in his bestselling *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Arthur Golden describes a character’s trip to perform rites for aborted fetuses before three tiny statues of Jizō.³⁵

There are still other sources of information about these Japanese Buddhist rituals for non-Buddhist America. Information also appears in many miscellaneous places, such as works on ritual, ethics, language, healing, or death: for example, FuneralWire—“Your Leading Source for Deathcare Industry News”—distributed a *Daily Yomburi* article about

³²Rachel Ray-Hamaie and Ruth Reese. “Mizuko Shrine.” Washington University Tyson Research Center, 2002, <http://www.biology.wustl.edu/tyson/projectsray.html>.

³³Anne Harris. *Inventing Memory*. (inventingmemory.com), 2004.

³⁴Emily Raboteau. *The Professor’s Daughter: A Novel*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005. Another example of *mizuko kuyō* in American fiction is Poul Anderson’s short story “The Shrine for Lost Children” in the October-November 1999 issue of *Fantasy & Science Fiction Magazine*.

³⁵Arthur Golden. *Memoirs of a Geisha*. New York: Arthur A. Knopf, 1997: 320.

mizuko kuyō in 2002.³⁶ And, of course, there are the channels that flow beyond the scholar's gaze—the conversations with Buddhist family members, the encounters in clinics and churches, the neighbor who wonders about the brightly-bibbed statue in the local temple's backyard. Together these recognized and unrecognized vectors are adding a new element to the American debates over abortion, miscarriage, and religion. We now turn to a more extensive discussion of why some of these observers and interpreters choose to tell other Americans about a Buddhist ritual from Japan.

*Pro-life Rhetorical Appropriations of Mizuko Kuyō*³⁷

In 1992 evangelical minister John MacArthur Jr. delivered a blistering sermon at his nondenominational Grace Community Church in Panorama City, California against “Humanists,” “atheists,” and “feminists” who, “under the control of Satan,” had engineered *Roe v. Wade* and turned America into a country of “mass murderers.”

This nation, which certainly prides itself on its humanitarianism, is in a murderous cycle of violence that makes the Nazi Holocaust look mild by comparison. Nearly 2,000,000 babies are aborted every year in America. . . . It is estimated that perhaps as many as 75,000,000 babies will be murdered this year around the world—75,000,000! That's probably conservative. It's more than all the deaths in all the wars, in all the history of the world. This kind of murder is shocking and I don't want to be too shocking, but I want to tell you how it is done and I hope I don't offend anyone. The processes of abortion are somewhat frightening and bizarre.³⁸

³⁶Kevin Short. “Studying in the Cemetery.” *FuneralWire*, 3/13/02.

³⁷I intentionally employ the term “rhetorical” in this and the following sections because of its multiple associations. Rhetorical can mean “related to the use of language:” the appropriations we study here are purely in the realm of discussion, not action. Rhetorical language is often specifically intended to be *persuasive*: *mizuko kuyō* is being appropriated here in order to further arguments. And rhetorical in the vernacular often means that no reply is expected because the answer is obvious: many of the people here are preaching to the choir (sometimes literally) while using *mizuko kuyō* to bolster their arguments.

³⁸John MacArthur Jr. “The Biblical View on Abortion, Part 1”: sermon delivered 1992, transcription April 1, 2003. Details taken from Grace to You. “RE: Question about Grace to You tape.” Email correspondence to Jeff Wilson from Grace to You ministries. 17 July 2006.

Despite his disclaimer, some of MacArthur's audience at the popular mega-church might well have been offended by the graphic description of tearing, sucking, dismembering, crushing, and puncturing that followed, and the subsequent horror stories of human-animal hybrid experiments and garbage bags of fetal material on the streets of New York City.

And then, MacArthur took a perhaps unexpected turn, moving from his jeremiad against America to report on a very different culture.

In other countries in the world people are still reeling from the impact of this. I will give you one illustration: Japan has been very aggressive in the abortion field for a number of years, and in Japan there is severe trauma on the part of Japanese women because there have been millions and millions of abortions that have occurred there. . . The women have been traumatized by these abortions, in terms of their own emotional life, and so the Buddhists have erected temples for the express purpose of dealing with the issue of abortion. These are temples which memorialized what are called "water babies" (this is a term for an aborted child). A "water baby," those who perish by abortion.

In order to secure peace for their departed souls, these women come to these places. And they are now aware of the fact in their own conscience (at least they assume this to be true *without biblical revelation*) that these little aborted "water babies" have a soul, and they have got to do something for the departed soul; so the Buddhists, in their religion, have erected temples where the departed souls of "water babies" can be attended to by penitent mothers. For somewhere between \$340 and \$640 a grieving mother can purchase a small stone Buddha. And somehow purchasing this small stone Buddha not only feeds the business enterprise but relieves some of the anxiety and, apparently, does something for the departed soul of the baby.

In one temple alone, tens of thousands of these have been sold; the grounds have become a commercial attraction where visitors pay to come and take pictures of women who are there agonizing over their departed "water babies." Priests will offer prayers at that place for "water babies" at \$120 per baby and \$40 for each additional baby that you have aborted. That is just one illustration from one country of the trauma that has occurred in the lives of these women.³⁹

³⁹MacArthur, "The Biblical View on Abortion, Part 1," 1992 (italics added). Interestingly, this sermon is substantially the same as one entitled "Forever Life" delivered by Rev. Jon McNeff at the nondenominational North Creek Church in Walnut Creek, CA, on January 28, 2001. There seem to be two possible explanations. Either McNeff's sermon is based on MacArthur's widely circulated (through

MacArthur's sermon continued, laying out in intimate detail the symptoms of psychological trauma and sociological effects that allegedly follow in the wake of abortion, before proceeding to a long series of Biblical prooftexts designed to hammer home the evil of abortion.

Ironically, this appropriation of Buddhism for the consumption of Christian audiences originates in a "culture war" over ultimate sources of moral authority in American society—a war in which MacArthur's side locates authority strictly in traditional sources, most especially the Bible. The concept of culture war originates perhaps in the late nineteenth century German idea of *kulturkampf*, but in the present context it refers to the struggles between orthodox and progressive forces in American society during the second half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. "Culture war" has become a fundamental aspect of contemporary America, with many commentators depicting the conflict in slightly different ways. Perhaps the best examination of this phenomenon is presented by James Davison Hunter, a professor of sociology and religious studies at the University of Virginia, in his 1991 book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. Hunter describes a divided American society wherein new alignments of conservatives (drawing especially from the one-time enemies of fundamentalist and evangelical Protestantism, traditionalist Catholicism, Orthodox

audiotapes, and, more recently, online transcriptions) sermon, or both McNeff and MacArthur are drawing on a common source that is circulating in evangelical pro-life communities (the dating of MacArthur's sermon—1992—suggests that he may have learned about it from William LaFleur's *Liquid Life*, or, less directly, from reviews or reactions to the book published shortly after it was released). Both possibilities point to the networks along which information about Buddhism travels in America well outside of contact with any actual Buddhists—presumably neither preacher learned about the practice of *mizuko kuyō* from a Buddhist, and certainly their congregations remained completely isolated from interaction with *mizuko kuyō*. Yet after hearing these sermons the attendees would find their understanding of the possibilities within religion expanded by rhetorical encounter with foreign Buddhist practices at church.

Judaism, and Mormonism) are actively engaged in rhetorical, political, and legal battle with broad coalitions of progressives (liberal Christians and Jews, secularists, and many identity groups such as homosexuals).⁴⁰ As he explains:

Because this is a culture war, the nub of political disagreement today on the range of issues debated—whether abortion, child care, funding for the arts, affirmative action and quotas, gay rights, values in public education, or multiculturalism—can be traced ultimately and finally to the matter of moral authority. By moral authority I mean the basis by which people determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, and so on. . . . It is the commitment to different and opposing bases of moral authority and the world views that derive from them that creates the deep cleavages between antagonists in the contemporary culture war.⁴¹

For Hunter, the orthodox side of this culture war is defined by where it derives its moral authority from—transcendent supernatural agencies and/or intrinsic moral laws, most frequently defined as God’s commandments as revealed in sacred scripture—and to what concomitant moral/social commitments it is most attached:

Based upon this general understanding of moral authority are certain non-negotiable moral “truths.” Among the most relevant for the present purposes are that the world, and all of the life within it, was created by God, and that human life begins at conception and, from that point on, it is sacred.⁴²

The progressivists, meanwhile, tend to locate moral authority in personal experience, individual conscience, and rational empiricism. When historic faiths are referenced they are typically “resymbolized” to meet the spirit of a largely secularized, privatized age.⁴³

As these two viewpoints on moral authority meet they clash in the public and private

⁴⁰These labels and configurations can be considerably nuanced—not all secularists are progressives, not all evangelicals are conservative—but are generally faithful to the overall culture war battle lines.

⁴¹James Davison Hunter. *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York: Basic Books, 1991: 42-43.

⁴²Hunter 1991: 122.

⁴³Hunter 1991: 122-126.

spheres over a wide range of social and political issues. Abortion tops Hunter's list of issues, and for good reason—arguably more than any other single issue, abortion has been a flashpoint for the struggles over American culture and a site of intense, all-or-nothing moral reasoning for both conservatives and progressives. Whether a political candidate is pro-life or pro-choice is the essential litmus test in many races, and the issue affects government and culture on every level from local town councils to Supreme Court nominations.

The Reverend John MacArthur Jr., whose sermon quotes began this section, is a seasoned veteran of the American culture war. He has made guest appearances on “Larry King Live,” hosts a weekly syndicated radio program aired by thousands of stations on six continents, and is the bestselling author of such books as *Why One Way? Defending an Exclusive Claim in an Inclusive World* and *Fool's Gold: Discerning Truth in an Age of Error*.⁴⁴ The question that naturally arises in the present context is this: given his fundamental commitment to the Bible as the sole source of transcendent moral authority, why would an evangelical Christian minister offer his flock an extensive description of Buddhist practices? What work is done for his side of the culture war by educating other Christians about *mizuko kuyō*? And, taken further, why is MacArthur's sermon only one among a large number of American Christian pro-life books, articles, sermons, and other media that have brought information about *mizuko* and Jizō to the attention of fellow believers. Why do these opponents of Buddhism care?

⁴⁴John MacArthur, Jr. *Why One Way? Defending an Exclusive Claim in an Inclusive World*. Nashville, W Publishing Group, 2002; John MacArthur, Jr. *Fool's Gold: Discerning Truth in an Age of Error*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005. As an aside, *Why One Way?* features a prominently-placed Buddha on its cover below a praying Muslim—both are trumped by the crucified Jesus who, in a nimbus of heavenly light pushing back the darkness, hangs at the very top and center of the cover.

One major reason why some American Christians are prompted to discuss *mizuko kuyō* is the ideologically-charged concept of “Post-Abortion Syndrome” (PAS).⁴⁵ This syndrome is not a psychological or medical condition recognized by the American Psychiatric Association or the American Medical Association, but its existence is near-gospel truth in pro-life circles. Abortion, PAS proponents suggest, is a traumatic experience that can physically and psychologically damage the mother (and, in some interpretations, the father, siblings, other relations, neighbors, and abortion providers and nurses—and perhaps even the soul of the aborted fetus⁴⁶), akin in many ways to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by violent conflict, assault, or accidents. It is in the discussion of PAS that *mizuko kuyō* most frequently appears in non-Buddhist materials, such as this passage by John Wilke, a Catholic and co-founder of the National Right to Life committee, and his wife Barbara Wilke:

How about an example from a non-Christian culture? In Japan, where abortion has been legal and accepted for over four decades, a common custom is to conduct Mizuko Kuyo services in honor of the god Jizo. This god has been made the patron saint of infants who died of starvation, abortion, or infanticide. Small baby statues, in his honor, are bought and dressed. Then, in a Buddhist Temple, rites of sorrow and reconciliation are carried out.⁴⁷

One of the foremost promoters of Post-Abortion Syndrome is David Reardon of the Elliot Institute, whose many works on PAS and frequent appearances on Christian, pro-life, and other television and radio programming have publicized and legitimized the

⁴⁵This concept is also alternately labeled “Post-Abortion Stress Syndrome” (PASS).

⁴⁶See Charismatic Jesuits Dennis and Matthew Linn’s *Healing the Greatest Hurt* (1985) for accounts of post-mortem healing rituals designed to move traumatized fetuses on to heaven.

⁴⁷Jack and Barbara Wilke. *Why Can’t We Love Them Both?: Questions & Answers About Abortion*. Cincinnati: Hayes Publishing Co., 1997.

concept.⁴⁸ According to Reardon's article "The Complexity and Distortions of Post-Abortion Research," the cognitive dissonance engendered in an aborting woman between the physiological changes she experiences during pregnancy and society's contention that she is merely removing "a blob of tissue" result in "psychological defense mechanisms of denial and repression [that are] massively in effect by the time she leaves the clinic." These lead in time to symptoms such as depression, suicidal thoughts, impaired work efficiency, weight loss, insomnia, alcoholism, psychosomatic pains, family problems, sexual difficulties, and feelings of worthlessness, despair, guilt, and hate. Women and men may have haunting mental images of their aborted fetuses in pain or crying for help, and may communicate in some way with these imagined children.⁴⁹

The similarity to Japanese concepts of *mizuko tatari* (spirit attack by aborted ghosts) is striking. In the introduction we encountered all of these symptoms in the rhetoric of Buddhist promoters of *mizuko kuyō* and women who had sought relief in the ritual. Furthermore, Reardon says that post-abortion trauma may hide unacknowledged beneath the surface for many years before surfacing, so that women displaying seemingly inexplicable distress decades after an abortion may be affected by PAS—this is reminiscent of Japanese *mizuko kuyō* proponents who say that virtually any ill luck or depression may have sprung from an abortion in much earlier years of one's life. The similarity continues even further: just as some Japanese *mizuko kuyō* entrepreneurs claim

⁴⁸Reardon's medical, psychiatric, and bioethical credentials are the subject of dispute. He apparently received a PhD in Philosophy of Business Administration through online work with Pacific Western University. In select forums he represents himself as a confessional Christian but tends to elide his denominational affiliation; reasoning from attention to the specific forums where he most often appears and the persons and organizations with which he is most associated suggests that he is a Catholic. See Emily Bazelon. "Is There a Post-Abortion Syndrome?" *The New York Times Magazine* (1/21/07).

⁴⁹David Reardon. "The Complexity and Distortions of Post-Abortion Research." Project Rachel, 2000. Project Rachel is the largest post-abortion counseling and support organization, originally organized as a Catholic outreach program.

that undiagnosable symptoms or bad luck may be caused by the wandering mizuko of total strangers, some American commentators theorize that people who have never had an abortion may nonetheless experience PAS simply because they live in a culture that so devalues fetal life. Thus abortion's negative effects become an all-encompassing interpretive rubric for some people in both Japan and the United States, providing a cipher with which all distressing situations may be decoded to reveal their origins in the wrong behavior of women.

But what in Japan is culturally understood as the actual intervention of angered spirits has in America been presented as a psychological reaction to trauma. Here we see American Christians interpreting *tatari*-like symptoms in a manner extremely close to that of the American Zen Buddhists described in chapters three and four. Neither liberal Buddhist nor conservative Christian Americans resort to the traditional Buddhist explanation of interference by ghosts. Instead, they both prefer to see bad feelings and possible physical effects in the aftermath of abortion as an essentially psychological, individualistic phenomenon outside the realm of the supernatural. If anything, this reaction could be more surprising among the Christians than the convert Buddhists: these same sources that advance a psychological interpretation of Post-Abortion Syndrome are also replete with references to an angry God who pours out his wrath on sinners. Yet while dire religious consequences are predicted for women who abort and men who aid them, God is rarely deemed responsible for the actual afflictions that pro-life Christians claim abound in the wake of abortion.⁵⁰

⁵⁰This should not suggest that God is fully absent from these considerations. In these worldviews, after all, it is God who set things up such that an abortion would lead to psychological trauma. But it is nonetheless remarkable how rarely God is pointed to as the actual direct cause of PAS sufferers' distress. Some of these same commentators are prepared to acknowledge God's wrathful hand in tornados, hurricanes, and

Mizuko kuyō provides conservative Christians with ammunition for their battle to promote the concept of PAS. Consider this quote from Catholic writer Joan Frawley Desmond, writing in *First Things*:

Jizo began to attract followers in the 1970s, after a decade of steadily rising abortion rates. The cult defies simple explanations, and Westerners should not shrug off this memorial service as a peculiar, if haunting, foreign custom. Its importance lies in its revelation of the damaging consequences of abortion. *Despite the lack of moral guidance*, Japanese parents want to admit wrongdoing.⁵¹

In *mizuko kuyō*, American Christians have found a practice that seems to support their assumptions about abortion's injurious effects. The logic put forward in this argument goes as follows: post-abortion syndrome is a universal phenomenon. Abortion is *naturally* traumatizing, without the need for a supernatural explanation or connection to a specific set of values or culture. *Even without Biblical revelation*, a benighted Buddhist woman in pagan Japan knows in her gut that abortion is wrong. Abhorrence of abortion is natural—that is to say, it is automatic and undeniable. It is not a product of a particular worldview, but of human nature. Those who do not share in this abhorrence must therefore be acting against their own humanity, perhaps because of evil influences or excessive greed, lust, pride, or narcissism.

This serves more than one ideological purpose. First, it bolsters the argument that Post-Abortion Syndrome exists as a real mental disorder. Second, it weakens the counter-arguments of opponents by characterizing PAS as a cross-cultural phenomenon that arises naturally—thus, it is not something unique to Americans, Christians, or abortion opponents. Third, it re-imagines women as natural mothers, who (should) feel

other natural disasters, but shy from—at least explicitly—implicating God in the suffering of a post-abortive woman.

⁵¹Joan Frawley Desmond. "Apologizing to the Babies." *First Things* 66 (October 1996). Emphasis added.

automatic shame and despair when they go against their ordained role. Here again we see a parallel to *mizuko kuyō* as it operates in some sectors of Japanese culture, where it is pushed by right-wing politicians and religious figures who feel women have generally stepped outside their prescribed positions. Bringing up *mizuko kuyō* allows angry pro-life activists to chastise sinful women who have had abortions yet, in their hearts, inescapably know they've done wrong. This dynamic is clear, for instance, in the works of Anthony Zimmerman, an American missionary priest who has served in Japan for many years:

The ideology of “choice” which rationalizes abortion in America blocks out social acceptance of mourning for the deceased child. A less rigid rationale in Japan facilitates the expression of grief by parents for their hapless little ones; the ritual Mizuko Kuyo (literally “water-child ceremony”) is not only an elixir that aids the psychic healing of the parents, especially the mother, but doubles as a lucrative windfall for obliging temples. In the USA, a rigid dogma which canonizes “choice” may encourage its adherents to march into abortuaries with heads held high in disdain for motherhood. “Choice” encourages the young woman to suppress her motherly instinct to grieve over the loss of her child; she must be strong. She incarnates manly symbols of power and control, submerging womanly instincts of nurturing and altruism. Years may pass before she relaxes her guard, to become herself again.⁵²

Fourth, references to *mizuko kuyō* support anti-abortion activists' claims that post-abortion feelings of guilt and depression are religious concerns, indirectly bolstering Christian authority on the issue. This may be played out, as in the case of MacArthur's sermon, with a subsequent appeal for women who have had an abortion to come forward and seek forgiveness from God through the church. The overall effect of introducing PAS into the debate is to further associate abortion with violence and anti-social behavior, and to cast abortion rights proponents as acting against the best interests of women. By declaring that abortion leads to trauma and misfortune for abortive mothers, Christian and other pro-life activists can condemn women who have had abortions and

⁵²Anthony Zimmerman. “Grieving the Unborn in Japan.” *The Catholic World Report* (February 1996).

yet simultaneously present themselves as the true supporters of women's health and well-being.

Reardon himself employs descriptions of *mizuko kuyō* in this manner. For instance, to illustrate that women may experience severe PAS symptoms on the anniversary of their abortions, he relates an incident where a grieving Japanese student was referred to him who was wracked by guilt on a monthly basis coinciding with the day of her procedure. He learned from her that "it is common in Japan to request memorial services for their children whom they believe they have 'sent from dark to dark.' At Buddhist temples parents rent stone statues of children for a year during which time prayers are offered for the babies to the god Jizu."⁵³ Similarly, we find Marvin Olasky, editor of the evangelical *World Magazine*—at 250,000 subscribers the world's largest Christian weekly news periodical and America's fourth largest weekly news periodical—editorializing about *mizuko kuyō* on the thirtieth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*:

Thirty years ago, they commonly dehumanized unborn children and made abortion seem easy: 15 minutes to feel "like a brand-new woman," the Omaha World-Herald propagandized. . . That was conventional liberal talk in those days. Now, even feminists admit that abortion is sorrowful, and that the conflict about it will not go away because of the gut guilt that abortion intrinsically yields. They want to mourn abortion but continue it, much as the Japanese do.

Aborting mothers in Japan typically make or buy *mizuko Jizo*, small statues of babies. They dress the statues in bibs and knitted caps, and leave next to the statues bottles of milk, baby rattles, and furry toys. You can find stacks of *mizuko Jizos* in cemeteries and also in special temples where they are housed, with mourning parents paying hundreds of dollars per year to have a small statue bathed and dressed, with incense burned and prayers recited.

One survey showed 86 percent of Japanese women and 76 percent of men saying they felt guilty upon having an abortion or pressuring their partners to have one. In this country [i.e. America], abortion advocates have generally sneered at the reality of post-abortion syndrome. Maybe now they will accept it and call for

⁵³Reardon, "The Complexity and Distortions of Post-Abortion Research." 2002. "Jizu" is the spelling used by Reardon.

government provision of “grief-recovery specialists.”⁵⁴

In some cases, pro-life writers bring up *mizuko kuyō* in the context of actual debates with pro-choice opponents, or place information about *mizuko kuyō* in forums where pro-choice or undecided readers could conceivably learn about the ritual and be pushed toward an anti-abortion position. But it is noteworthy that in other cases *mizuko kuyō* is discussed in settings where readers other than already-convinced pro-life Christians are extremely unlikely. The interest, therefore, is not confined to simply strategic arguments meant to win others to their own side. The implication is that even many politically conservative, theologically fundamentalist American Christians are on some level further convinced of the correctness of their position by reference to the ideas and practices of Japanese Buddhists. They seem to imply that it is not always enough to hear that Christians oppose abortion and that Americans experience post-abortion grief, or that the Bible condemns taking the life of the unborn. While these writers and readers frequently profess that there is no light in religions that do not have a basis in the Bible and a conscious commitment to Jesus Christ, in practice they are in fact finding further support for pro-life positions by learning about Buddhism.

Pro-life Christians also can use the phenomenon of *mizuko kuyō* as a prod to radicalize seemingly complacent fellow Christians. An example of this strategic employment of information about Japanese ritual practices appears in a *Life Advocate Magazine* column by evangelical Baptist and vigorous pro-life activist Paul deBarrie. After describing *mizuko kuyō* and using it as a club to rhetorically bash Planned

⁵⁴Marvin Olasky. “From Denial to Tears.” *World Magazine*, vol. 18, no. 2 (1/18/03). A nearly identical version of this article was posted the same week at TownHall.com, one of the most prominent right-wing American political websites.

Parenthood, deBarrie begins to lash out at his real target: fellow pro-life Christians who seem lukewarm in their activism:

The misery of the Japanese women—*who have no moral teaching against abortion*—is palpable.

“I have done something bad enough to be cursed,” said Yuka Sugimoto, a woman visiting her mizuko Jizo in Kamakura, Japan. . .

This, in a country that has no anti-abortion activism, no national debate on abortion, no politicians taking this or that position on abortion (Who says that the guilt all comes from moralists imposing their values on others?)

It doesn’t even require a particularly astute listener to hear the wailing grief-stricken mothers in Japan.

Here in America, we have our annual Washington, D.C., march, many local activist groups. . . and we have no real concerted cry of grief heard throughout the land.

These are women—even members of our churches—who have murdered their own infants and we hear nothing of it save an occasional muffled noise out from under the misnomer of “victim of abortion.”

Little comes from the Church on this matter. Pastors are afraid of offending a murderous mom for fear she will leave instead of speaking out for fear of being accountable for her blood. Even when a woman does repent she is often treated as a victim instead of a perpetrator. . . I suspect that deeper down, the reason there is no confrontation of this sin is that there remains so much of it still in the camp. After all, we can’t have little Suzy embarrass her father the pastor or elder by being pregnant outside of wedlock. And we just can’t have another child—that would be bad stewardship!

Going to the Church on this is like the woman with marital problems going to her divorced friend for advice. . . Japan is so much better off. In this, they are like the publican praying and smiting his breast hoping for forgiveness; America is like the Pharisee who prayed to himself saying, “Thank you that I am not like this heathen.”⁵⁵

American Catholics too use *mizuko kuyō* in this way: for instance, a columnist for the *Superior Catholic Herald* (drawing on Olasky’s *World* editorial for *mizuko kuyō* information) embeds a description of the mourning expressed in the Japanese ritual in his attack on poor leadership from church authorities on the abortion issue. “We note that *even in a country that is not imbued with Christian principles*, a profound sense of loss

⁵⁵Paul deBarrie. “Stilling the Cries of Grief.” *Life Advocate Magazine* (5/2/03). Emphasis added. The article which deBarrie quotes from is Sheryl WuDunn’s *The New York Times* article “In Japan, a Ritual of Mourning for Abortions.”

and guilt accompanies the unnatural act of abortion which, somehow, must be recognized, mourned and hopefully forgiven by the child whose life was so brutally ended. . . [Yet] we are in a strange position as Catholics in America of getting moral leadership on abortion from our Congress and president than from our bishops and priests.”⁵⁶

While in MacArthur and Olasky’s depictions “even” heathens such as the Japanese felt remorse at their killing, here the Japanese are in some ways actually rhetorically elevated above Christians—as deBarrie and Ackeret see it, these non-Christians are willing to dramatically and publicly admit their grief and guilt and seek repentance, while ostensibly pro-life American Christians have routinized their political activism, harbor murderers in their midst without comment, and are afraid to speak out on the issue for fear of offending their flocks. What began as the rhetorical appropriation of *mizuko kuyō* in order to attack pro-choice positions, has now become the employment of Japanese Buddhism to attack other pro-life supporters.

Pro-choice Rhetorical Appropriations of Mizuko Kuyō

The pro-life faction is not the only side to call upon *mizuko kuyō* in the battle over abortion in America. Information about *mizuko*, Jizō, and Japanese Buddhist rituals appears in a number of prominent pro-choice venues. As might be imagined, these commentators refer to *mizuko kuyō* because they believe that, contrary to the opinions of their pro-life opponents, the phenomenon actually supports their demand for legal access to abortion. Considering the strength that anti-abortion advocates feel *mizuko kuyō* lends

⁵⁶Vince Ackeret. “Spiritual Leaders, Politicians, and Abortion.” *Superior Catholic Herald* (June 2003). Emphasis added.

their cause, what are the advantages that pro-choice advocates discern in raising the issue?

An extended discussion of Japanese Buddhist practices in relation to abortion occurs in Daniel Maguire's *Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions*. Many of the motivations and strategies at work in other pro-choice articles on *mizuko kuyō* are clearly on display in this book. Maguire first describes Buddhism as a peaceful, admirable religion with a deep commitment to ethics. After a discussion of basic Buddhist ideas and some attention to abortion attitudes, he draws on William LaFleur's *Liquid Life* to assert that *mizuko kuyō* shows "how a contemporary Japanese woman could accept Buddhism with its First Precept against killing, have an abortion, and still consider herself a Buddhist in good standing."⁵⁷ Maguire emphasizes the love of children in Japan and how the Japanese nonetheless are enabled by Buddhism to deal with unwanted pregnancies in a practical manner:

Japan has always strongly valued children. Francois Caron, who lived in Japan in the early seventeenth century, made this observation: "Children are carefully and tenderly brought up; their parents strike them seldom or never, and though they cry whole nights together, they endeavor to still them with patience; judging that infants have no understanding, but that it grows with them as they grow in years, and therefore they are to be encouraged with indulgences and examples."

LaFleur sees all of this as "evidence that there is no necessary correlation between the allowance of abortion and the quality—or even the overall tenor—of family life in a given society. . . Apparently it is possible for a society to practice abortion and still have what is generally called a 'strong' conception of the family." Additional proof may be found inversely in those modern right-wing resisters to abortion rights who, with all their talk of *family values*, display no great concern for born children, their schools, their families, or their welfare. There are lessons here. Do not equate the use of abortion with cruelty or resistance to it with gentleness. It's just not that simple. . .

Even today, we can see that Japanese Buddhists do not take abortions lightly. They do not forget the aborted fetus, which they see, in LaFleur's words "not so much as being 'terminated' as being put on 'hold,' asked to bide its time

⁵⁷Daniel C. Maguire. *Sacred Choices: The Right to Contraception and Abortion in Ten World Religions*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001: 67.

in some other world.”⁵⁸

Maguire then talks about the process of *mizuko kuyō* and the “sweet savior-figure” Jizō.

He concludes that “There is nothing coldhearted about the care of the *mizuko*.”⁵⁹

Maguire discusses a range of other cultures and their attitudes toward abortion in his book. Yet it is the Japanese Buddhist case that he seems to find most intriguing. *Sacred Choices* was followed in 2003 by the similarly titled *Sacred Rights: The Case for Contraception and Abortion in World Religions*, an anthology edited by Maguire with almost entirely new material. There was one part of his own earlier book that he couldn’t resist republishing in *Sacred Rights*, however: he includes an appendix titled “Editor’s Note on Japanese Buddhism,” wherein he excerpts the material that specifically relates to *mizuko kuyō*.⁶⁰ In this he follows the lead of other American pro-choice advocates—to the extent that material about non-Western cultures appears in pro-choice books or websites, *mizuko kuyō* seems to be by far the most commonly referenced religious practice. Pro-Choice Connection (prochoiceconnection.com), for instance, includes an entire separate page titled “Mizuko Kuyo,” which describes the ritual in detail and the logic behind it.⁶¹

As with the employment of rhetoric about *mizuko kuyō* in pro-life sources, its appearance in pro-choice arguments serves multiple ideological agendas. First, by showing that foreign cultures contextualize and ritualize the issues of abortion differently,

⁵⁸Maguire 2001: 68-69. Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁹Maguire 2001: 70.

⁶⁰Daniel Maguire. *Sacred Rights: The Case for Contraception and Abortion in World Religions*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003 2003: 285-287.

⁶¹<http://www.prochoiceconnection.com/psc05.html> (as of 2/20/99). The site lists LaFleur’s *Liquid Life* as “a good resource” for additional reference.

pro-choice advocates demonstrate that American attitudes and discussions are not “natural”—that is to say, they are contingent approaches based on the limited and historically-determined ideas of just one culture, not automatic human reactions to abortion. Other peoples don’t necessarily assume that abortion angers God or goes against religion, and therefore, this line of argumentation suggests, when pro-life partisans make these claims they are merely trying to impose their personal ideas on everyone else. Second, the case of *mizuko kuyō* demonstrates that people who have abortions or support the legal right to do so are not hardhearted monsters or child-haters. Before and after an abortion these Buddhists care about their fetuses, and they seek to provide some care for them in the afterlife or apologize for necessary acts. Pro-choice advocates thus use gestures toward *mizuko kuyō* in an attempt to re-produce themselves as caring, concerned human beings who are wrestling honestly with difficult situations. They are the *real* family values people, it turns out. Third, *mizuko kuyō* enables pro-choice partisans to claim the mantle of religion. The default assumption in America seems to be that pro-life positions are religiously motivated, while pro-choice positions are possibly anti-religious. With *mizuko kuyō* pro-choice advocates believe they have an example of religious people who can support abortion rights without any hypocrisy. Fourth, the idea of *mizuko* offers a new way of discussing the status of the fetus: abortion doesn’t kill a full human person, but only a “person-in-process,” who clearly has lower ontological status than the mother. And fifth, another novelty of *mizuko kuyō* is that it offers a new way of imagining what occurs in the act of abortion itself: instead of a termination, with a heavy sense of finality, abortion can now be represented as a pause in a possibly ongoing process to be continued later.

The case being advanced here by pro-choice advocates presents the following argument: American Christian hostility to abortion is an unusual phenomenon. Sadness after abortion *can* be dealt with religiously and needs not be seen as a major psychological trauma. *Even such a child-centered culture as Buddhist Japan* knows that women need to have access to legal abortion. Absolute opposition to reproductive rights is unnatural—that is to say, it only occurs when someone is indoctrinated by religious fanatics.

Appropriations Beyond the Abortion Debate

Let us turn our attention for a moment to other American battlegrounds where non-Buddhists are discussing *mizuko kuyō*. While abortion is undeniably the most contentious issue in the wrangling over “creating a culture of life,” there are other important areas of cultural conflict, such as harvesting of human embryonic stem cells, human cloning, and genetic manipulation. At least since 2000, *mizuko kuyō* has begun to emerge as a point of discussion in relation to these issues. These discussions are particularly interesting because they typically take place in academic and medical forums, among doctors, researchers, and bio-ethicists who rarely resort to specifically religious arguments to win points in what are essentially secular and scientific environments. Just as it seemed at first strange that born-again Christians would widely discuss Buddhist post-abortion rituals, it may be unexpected to find geneticists and their colleagues examining ideas of ghosts and bodhisattva saviors for orientation about how to conduct their experiments.

The first important appearance of *mizuko kuyō* in these debates seems to be Dr. Dorothy Wertz's article "The Cult of Jizō" in an early 2000 issue of *GeneLetter*, a periodical for professionals working in the field of human genetics. Wertz provides a description of *mizuko* Jizō, the offerings made to these figures, and temples with tens of thousands of statues, drawing on LaFleur's *Liquid Life*. Then, extrapolating from the logic of the concept of *mizuko* as unformed spirits who can be sent back to the pre-mortal world and brought to term at some future point, she makes a rather remarkable observation:

Mizuko are always seeking to return to life; some people believe that they try to find their original families. So preserving fetal cells and later cloning them to provide an identical—but—cured body would provide an ideal welcome for a *mizuko* seeking its family.⁶²

It seems unlikely that any Buddhist monk had such a scenario in mind when the practice of *mizuko kuyō* was being developed in Japan. Here *mizuko kuyō* has been used to support the idea of preserving fetal cells following an abortion for reasons of genetic abnormalities; later, when a cure for the genetic conditions has been developed and the preserved cells can be manipulated so that they would grow into a healthy child, they could be cloned and grown into a living human being, presumably the same human being who would have resulted from the original pregnancy, who would be grateful for its "resurrection." This is indeed the science fiction laboratory equivalent of Japanese Buddhist *mizuko kuyō*: returning a pregnancy to a state of stasis so that later it can be retrieved in better conditions.

⁶²Dorothy C. Wertz. "The Cult of Jizo." *The Gene Letter*. (February 1, 2000). LaFleur's book was in fact included in a review article in *Second Opinion*, another major bioethics forum, in 1993. As a side note, Kathleen Nolan, the author of the review, has been personally involved in Zen Buddhist practice in the United States.

The following year a more protracted debate began in *The Hastings Center Report*, one of the primary forums for sustained attention to bio-ethics and emergent laboratory technologies in America. The discussion was opened by Michael Meyer and Lawrence Nelson in their article “Respecting What We Destroy: Reflections on Human Embryo Research.”⁶³ For Meyer and Nelson, *mizuko kuyō* provides a compelling example that people are able to show respect and compassion for lives that they are nonetheless compelled to destroy. “Such acts as *tikkun*, as well as the practice of *mizuko kuyō*, are manifestations of genuine respect for the aborted fetus, even if that respect was by itself not enough to lead a woman to forgo the abortion.”⁶⁴ Researchers who destroy human embryos in order to gain stem cells for further medical experiments therefore are not necessarily callous or disrespectful toward human life in the abstract or the living embryos and cells in their possession.

This method of argumentation was less than convincing to some readers. In a later issue Daniel Callahan, a fellow at the Hastings Center, fired back.

Since when is it good ethical methodology to root around in anthropology files to find cultures that do what we want to do? Does the fact that a culture simply does or believes something give its behavior automatic moral standing? If so, that’s news to me.⁶⁵

⁶³Michael J. Meyer and Lawrence J. Nelson. “Respecting What We Destroy: Reflections on Human Embryo Research.” *The Hastings Center Report*, vol. 31, issue 1 (Jan-Feb 2001) 16-23.

⁶⁴Meyer and Nelson 2001: 20. The authors draw mainly on Hardacre for their discussion of *mizuko kuyō*. It is worth noting that the article is illustrated with a photo of a particularly plaintive and infantile-looking *mizuko Jizō*. *Tikkun* is a Jewish concept that roughly means “to mend the world.”

⁶⁵Daniel Callahan. Letter to the editor, *The Hastings Center Report* (July-August 2001): 4. Meyer and Nelson’s rather acerbic reply: “We no more ‘root around in anthropology files to find cultures that do what we want to do’ than we think Callahan usually roots around in a dictionary to find definitions that support what he wants to do.” Meyer and Nelson 2001: 5.

Cynthia Cohen, of the Kennedy Institute for Ethics at Georgetown University, was also ambivalent about this argument. Citing LaFleur and her own encounters with *mizuko kuyō* in Japan, Cohen asserts that the practice indicates that Japanese Buddhists in fact attribute far greater moral status to pregnancies than Meyer and Nelson admit:

As the example of *mizuko kuyo* suggests, it is difficult, even across cultures, to escape the nagging realization that a human embryo is a human being in process. Although I do not pretend to have a final answer to the question of the weight of its moral status, I venture to say that because it is a potential human being, it has more than weak moral status. I dare add that many others agree and are consequently reluctant to see it destroyed. It therefore behooves us agnostics to recommend that first attempts at stem cell research should use adult stem cells to avoid the destruction of potential human beings.⁶⁶

Turning the tables, Cohen thinks *mizuko kuyō* actually supports the argument against using human embryos for experimentation. As with the pro-life and pro-choice debates over *mizuko kuyō*'s significance, the ritual can be made to support either side in these further bio-ethical discussions.

A final note on this subject: while the professional researchers abstractly debate the ethics of their experiments, some of their student assistants may be struggling with these issues in a far more visceral way. An indication comes from the online journal of a University of Washington undergraduate who, having grown human bone cells as part of class lab work, was left conflicted about what to do with them at the end of the experiment. Following this train of thought led to reading about *mizuko kuyō* and the idea of perhaps creating a Buddhist-influenced ritual for people working in laboratories.

⁶⁶ Cynthia B. Cohen. "Human Embryo Research: Respecting What We Destroy?" (letter to the editor) *Hastings Center Report*, vol. 31, no. 4 (July/August): 5. The debate over *mizuko kuyō*'s level of support for human embryo destruction and experimentation has continued since this exchange. See for instance William Fitzpatrick. "Surplus Embryos, Nonreproductive Cloning, and the Intend/Foresee Distinction," *The Hastings Center Report*, vol. 33, no. 3 (May-June 2003) and Michael Brannigan. "Fixations on the Moral Status of the Embryo." *Biomedical Ethics Reviews: Stem Cell Research*. Edited by James Humber and Robert Almeder, 2004.

“What would the ritual look like? Is it ethical to perform religious rituals over tissue and genetic material of someone belonging to a different faith? Is there an ethical way to incorporate more respectfully religious action in a research clinic environment, and is it necessary in the first place?”⁶⁷ Not all thinking on these subjects takes place at the top of the bio-medical industry’s hierarchy.

Naming an Overlooked Phenomenon: Buddhist Appropriators

In the first section of this chapter, I criticized the historiographical turn in studies of American Buddhism that has shifted attention from how Buddhism arrives here to wrangling over what types of Buddhists there are in America. Converts, ethnics, sympathizers, night-stand Buddhists, and many other creatures have become the basic characters of scholarly studies on Buddhism in North America, to the extent that the issue of typology sometimes threatens to stifle other potential approaches to the rich stew of American Buddhist phenomena. In this section I intend to add yet another exotic animal to our menagerie, but one of a very different type—one that I hope will help expand the possibilities of research on Buddhism in America, as well as on religions with a stronger and longer presence in the historiographical annals, such as Christianity and Judaism.

I have already noted the terms *Buddhist opponent* and *Buddhist interpreter*, coined by Thomas Tweed but not given very much attention by either Tweed or subsequent researchers. Here is the sum of his discussion:

Some other non-Buddhists, whom I have not discussed here, play an important role, too, in the story: *Buddhist opponents*, such as evangelical Protestants who dismiss Buddhism as a dangerous ‘cult’ or try to convert followers in Asia; and *Buddhist interpreters*, journalists, film makers, scholars, poets, painters, and

⁶⁷“MHE 497 Final Project Proposal.” *Academia as an Extreme Sport*, 2/16/05.

novelists who represent the tradition for American audiences.⁶⁸

Neither term fits very well for many of the people covered in the present chapter. Some are most certainly opponents of Buddhism; yet they figure in our story not as enemies seeking to displace Buddhism but as observers eager to employ Buddhism for their own ends. They certainly don't fall under Tweed's category of *Buddhist sympathizers*, people with a certain affinity for elements of Buddhism but no wish to actually convert or become full practitioners of the religion. Neuhaus, O'Neill, and other conservative Christians stretch the bounds of "sympathy" for Buddhism well beyond reason. Meanwhile, the definition of Buddhist interpreters offered above seems to split into two broad camps: first, a professional class who disseminate information on Buddhism primarily to increase public knowledge of human culture (journalists, scholars, some film makers); and second, another professional class who draw on selected Buddhist tropes for creative inspiration (poets, painters, novelists, other film makers). Playwright Wendy MacLeod, for instance, whose play *The Water Children* used *mizuko kuyō* to resolve the main character's dilemma, would be considered one of these interpreters. Many others, though, probably should not be included here. John Wilke and David Reardon are not simply journalists or poets—they spread information about Buddhism specifically to advance political and religious agendas.

Rather than trying to uncomfortably cram the people encountered in this chapter into ill-fitting typologies, I prefer to refer to them as *Buddhist appropriators*. A Buddhist appropriator is not a type of Buddhist. The term, as I use it, refers to non-Buddhists who employ elements of Buddhism for their own purposes. Thus pro-life minister John

⁶⁸Tweed 1999: 84. Emphasis in original.

MacArthur and pro-choice author Daniel Maguire are both Buddhist appropriators: they bring up *mizuko kuyō* in their discussions not as Buddhist apologists, opponents, or sympathizers, but to strategically utilize it to score points in a debate that otherwise has little if anything to do with Buddhism. In the process, such Buddhist appropriators add to the general pool of knowledge (and, not uncommonly, misunderstanding) of Buddhism in America, and partially alter the terms on which the culture war will be fought.

Adding the term Buddhist appropriator to the lexicon of religious studies allows us to acknowledge a particular type of non-Buddhist as players in the larger discourse on Buddhism in America. This has obvious utility for scholars whose primary research interests are American Buddhist phenomena. But the term can also benefit scholars who concentrate on other religious groups, such as American Catholics or evangelicals. Seeing their subjects as Buddhist appropriators helps to bring into focus the fact that even conservative groups exist within a milieu of religious diversity, and they take things from outside groups without necessarily desiring to forge ongoing relationships with these others. It also exposes some of the effects of globalization on local religious communities: because there are Catholic priests ministering in Japan, Midwestern Catholic newsletters end up carrying information about Buddhist post-abortion rites. It is hard to maintain the stereotype of provincial Christian fundamentalists when you encounter one sermonizing about *mizuko kuyō*.

Furthermore, we may expand the notion of appropriators to include non-Buddhist phenomena. Many of these Buddhist appropriators are also *Jewish appropriators*, for instance, readily referencing Jewish ideas or traditions if they seem to support their cause. Note the reference to “*tikkun*” in Michael Meyer and Lawrence Nelson’s article on

human embryos. They may even be *shamanistic*, *polytheistic*, or *animistic appropriators*, drawing on the local religious/cultural beliefs and practices of various ethnic groups for fodder. For a quick example of this latter type, consider this passage from Catholic philosophy professor Peter Kreeft's *How to Win the Culture War: A Christian Battle Plan for a Society in Crisis*:

I know a doctor who spent two years in the Congo winning the confidence of a dying tribe who would not trust outsiders (black or white) and who were dying because of their bad diet. He was a dietician, and he saved their lives. Once they knew this, they trusted him totally and asked him all sorts of questions about life in the West. They believed all the things he told them, like flying to the moon and destroying whole cities with one bomb, but there were two things they literally could not believe. One was that in the West there are atheists—people who believe in no gods at all (“Are these people blind and deaf? Have they never seen a leaf or heard a waterfall?”) The other was that in one nation alone (America), over a million mothers each year pay doctors to kill their babies before they are born. Their reaction to this was to giggle, which was their embarrassed way of trying to be polite, assuming it was a joke. They simply had no holding place in their minds for this concept, and they expected every day that the doctor would tell them the point of the joke.

And it is we who call these people “primitive.” The irony is monstrous.⁶⁹

As with John MacArthur's extensive description of *mizuko kuyō* in his sermon, here Kreeft appropriates the attitudes and beliefs of a foreign religious and cultural system to score points against his domestic opponents. Even the polytheistic peoples we call “primitive” know better than American atheists and pro-choice advocates about religion and morality, he alleges. This employment of a Congolese ethnic group's beliefs is not meant to honor them or suggest that American Christians should learn from them—it is purely a rhetorical tool for making people who oppose the author's agenda seem “blind,” “deaf,” and “monstrous.” Here we see that increasing contact between different cultures and religions, and even learning from outside sources and willingness to discuss the ideas

⁶⁹Peter Kreeft. *How to Win the Culture War: A Christian Battle Plan for a Society in Crisis*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002: 16.

of others, does not necessarily lead in a straightforward way to tolerance and pluralism. MacArthur's evangelical congregation and Kreeft's Christian readers operate in a somewhat diverse environment where conservative Christian leaders actively expose them to non-Christian ideas and practices. But it is difficult to argue that actual pluralism, in the sense of appreciation for other ways of thinking and acting, is being achieved here when the framework of appropriation so seamlessly plugs these new religions into pre-existing structures of thought and value.

Returning to the study of Buddhism, we may observe that many American Buddhists are themselves *Christian appropriators*, frequently making use of Christian language or concepts when they serve to illustrate points of doctrine. And finally, we should not confine appropriations of Buddhism to non-Buddhist religious commentators. Some of the people in this chapter are not explicitly religious (some are even openly agnostic), yet they resort to references to Buddhism and other religions when it suits their purposes. Perhaps we need to talk of *religious appropriators*, people who employ discussion of religion to make points in arguments that are not necessarily considered religious matters, or where the commentator's own motivations are not religious in character. Certainly this would seem to be a common phenomenon in the contemporary United States, hardly confined to the use of *mizuko kuyō* in discussions of abortion or human cloning.

Conclusion: Liquid Lives and American Arguments

Repeatedly, William LaFleur has surfaced in this narrative as an important source for non-Buddhist knowledge of *mizuko kuyō*. From Catholic priests to visual artists,

Americans with a wide variety of occupations, religions, and political views have learned about Japanese Buddhist abortion concepts from his 1992 book. In fact, his intentions in writing *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* included the possibility of making an impact on the American debate over abortion. “If some of the ideas presented here could be used as a heuristic tool for looking at—and trying to solve—our own abortion dilemma, I would be doubly pleased.”⁷⁰ LaFleur’s main concern appears not to be with questions of whether abortion is moral or whether abortion should be legal, and his book is thus not strongly pro-life or pro-choice. He is focused on another problem altogether, which perhaps—he hopes—knowledge of *mizuko kuyō* could help us resolve: the corrosive effect of the abortion dispute on American society as a whole.

The debate about learning from Japan ought also to include a careful, balanced, open look at how abortion is dealt with there. For Americans to join in that debate might prove to be very profitable—especially since, as now seems to be the case, discussions of abortion in the United States threaten to remain deadlocked, divisive, or both. One of the salient features of the Japanese approach [i.e. *mizuko kuyō*] appears to be that it has enabled society to avoid the kind of social division and disruptions we have been absorbed in for decades now. To the extent that it contributes to social solidarity rather than to fracturedness, the Japanese approach is eminently pragmatic.⁷¹

The information presented in this chapter may argue against any apparent potential of *mizuko kuyō* to alleviate the cultural war over abortion. In the wake of exposure to the idea of *mizuko kuyō*—in no small part because of LaFleur’s influence—both pro-life and pro-choice Buddhist appropriators resort to discussions of the ritual because they feel it helps them strengthen the weaknesses of their own sides and

⁷⁰LaFleur 1992: XV.

⁷¹LaFleur 1992: 216. Although he devotes less space to the subject, LaFleur also speculates that *mizuko kuyō* could have the additional benefit of ministering to abortive American mothers’ distress. This second concern of LaFleur will be discussed in depth in the following chapter.

undermine the positions of their opponents. Pro-life Americans use *mizuko kuyō* to prove that they care about women, not just fetuses, and that their convictions do not arise simply out of private religious feelings but objective psychological and medical facts. Pro-choice Americans, on the other hand, use *mizuko kuyō* to demonstrate that they care about families and children, not just women, and that they are sensitive not only to the secular but also the religious aspects of life and abortion. In the process, pro-life Christians, who seem to be primarily motivated by their exclusivist and authoritarian Biblical convictions, turn for support to a non-theistic religion they otherwise oppose; pro-choice feminists, who seem to have chiefly secular reasons for supporting abortion rights, turn for support to a supernatural entity and his retinue of angry fetal ghosts. Buddhist appropriations are not infrequently tinged with a degree of unintended irony.

As with the pro-life and pro-choice debates over *mizuko kuyō*'s significance, the ritual can be made to support either side in a number of other bio-ethical discussions around such issues as cloning and gene therapy. This mutability of *mizuko kuyō*'s meaning in American discussions is not simply because the ritual comes from a foreign culture and therefore is designed to meet the needs of a different situation. It also arises because the multifaceted ritual can be abstracted in multiple ways, such that different observers may find reflected in the ritual differing elements that appear to support their biases about abortion and biomedical issues. Water baby rituals turn out to be so fluid that they can be marshaled to support opposing positions on a wide range of (sometimes only tenuously associated) subjects, and once introduced into the discussion they may be used to attack others who share one's own general perspective or even reinterpreted against the original appropriator. This extreme fluidity may be too strong for *mizuko*

kuyō to form a foundation for LaFleur's desired common ground: since *mizuko kuyō* can be channeled into support of any number of partisan positions, it seems to lack the ability to fundamentally sway opponents. It does change the nature of the debate by diversifying the number and type of religious and cultural resources drawn upon in the American culture wars. This is a significant development that deserves attention. But nonetheless, at least on the level of political discussion, knowledge of Japanese Buddhism doesn't seem to change *minds*. Rather, *mizuko kuyō* becomes another site for argumentation and self-justification, not a lever that actually moves significant numbers of people to one side or another of these debates. Jizō, who functions as the bodhisattva patron of firefighters, so far has shown little capacity to extinguish the raging flames of the American abortion debate.

But there is another aspect of the non-Buddhist encounter with *mizuko kuyō* that needs to be considered. On the level of *discussion*, we find *mizuko kuyō* is easily used as yet another weapon in the abortion cultural war. With the level of antagonism so high, neither side seems prepared to back down in the arena of debate and attempt to reach some accord. But the pragmatic approach that LaFleur desires—which he sees as a formerly widespread element of American thought that has now been largely abandoned—does appear to make some headway in another aspect of American life. On the level of *action*, of ritual, there is evidence that *mizuko kuyō* is slowly altering the way some Americans on both sides of the debate relate to abortion and religion. It is to this second area of appropriation—ritual—that we turn in the next chapter.

“THANK YOU GETUPGRRL FOR GIVING ME MY MIZUKO”:
THERAPEUTIC APPROPRIATIONS OF *MIZUKO KUYŌ* BY NON-BUDDHIST
AMERICANS

In early 1925 Gloria Swanson was the most famous and popular woman on earth. Already a veteran star of the silver screen at age twenty-five, the dark-haired American actress had worked with such stars and star-makers as Charlie Chaplin, Rudolph Valentino, and Cecile B. De Mille, and she was in Paris preparing to marry the Marquis de la Falaise. It should have been the crowning moment of a triumphant life. But as Swanson explains on the first page of her 519-page autobiography, she was secretly in the grip of terror and despair.

Gloria Swanson, the million-dollar-girl, was pregnant. If the news reached Hollywood, defensive under the scrutinizing eye of the oppressive Hays Office, her career was over. Although unplanned, she wanted to bear the Marquis’ baby—yet she also felt an obligation to her fans to fulfill their dreams for her. And, as she made clear, there was all the money to be made if she just didn’t let this little bump in the road derail her. Torn by the situation, she imagined the fetus speaking to her plaintively, begging not to be flushed into the cold sewers. She saw the face of death in the fog, stalking her. Telling no one but the few people she needed to arrange the procedure, she quietly obtained an abortion. Immediately she contracted blood poisoning and fell into a near-fatal fever that lingered for weeks, as she thrashed in the sheets with nightmares of her

dead child. She knew her illness was a punishment. Eventually, Swanson recovered and moved on to even greater stardom, succeeding not only in film but as a fashion designer, artist, and advocate for women. Decade by decade she was gazed at by hundreds of millions, none of whom knew that sadness and a desire for some sort of forgiveness gnawed at her.

Finally, unexpectedly, she found her redemption. On the last page of her international bestseller, after all the triumphs and the ever-lingering effects of the tragedy that opened the book, Swanson visited Japan:

. . . the greatest regret of my life has always been that I didn't have my baby, Henri's child, in 1925. Nothing in the whole world is worth a baby, I realized as soon as it was too late, and I never stopped blaming myself. Then in 1979 Bill and I traveled to Japan, and at a Buddhist temple at a place called Kyo San, or Honorable Mountain, our guide and a Buddhist monk led us up through the most timeless, peaceful landscape I have ever seen, asleep or awake: a mountain forest of pathways lacing the area, and ancient graves everywhere. At one point I noticed a tiny stone figure near the massive roots of one of the cedars. Then another. Then I realized that there were hundreds. With little cloth bibs around them.

"What are these?" I asked.

"Babies," the guide said. He crouched down for a closer look at one stone.

"Fifteen hundred twenty-five. This baby's life was ended before he was born."

Then he and the monk must have seen how deeply moved I was, for they showed me how to pay respect in that place. They gave me a dipper of water and indicated that I should pour it over the tiny stone figure. Then I burned the incense the monk gave me and left some grains of rice.

As we stood up, I was crying fresh tears out of a guilt I had carried for fifty-four years. The guide and the monk exchanged some words, and then the guide said to me, "We all choose our parents. We choose everything. No blame."

I believed him. The message came to me too directly for me to disbelieve it. I believe it to this day. In fact, I tried to convey a bit of that message on the first-day cover I designed for the United Nations. And since that day on the Honorable Mountain I look at my children and their children and their children with respect and awe as well as love.¹

¹ Gloria Swanson. *Swanson on Swanson*. New York: Random House, 1980: 519.

Swanson closes by saying that now “things are getting clearer.” Fame, fortune, power, love, four husbands, and the cultural and religious riches of America failed to heal that life-long self-inflicted wound. But in an impromptu *mizuko kuyō* atop a dream-like mountain in Japan, Swanson found the release she sought.

In the previous chapter we encountered non-Buddhist Americans who rhetorically appropriate *mizuko kuyō* to bolster their arguments over abortion and other contentious bioethical issues. Most often, such appropriations were used to critique ideological opponents. But there are other appropriations of *mizuko kuyō* that deserve attention. For some American Christians and others, Jizō’s role in *mizuko kuyō* offers a compelling new vision of religious response to the difficult question of abortion, as well as other wrenching pregnancy losses such as miscarriage or stillbirth. At times, where God seems unapproachable or forbidding, Jizō is being marshaled to offer solace to women after pregnancy losses, intentional or otherwise. Beyond the simple rhetorical employment of *mizuko* in the contentious American culture wars, there is the emergence of another kind of phenomenon: some non-Buddhist Americans, including pro-life Christians, are actually participating in *mizuko kuyō* rituals themselves as a way to heal after a pregnancy loss. Even for those who don’t perform *mizuko kuyō*, the opinion that non-Buddhist Americans can benefit from being introduced to the concept of *mizuko kuyō* seems to be widely shared, and the ritual has drawn attention from Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and other communities seeking to emulate it by producing their own versions of *mizuko kuyō*. These assessments of *mizuko kuyō* as a potentially positive force in America seem to be even more numerous than the aggressive appropriations presented in the previous chapter.

On this final leg of our exploration of Jizō's perambulations through non-Buddhist America we find that—despite all the wrestling over whether *mizuko kuyō* is a pro-life or pro-choice ritual—some tentative common ground is achieved between the two sides. The appropriations we are interested in this chapter are therapeutic ones.² If the appropriations of chapter five were most often designed to wound—to score points or draw rhetorical blood in the wars over abortion and other issues—those investigated here are intended to heal. There are two forms of healing around *mizuko kuyō* that are proposed most frequently in the non-Buddhist literature. The first is healing of the cultural divide between pro-life and pro-choice supporters. The second is the more intimate healing of grief-stricken individuals and families who have experienced pregnancy loss. As we will see, a surprising range of non-Buddhists from various religious backgrounds and holding differing views on contentious issues nonetheless all see potential within the ritual of *mizuko kuyō* for both of these types of healing.

“The Japanese Approach is More Sensitive:” Japan as Better Off Than America

Let us begin with Gary Chamberlain, one of the most perceptive interpreters of *mizuko kuyō* for a non-Buddhist audience, writing in the Jesuit journal *America*:

As the bus neared Purple Cloud Temple, two long miles by train and bus from Tokyo, loud-speakers were already blaring in the early-morning sunshine. From the bits of Japanese I know, I could make out words like “sorrow,” “sadness,” “water child” and others, which told me I had arrived at a unique Buddhist temple devoted exclusively to prayers and rituals for aborted fetuses. But beyond the sounds of chants, music and rhythmic phrases, I was overwhelmed by the sight

²I intentionally employ the term “therapeutic” because of its multiple associations. In its most basic definition, therapeutic means something that is healing or has the power to heal: healing societies and healing persons are the appropriations we examine in this chapter. In common parlance, therapeutic has the tendency to become associated with psychotherapy in particular: as we will see, the religious aspect of *mizuko kuyō* appropriation becomes entangled with clinical and popular notions of psychotherapy and ministering to emotional distress.

before me. On every side of the mountains surrounding the temple, small statues of the god Jizo, special protector of children, stretched out as far as the eye could see. . .

I had come to this spot nestled in the mountains as part of my own work on abortion and family planning in Japan and the response of the Roman Catholic Church. In the process, I had seen Jizo statues from Sendai in the north, to Zogoji temple in Tokyo. . . What all these statues, temples and rituals had in common was a set of practices dating from the 17th century to help women deal with the anguish and sadness surrounding the deaths of fetuses and young children, whether from deaths or abortions. Today these rituals serve at least two purposes. They provide an outlet and expression of personal loss, and they provide a ritualized, public policy that replaces our Western reliance upon law to resolve our anguish about abortion. I believe that *such rituals* not only can teach us a great deal about how to deal with abortion but also, *if adopted by Christian communities, can absorb the divisions and tensions created by the political climate surrounding abortion in the United States.*³

What America needs to heal the deep divide over abortion, Chamberlain suggests, is Christianized *mizuko kuyō*. This statement from a Catholic in a Jesuit weekly may seem surprising, yet variants on this theme are surprisingly common. In fact, Chamberlain's sentiments are echoed from many directions. Already in 1989 Anthony Zimmerman, an American Catholic priest serving in Nagoya, had made a similar suggestion:

We who are Catholic—we are strangely silent about reparation for the injustice done to our children whom we aborted, and to God whose commandment we broke. Mothers keep the pain in their hearts, without opportunity to express it in prayer, and in making offerings. Is it right? . . . *Maybe we Catholics should look past the superstition, and learn from the Japanese* to do a little penance for our sins in killing the preborn. When will we have a corner in our churches to honor the “water children?” *When will priests offer Masses for the water children of the city, state, and nation*, accepting offerings in a box which protects confidentiality; offerings which would be used to help pro-life causes and to finance birth costs for unwed mothers, and adoption costs for their children?⁴

³Gary Chamberlain. “Learning From the Japanese.” *America* vol. 171, iss. 7 (9/17/94). Emphasis added.

⁴Anthony Zimmerman. “Memorial Services for Aborted Children in Japan.” *All About Issue Magazine*, (April 1989). Emphasis added.

Even the American Life League, a virulently pro-life Catholic group that opposes abortion and contraception in all situations, has seen a positive connection between Japanese Buddhist rituals and the American abortion debate:

Japanese women at least have a religious mechanism for dealing with their guilt and remorse. Buddhist memorial services for their aborted babies which are referred to as “water children sent from dark to dark” have become a booming business in Japan. . . *We in the United States have begun to imitate the Japanese with grave plots and memorial services for the preborn*, despite the fanatical resistance of such anti-religious groups as the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Organization for Women, who have actually taken pro-lifers to court for daring to attempt to bury the sad little bodies of aborted preborn babies.⁵

These feelings are not confined to Catholics. There are also voiced by Protestants, Jews, Neo-Pagans, Unitarian Universalists, agnostics, atheists, and others. They represent pro-choice, pro-life, and undecided viewpoints. While the sources are varied, the lament is the same: the United States is worse off than Japan because Japanese Buddhists have recourse to *mizuko kuyō* while American Christians and others have no widespread post-pregnancy loss rituals.

Let’s listen in for a moment on these voices before analyzing them further. We hear Mormon legal scholar Lynn Wardle characterizing *mizuko kuyō* as “remarkably honest and healthy.”⁶

The Japanese practice of abortion allows for mourning and grieving.

⁵Brian Clowes. *Pro-Life Activist’s Encyclopedia*, American Life League, 1998. Emphasis added.

⁶Lynn Wardle. “‘Crying Stones’: A Comparison of Abortion in Japan and the United States.” *New York Law School Journal of International and Comparative Law*, 1993: 14. Because of their belief in the premortal spirit world, Mormons might potentially respond more favorably than other Christians to the basic concept of *mizuko*. In LDS cosmology, prior to mortal birth spirits already exist in a premortal life conceptually similar in some ways to the undefined spirit existence of future babies in Japanese religion. While I am unaware of any Mormons who feel that abortion returns fetuses to the premortal life (most, it seems, believe that they progress on to the post-mortal world), it seems plausible to imagine that such a belief could arise in the future as a way of dealing with the theological and emotional difficulties of abortion.

Acknowledgment of responsibility is socially encouraged in Japan. The result—open ritual grieving for abortion—is beneficially and compassionately healing with respect to the feelings of the woman and is also very honest by recognizing that a child’s life has been sacrificed. The American approach is to deny responsibility, suppress guilt, and repress mourning. Guilt or grief is a sign of weakness. Feminists shouts of “no apology” and “no shame” and the legal principle that abortion is a fundamental constitutional right, intimidate American women and obstruct their grieving . . . *The Japanese approach is more sensitive to non-economic, intangible dimensions of life, especially bonds and relationships, and is more holistic.*⁷

From the opposite direction, we hear pro-choice writer Wren Farris in *Vision Magazine*:

The culture of Jizo in Japan may have vital insights to lend to our own country as we contend with an anti-woman governmental system and a culture of secrecy and shame around abortion. The single focus on the duality of “legal or illegal, right or wrong” has left nearly all other aspects of the subject sorely neglected; overlooking the healing of the actual women who undergo abortions, enshrouding the topic in shame, and sweeping it under the carpet of collective cultural untouchables. Japanese women, on the other hand, have the great opportunity to share their grief, participating in culturally accepted rituals with their families and communities. . . So what could an American version of Jizo look like? What would it feel like to acknowledge and mourn our losses instead of feeling forced to hide them? . . . Perhaps it is time for women in America to develop a set of personally and culturally empowering practices, or deeper understandings surrounding reproductive choice. With change on the governmental level seeming more and more formidable, I propose that we begin from the ground up, in our own lives, and in our own families and communities, to create a new cultural story, one in which abortion is not synonymous with protest, political debate, and religious affiliation, but rather with the deeply-felt, powerful and difficult experience that it truly is.

Finding ways to counterbalance and break the ideology of secrecy around abortion that exists in our country may be the next step in the centuries-long reclamation of true equality from within society for women. . . Gratitude to the women and men who tend Jizo; may we take strength from their willingness to openly grieve.⁸

We also hear Zachery Braverman, an American Jew living in Japan:

Jizo is the patron saint of, among other things, lost children. One meaning of lost

⁷Wardle 1993: 239-240. Emphasis added.

⁸Wren Farris. “Honoring the Unborn.” *Vision Magazine*, September 2005. Emphasis added.

children is aborted children, as well as those who died in childbirth. . . *In Japan, abortion is not politicized as it is in the States. It's just a fact of life.* That means that there is a place within the society for things like this, where women can go to make an offering to a spirit that didn't—for whatever reason—make it into this world. Thus the women have a place to seek comfort, the memory of the unborn child is respected, and healing can happen. *I don't think the polarization of the issue in the States allows for such sentiments to be expressed semi-publicly like this, which is too bad.* It negates the possibility of comfort where there should be some.⁹

Like Chamberlain, each of these writers recognizes that America has reached some sort of deadlock, which is hurting the nation as a whole, and women and their families involved with abortion in particular. At a loss as to how to move the conversation forward and find a healthier way, a solution suddenly seems to materialize when the idea of *mizuko kuyō* is encountered. Nearly all non-Buddhist observers concede that *mizuko kuyō* offers some degree of genuine post-abortion healing, and this concession often comes with a tinge of jealousy. Collectively, these many non-Buddhist commentators on *mizuko kuyō* seem to be making the following statement: the Japanese aren't paralyzed by the issue of abortion—it hasn't rent their social fabric and balkanized the country into angry groups that are viciously and mutually suspicious. Their women are allowed to grieve for abortions and heal, while ours suffer in shame and silence. Apparently the key is a Buddhist memorial ritual for fetuses. So if it works for them, might it work for us too?

It is interesting to note that some of the voices expressing the most dismay at the American situation and the greatest respect for Japan's lack of strife are conservative Christians. There is a tendency for some commentators to assume an easy relationship between conservative Christianity and knee-jerk American patriotism. But the discussion

⁹Zachery Braverman. "Stone and Moss, [Translator's Note:] (www.biocom-jp.com/ee), 3/15/03. Emphasis added.

of *mizuko kuyō* in these circles shows significant dissatisfaction with American culture and admiration for aspects of very foreign cultures. One lesson from attention to these appropriations of Buddhism is that while America often figures as the savior of the world in fundamentalist discourse, the USA can just as easily appear as the anti-Christ when American politics or society seem to stray from a strongly conservative Christian vision of what America should be.¹⁰

There are several important points to take from these American musings on *mizuko kuyō*. First, we can see a desire by many on both sides of the abortion debate for less rancor and greater social unity. Naturally, this wish for social unity is sometimes connected with the desire that one's own side win outright, eliminating the battle by eliminating the opposition. But there are also significant instances of simple dismay at the battle itself. Even among those who are actively involved in polarizing American religion and politics, there is often a counter-desire for greater social harmony. In fact, opponents often enter the fray in the name of social harmony: many pro-life Christians and Jews see social disharmony as a result of murder of pre-born babies and devaluation of women's roles as mothers, while many pro-choice advocates (religious or otherwise) believe social disharmony arises from suppression of women's reproductive rights and the intrusion of fundamentalist religion into the secularized public sphere. In their attempts to achieve social unity, the two sides cause further breakdown in the social fabric. This is simply one of the basic ironies of the culture wars. Another irony is that

¹⁰Beyond the USA as savior/anti-Christ trope (and given the gender implications of abortion) one might point to the virgin/whore trope common in American Christianity as another applicable analogy. The chaste and faithful woman is potentially the most exalted of all Christian types, while the promiscuous or unfaithful woman is excoriated as the wickedest of sinners. Similarly, many fundamentalist Christians and conservative Catholics put America on a pedestal, but when the USA fails to toe their preferred line on social issues, their disappointed wrath is proportional to their feeling of just how far the country has fallen.

each side tends to react to this degradation of the public discourse by blaming the other, increasing the divide yet further.

But these ironic twists do not remove the underlying desire for a united America. Even as they blame and at times demonize one another, opponents on both sides express frequent desire for a more polite, unified, and compassionate society. Furthermore, the dyed-in-the-wool culture warriors are a clear minority of the American population as a whole. As political science professor Morris P. Fiorina explains in *Culture War?*, most Americans are in fact moderates on the issue of abortion. This great moderate middle has few voices in the highly polarized public debate over abortion, which is typically monopolized by people who are more extreme to one side or the other than the average citizen:

. . . the evidence is clear that the broad American public is not polarized on the specifics of the abortion issue. They believe that abortion should be legal but that it is reasonable to restrict it in various ways. They are “pro-choice, but”. . . Americans are traditionally pragmatic, and they approach even an issue like abortion in a pragmatic fashion. They favor the right to choose, but only a small minority favors the right to choose in every conceivable circumstance. Overwhelming majorities regard rape, birth defects, and threats to the mother’s life and health as sufficient justifications for abortion, while clear majorities regard personal convenience and gender selection as insufficient. . . In sum, public opinion on abortion does not support militants on either side of the issue. Pro-choice activists who play an important role in the Democratic Party argue that any infringement on a woman’s right to choose is unacceptable, even if that means the occasional abortion of a healthy, near-term fetus. Such people probably comprise less than 10 percent of the population. Pro-life activists who play an important role in the Republican Party argue that any abortion is unacceptable, even if that means the occasional death of a woman. Such people certainly comprise less than 10 percent of the population. The great majority of the American citizenry rejects extreme positions and could be content with compromise laws, but such compromises are hard to achieve given the current state of American electoral politics.¹¹

¹¹Morris P. Fiorina. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005: 63-66.

Despite the dominance of public discourse (and the political process) by the voices of the extremes, some of these moderates do publicly articulate a desire for less rancor, and some culture warriors, even while personally desiring a more radical stance, are aware of this moderate tendency and are willing to discuss compromises that are more faithful to the majority's wishes.

Mizuko kuyō enters this situation as a potential way of healing the rift between pro-life and pro-choice Americans. As Americans gaze at Japan, many are startled to encounter a society that simultaneously has a high abortion rate, little social strife over abortion, and apparently high levels of religious acknowledgement of abortion. In the previous chapter, the competing interests of the appropriators caused them to make opposite assessments of *mizuko kuyō*'s meaning: pro-life advocates saw it as a pro-life ritual, while pro-choice advocates framed it as supporting abortion rights. Both rhetorically appropriated *mizuko kuyō*, and in the process the ritual was used to push the two sides further apart. But on the issue of greater social harmony the desires of the two sides converge, and therefore they tend to agree that *mizuko kuyō* opens up a space where one side can tentatively reach out toward the other in the hope of using *mizuko kuyō* to turn down the heat in the American debate.

Different commentators see different levels of potential in *mizuko kuyō* for America. For some, it is simply an example of a nation where legal abortion doesn't dramatically damage society. This resembles the pro-choice appropriation that seeks to employ *mizuko kuyō* to prove that there is something unusual about America and its angry abortion battle. If some other country can get along despite the presence of abortion, perhaps we can too, whether or not we support the practice. For others, *mizuko*

kuyō offers a more specific clue as to *how* to achieve the desired social harmony. Some analyze the situation and declare that it is the religious angle that matters: if we could take some responsibility by humbly and religiously acknowledging abortion's sinful and/or regrettable nature then we would be on our way to a less rancorous situation, even if we did not necessarily then criminalize abortion itself. This is close to the stance taken by Naomi Wolf in her widely discussed 1995 *The New Republic* essay:

How could one live with a conscious view that abortion is an evil and still be pro-choice? Through acts of redemption, or what the Jewish mystical tradition calls *tikkun*; or "mending." Laurence Tribe, in *Abortion: The Clash of Absolutes*, notes that "Memorial services for the souls of aborted fetuses are fairly common in contemporary Japan," where abortions are both legal and readily available. Shinto doctrine holds that women should make offerings to the fetus to help it rest in peace; Buddhists once erected statues of the spirit guardian of children to honor aborted fetuses (called "water children" or "unseeing children").¹²

Wolf assimilates Japanese *mizuko kuyō* practices to her own Jewish perspective, trying to suggest a path between the two polarized options available to American women around abortion: the Scylla of pro-choice feminism that defends the procedure but refuses to allow religious language into the debate, and the Charybdis of pro-life conservatism that acknowledges people's spiritual side but demands the abrogation of reproductive rights. Yet other commentators take their analysis another step and conclude that it is specifically the *ritual* context of abortion in Japan that provides the answer: because the Japanese avoid "rights talk" and focus on ritual solutions to social problems, "mother and fetus" or "religion and women" are never hypothesized as opposing combatants.

For those whose analysis doesn't proceed past the simple observation of Japan as a less polarized society, *mizuko kuyō* remains a ritual that is merely rhetorically appropriated. These people raise the issue of *mizuko kuyō* to envision a better America,

¹²Naomi Wolf. "Our Bodies, Our Souls." *The New Republic*. (Oct. 16, 1985): 35.

but for various reasons—opposition to Buddhism, lack of interest in ritual, the sense that America is too different a culture from Japan to utilize the same solution, etc—they do not go further. But for those who see Japan as a model that can actually be emulated to some degree, *mizuko kuyō* becomes a resource that can potentially be copied and used in North America to heal a wounded society. Thus, Chamberlain and others call for *mizuko kuyō*-type rituals in American Christianity as a method of dealing with the fact of abortion that doesn't contribute to the creation of harsh public wrangling over the procedure. Staunch pro-life and pro-choice partisans may not be able to agree on the issues, but, these commentators suggest, they could potentially participate side by side in shared ritual that expresses regret over abortion without explicitly condemning or valorizing those who support it. And once they sit down together, perhaps a new solution will eventually grow from these first tentative steps.

Healing Pregnancy Losses Through Mizuko Kuyō, Online and Off

In the quoted passages offered above, there is another significant issue constantly being raised: the potential of *mizuko kuyō*-type rituals to provide spiritual or psychological healing to individual women who have experienced abortion. It is not only the promoters of Post-Abortion Syndrome whom we encountered in the previous chapter who feel that such women (and perhaps their families) need healing. Like Wolf, many pro-choice advocates and undecided moderates have expressed the need for some sort of recognition that abortion is a regretful, painful event that can give rise to feelings of grief, shame, and depression.

Of course, not all pregnancy losses are caused by abortion. A second group calling for help with their losses is women and their partners dealing with miscarriage. In many cases, these writers resent what they see as the abortion debate's oppressive polarization of pregnancy loss issues, such that miscarriage can't be acknowledged as a source of real grief—to do so would open up the question once again of whether a fetus is a human person.

If one publishes a rite in which a stillborn infant of five and a half months gestation, or even a fetus miscarried in the first trimester, is referred to as a “baby,” and perhaps given a name, one seems to have settled the question of when an individual human life begins. Is this a person or not? The question is central to the problem of whether there is a clear promise of eternal life for this little one. But what makes it a highly volatile, politicized issue in our society is its relation to the abortion debate, and that social situation obscures the choice of language with ideology. There are those who ideologically refuse to call a stillborn or miscarried fetus a baby, and those who ideologically insist that if a woman who has miscarried doesn't use the word “baby,” she is denying her grief. This politically charged atmosphere is not conducive to the creation of gracious liturgical language, as we have found out whenever the concern for inclusive language has devolved into competing ideologies.¹³

At the same time, funerals for miscarried fetuses have not been a prominent part of Christian and Jewish practice, leaving miscarried mothers feeling abandoned by all sides. Not surprisingly, many non-Buddhists consider *mizuko kuyō* a possible solution to this felt lack of ritualization. And there are yet other American voices looking at *mizuko kuyō* and demanding recognition of their losses: parents of stillborn children, of dead infants, even infertile couples wishing for a way to deal with their loss of potential families.

Reflecting this interest in the ritual, highly detailed *mizuko kuyō* descriptions appear in many of the most popular post-pregnancy loss manuals, such as *Unspeakable Losses: Healing From Miscarriage, Abortion, and Other Pregnancy Loss*; *The Healing*

¹³Elaine J. Ramshaw. “Ritual for Stillbirth: Exploring the Issues.” *Worship*, volume 62, number 6 (November 1988): 537. Ramshaw is a Methodist pastor.

*Choice: Your Guide to Emotional Recovery After an Abortion; You're Not Alone: Healing Through God's Grace After Abortion; and Finding Hope When a Child Dies: What Other Cultures Can Teach Us.*¹⁴ Websites and the literature of their associated offline organizations devoted to miscarriage and abortion support frequently carry in depth information on *mizuko kuyō*, including Post Abortion Stress Syndrome, Pro-Choice Connection, Exhale, Life After Abortion, and Earth Island Angels.¹⁵ Online communities for pregnancy and parenting, such as MotheringDotCommune and BabyCenter, very frequently include forums for discussion of pregnancy loss, and *mizuko kuyō* is raised by non-Buddhists at these sites time and again.¹⁶ And the ritual is carefully described and explicitly promoted in many non-Buddhist publications for female spirituality, such as *Return to Spirit* and *Keys to the Open Gate: A Woman's Spirituality Sourcebook*.¹⁷

For many American women simply reading that the Japanese memorialize their lost pregnancies brings amazement, gratitude, and in some cases, claims of healing—the more mediated equivalent of the “*mizuko shock*,” described in the previous chapter, of Americans when first encountering rows of *mizuko Jizō* at Japanese temples. One place to observe this dynamic is in online forums where women gather to support one another

¹⁴Many other post-pregnancy loss manuals by non-Buddhists that do not carry explicit information about *mizuko kuyō* nonetheless draw on other elements of Buddhism to provide comfort and healing practices. Examples include *Peace After Abortion* by Ava Torre-Bueno and *Miscarriage: Women Sharing From the Heart* by Marie Allen and Shelly Marks.

¹⁵The Internet addresses for these sites are as follows: Post Abortion Stress Abortion Syndrome (www.afterabortion.com), Pro-Choice Connection (www.prochoiceconnection.com), Exhale (www.4exhale.org), Life After Abortion (afterabortion.blogspot.com), Earth Island Angels (www.earthislandangels.com).

¹⁶The Internet addresses for these sites are: MotheringDotCommune (www.mothering.com) and BabyCenter (www.babycenter.com). Both of these sites have grief forums where women have exchanged information about *mizuko kuyō* with one another.

¹⁷Joan Snider. “Jizō Ceremony for Aborted and Miscarried Children.” *Keys to the Open Gate: A Woman's Spirituality Sourcebook*. Edited by Melody Ermachild. Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 2004; Barbara Stone. *Return to Spirit, Book II: Emptiness to Form, Soul Loss*. Lee, MA: House of Spirit, 1997.

in the wake of pregnancy losses. These sites have become a major online phenomenon in recent years—the most popular ones get tens of thousands of unique visitors each day, and there are hundreds of smaller forums where women cluster to find comfort in the quasi-anonymous world of virtual community.¹⁸ Here they can express those feelings that Chamberlain and others complain have no comfortable place in American society. Voiceless and frustrated in real life, online the almost-mother of a fetus that has been aborted, miscarried, or lost at birth can cry out and receive near instant recognition from hundreds of other women dealing with similar losses. And again and again, these women share the concept of *mizuko kuyō* with one another.

Religion in cyberspace is a relatively new phenomenon, but since the turn of the millennium it has attracted increasing scholarly notice. Sociologist Brenda Basher in her book *Give Me That Online Religion* offers some hints of this new medium's potential to transform religion and religious studies:

The Internet has proven an excellent platform for conveying religious information.

When considered cumulatively, sites that contain translations of religious texts, religious histories, religious rituals, and theological teachings offer more religious information about more religious traditions than has even been available at any time in human history. . . . Online religion is the most portentous development for the future of religion to come out of the twentieth century. . . . Using a computer for online religious activity—an intriguing, albeit marginal, pastime to which interactive computing was put in the late twentieth century—could become the dominant form of religion and religious experience in the next century. If so, religious expression and experience will change dramatically.¹⁹

It's impossible to know at this point, of course, whether online religion will ultimately live up to Basher's speculation. Basher herself is well aware of the propensity for error

¹⁸Patti Hartigan. "The Kindness of Strangers." *Boston Globe Magazine*. (8/4/02).

¹⁹Brenda Basher. *Give Me That Online Religion*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001: xi; 17; 19.

and hyperbole on the part of prognosticators—in her study she both buttresses her statements with considerable evidence and frequently qualifies them, admitting upfront the multiple difficulties scholars have experienced in trying to predict future religious trends. But whether or not online religion really becomes the dominant form of religious experience, the general thrust of Basher’s study seems correct: religion has exploded on the internet in the past decade and has become a major source of religious information (and even community) for millions of Americans.

Basher’s further description of online religious activity can help shed some light on our subjects:

Today, virtual home sites for online religion are being constructed by practically every religious group with active adherents. Yet the vast majority of people involved with online religion are not those who build the amazing textual and image edifices of virtual spirituality. Instead, they are those who come to inhabit them. They are people who find or seek out online religion, valuing it because it meets a pressing spiritual need. In the semi-imaginative locale of cyberspace, accountants, factory workers, lawyers, students, and assorted others do not just trade stocks, participate in eBay auctions, and view scanned risqué photos. A sizable percentage have novel religious experiences.²⁰

These people who go online to meet pressing spiritual needs are called *cyber-seekers* by Basher. Such a description certainly fits the women who exchange information about *mizuko kuyō* in forums designed for discussion of pregnancy losses. It is also worth noting that while many religious sites carry information about *mizuko kuyō*, the parenting and other bulletin boards and blogs we are mainly examining here fall outside the “virtual home sites for online religion” that Basher focuses her attention on. Most often, they are “secular” sites that are unaffiliated with any particular religious tradition and are not devoted to explicitly religious subjects. That they become sites of religious encounter

²⁰Basher 2001: 70-71.

and exchange arises directly from the activities of their users, not the intent of their creators. In their quest for answers, cyber-seekers are not only shaped by the virtual spaces they inhabit but actively terraform secular websites to create communities of meaning.

The number of women in these online forums who are actually Buddhist seems to be tiny, but through the channels described in the previous chapter, these non-Buddhists have encountered *mizuko kuyō* concepts and pondered them in their hearts. When new women come along seeking some sort of solace, discussion of Jizō and water babies readily emerges. Likewise, web diaries (blogs) that offer information on *mizuko kuyō* rapidly attract the attention of commentators:

Thank You GetupGrrl for Giving Me My Mizuko: For those of you who have provided so many encouraging words and stories to me regarding my past miscarriages and my attempt to get pregnant again—I offer you getupgrrl's latest entry [link to post about *mizuko kuyō*]. She has been one of my many sources of inspiration and information in the last few months. And today? She gave me a place, and a way, to mourn my loss. If you read the entry—be sure to also read the comments, which ended up being a place for women to post their own stories of loss. It's an amazing thing going on there. It was nice to be a part of it. Although I could have done without the floodgate of tears I seemed to be unable to control while reading. . .

Samantha: i thought it was a particularly beautiful entry—those Japanese have got it right. And the part about her mother crying? Definitely caused some tears. Much love to YOU, Zoot!!

Mary: Oh, my. I just read through each and every story and comment and I am at a loss. I posted my own comment—an apology, of sorts, for being a rotten, impatient ingrate. If I ever complain about either of my kids again I want someone to tell me to just shut the fuck up. I'm so glad she shared the concept of *mizuko*. It's obviously helping a lot of people. I'm sorry for your loss, Zoot.²¹

²¹Miss Zoot (www.misszoot.com), “Thank You GetupGrrl for Giving Me My Mizuko” thread, 8/6-8/04. Miss Zoot alleges to live in Alabama and claims to “Hate/Abhor/Loathe” organized religion. Note that there are numerous grammatical and spelling errors in the online messages in this chapter, but I have elected not to include “[sic]” because it would quickly become too distracting. Also, it is the nature of online communication that shorthand and symbols are frequently employed, such that the offline rules of proper writing are less applicable to email and Web messages.

The people in this latest example are discussing a post at Chez Miscarriage, which describes the concept of *mizuko kuyō*, based on Peggy Orenstein's 2002 *The New York Times* tale of performing one in Tokyo. The author complains "We have no such rituals in our culture. I know of no church or synagogue that invites women to mark the passing of a mizuko. I know of no formal rite, no specific prayer, no community acknowledgement. Unlike in Asia, where Jizō temples offer women a tangible place to take their grief, I know of no public space in this country devoted to the topic of miscarriage or infertility."²² Her description of *mizuko kuyō* and lament over Americans' lack of something similar set off a flurry of activity. Within a week of posting this entry, 150 comments were left in reply. Because they provide such a rich collection of voices that offline are often subaltern, and because the sentiments expressed in this forum are closely representative of those expressed at many other blogs and bulletin boards, extended quotations seem to be justified here. What follows are messages left by many different commentators over the course of a few days; for ease of reading, they have been broken into sections based on when they were posted:

"Today Grrl spoke for all of us. Today she just described totally how we feel. Something that most people who haven't been through something like this dont understand. This is her entry She had me crying and wanting to scream this words to e. . ." "grrl. . . i've never met you, but you speak my heart. it was april 20th. even though i now cradle another child in my arms, my heart is grieved for that one, the possibility i lost before it had even begun. thank you for writing this, for me, for all women, everywhere" "Grrl, thank you for that lovely post. I remember reading that NYT article awhile back and thinking how lovely it was to

²²Chez Miscarriage (chezmiscarriage.blogs.com), "Mizuko" thread, 8/5/04. GetupGrrl is the pseudonym of the proprietor of Chez Miscarriage. "Grrl" is a common alternate spelling of "girl," intended to convey a sense of female power (note how it sounds like a fierce animal growling). Online pseudonyms frequently carry important meaning about how a person sees themselves/wishes to be seen. "GetupGrrl," for instance, suggests a women who has been knocked around by life but refuses to be beaten, as in "Don't just lie there, get up, girl!"

have a word, and some traditions, to surround such a lonely loss.” “I’ve never posted anywhere before but this post hit me hard. I am glad to have this word Mizuko. I have often wished there was a word for me, the woman I am now after these losses.” “I do find comfort in the idea of mizuko, I have never heard of it before, but if I had I would have sought out a temple, without a doubt. Its a comforting thought to think that my children went and found another path. I hope that their new path is wonderful.” “Peggy Orenstein’s article about mizuko was one of the things that helped through the next while. For that one (the others were very early), we had a ceremony with close friends and family. We planted a tree in memory of our son, read prayers and passages from the journal we kept for him. . . As part of the ceremony, we then filled a memory box, saying that in a way, our memory box is like a Jizo statue, in that it contains our material remembrances of our son and our love for him.” “I wish we had Buddhist temple that honored our losses. Imagine it filled with women of all shapes, sizes, nationalities...we would have a name, we would exist.” “If anyone is interested in Buddhist ceremonies for lost children, there are a couple of Zen centers in Northern California who offer them.” “Mizuko...yes...this is what has been missing in my mourning process. I wish all of our losses could be honored so openly.”

“What a gift you have for putting into words what we all feel and what a gift of healing you’ve given me. . . now, I feel I can name this pain and acknowledge my water babies. You’ve given me a sense of peace. I wish them well in the lives they’ll have to come and remember them always in my heart.”

“Thank you, grrl, because your writing’s really what got me through. I love the concept of mizuko. There really does need to be some acknowledgement that yes, these children were here, yes, they were real, and yes, they were loved.” “My pastor often says a prayer for ‘those known only to God.’ I’ve always thought it was about mizuko.” “I have four Mizuko’s, all lost within the last six years. . .”

“I remember the NYTimes article she writes about as if I read it yesterday and it was over 2-years ago. The cultures that formalize the loss of an unborn, whether sadly intentional (it is NEVER an easy choice for a woman) or sadly ‘natural,’ understand the sense of deep loss. I also remember the article because I love to think of our little boy as water and part of a continuum. And yes, thinking about his loss still brings tears to my eyes.”²³

These are only a small portion of the discussions of *mizuko kuyō* I have encountered in online grief forums and blogs by people who have experienced pregnancy loss.

²³Chez Miscarriage (chezmiscarriage.blogs.com), “Mizuko” thread, various contributors, 8/5-13/04. These are only a small sampling of the messages left in this one thread.

What is it about *mizuko kuyō* that appeals to all of these people? There are basically three separate but interconnected demands—all related to ideas of healing—that are being expressed in these discussions of *mizuko kuyō* by non-Buddhist Americans who have experienced pregnancy loss. They are the desire for a voice, the desire for public recognition of their pain, and the desire for a plan of action in the wake of traumatic pregnancy loss. We see these wishes mirrored in many of the offline publications on *mizuko kuyō* as well. For each of these desires *mizuko kuyō* provides a site for expressing criticism of American religion and society, and a potential solution to American inadequacies. Each will now be explored in turn.

Finding a Voice

In the wake of abortion or another pregnancy loss, a major concern for many women seems to be the inability to talk about the experience and their feelings. When a family member or friend dies, people have recourse to funerals, memorial services, and other religious resources that provide a context and language for the loss. But this often does not hold true for losses that occur prior to birth. Recognition of these losses seems not to have been a common part of American religious history, especially in the case of abortion. Because abortion is condemned by many religious groups, women often have nowhere to turn in their hour of need. For instance, the Vatican considers abortion a grievous sin that automatically leads to excommunication (*latae sententiae*) whether or not it is reported to a church official: the acts of receiving or carrying out an abortion

result in immediate supernatural severance of the ties between believer and church.²⁴

Stern doctrines such as this not only deprive women of the ability to ritually work through their pain, but rob them of the possibility of even talking about their situations, effectively enforcing a code of silence around the issue. Miscarriage and stillbirth are not as stigmatized as abortion, yet they too frequently slip into an uncomfortable interstitial realm where the normal rites and concepts surrounding loss seem inadequate or unavailable.

In her feminist study of pregnancy loss in America, Linda Layne highlights the importance attached by American women to regaining the ability to speak as a step in dealing with abortion and miscarriage:

Pregnancy-loss support groups are fundamentally designed to break this silence. Through their meetings they carve out a space in which it is permissible to speak, and with the claim that pregnancy loss is a legitimate source of grief, they define loss as an acceptable topic of conversation outside support-group meetings.

In many respects their efforts in this regard have been successful. Patterning themselves on the myriad of other self-help groups in our society, participants engage in what Goffman (1963) has called “the management of a spoiled identity,” the primary mechanism of which is speech. Most organizations hold regular meetings at which those who have suffered a pregnancy loss meet to share their experiences, to tell their stories.²⁵

Layne locates pregnancy loss support groups—of which the online forums are a special sub-type—within the wider landscape of American self-help groups. As discussed in chapter four, what Eva Moskowitz calls the “therapeutic gospel” provides the major

²⁴Pope John Paul II. *The Gospel of Life*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1995. There are a number of loopholes—for example, the woman must have been aware that abortion is wrong and cannot have been coerced into it.

²⁵Layne 2003: 74-75.

philosophical grounding for these groups.²⁶ The Buddhist women in that chapter tightly associate therapy and religion in their production of Americanized water baby ceremonies—as we will see below, the non-Buddhist women under discussion here likewise combine the two into an often seamless whole.

Sukie Miller, in her post-child loss manual, articulates the feelings of many women on this issue:

The fact that there is no name for the one who has lost a child is of enormous consequence: the nameless live in a kind of limbo. They still exist, but in a new stratosphere where their namelessness effectively isolates them from the rest of the world.

When we don't name things, they remain out of reach. I have never known a parent or anyone else who has lost a child not to describe a period of feeling out of touch, beyond the reach of anyone else's comfort or understanding. And it's true. You can't engage on any deep level with someone whose name you don't know. You can't effectively ask for something that you can't name: "Bring me that—no that—no *that!*" is unbearably inefficient. . . . Those things about which we cannot speak or will not speak do not simply disappear because we don't discuss them. In fact, they gain some of their power over us *because* we don't have language to vent them. They remain crouching in the shadows of our lives, unpredictable, a locus of rage, of despair, of fear, looking for an opportunity to be heard.²⁷

Here the unarticulated feelings that arise in the wake of a young child's loss (Miller explicitly connects these to pregnancy losses as well) become transformed into a kind of menacing spirit nearly identical to the threatening *mizuko* described in the introduction. Language then becomes the key to rendering these fluid and ungraspable lost children tangible:

Language is in every way an antidote to our fears and anxieties and general paralysis on the subject of death and dying. Language allows us to describe what

²⁶Eva Moskowitz. *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

²⁷Sukie Miller, with Doris Ober. *Finding Hope When a Child Dies: What Other Cultures Can Teach Us*. New York: Fireside, 2002: 19-21.

happens, what is going through our minds, what we feel and have felt. . . With language what was amorphous takes shape. Whatever the subject, language brings it to life, and this is true even when the subject is death. . . With language not only can we name what we couldn't name before, but we may also be able to see what we couldn't see before. With language whole worlds open up to us. In some places that access may extend to the world where our deceased children reside.²⁸

The central thesis of Miller's manual is that Western societies lack sufficient terms and rituals to deal with child and pregnancy losses, and therefore we must turn to non-Western cultures to buttress our own. The case of the unborn receives particular attention in her book:

If the death of a child we love is a subject about which we do not speak because of insufficient language, we have even fewer words with which to talk about the death of the unborn. What was it that we carried and lost? We're shy about calling it a baby until it is born, and for many people the word *fetus* sticks in the throat. . . We don't describe the emotional aspects because without language, we can't express them—besides, our culture rarely acknowledges that there are any emotional aspects to miscarriage. . . Among all the cultures I have researched on this subject, Japan seems to have the most developed language, in our broad sense of the word, for the phenomenon of death before life.²⁹

Miller then embarks on several pages of extensive description of *mizuko kuyō* and Jizō's place in Japanese religion. For her, the word *mizuko* provides that missing language. Learning about Jizō and *mizuko* allows a grieving mother to face up to her loss and re-establish a connection with the child who never came to term. It allows her to acknowledge the value of that lost baby and imagine the child moving on to the next step in its journey. All of this could allegedly result in healing—a healing that, Miller claims, Western society currently doesn't provide a means for.

²⁸Miller 2002: 24.

²⁹Miller 2002: 100; 105. Emphasis in original.

Does merely having a vocabulary to discuss issues in provide actual healing? The answer to that question lies outside the scope of this study. Nor do I feel qualified by my training in religious studies to pontificate about a subject on which even psychiatrists and clinical psychologists do not have a consensus. But there is certainly evidence that some non-Buddhist Americans claim a strong benefit simply from having been exposed to the idea of mizuko. Look again at some of the online quotes provided in the previous section: “Grrl, thank you for that lovely post. I remember reading that NYT article awhile back and thinking how lovely it was to have a word, and some traditions, to surround such a lonely loss.” “I’ve never posted anywhere before but this post hit me hard. I am glad to have this word Mizuko. I have often wished there was a word for me, the woman I am now after these losses.” “What a gift you have for putting into words what we all feel and what a gift of healing you’ve given me. . . now, I feel I can name this pain and acknowledge my water babies. You’ve given me a sense of peace. I wish them well in the lives they’ll have to come and remember them always in my heart.”

The linguistic theories of anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf provide one possible lens through which to view this phenomenon. Sapir-Whorf linguistics points out the tight relationship between thought, language, and culture. Two aspects of their work are particularly relevant: linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity. Linguistic determinism suggests that language shapes thought; some proponents go so far as to say that without access to a word for a phenomenon, that phenomenon literally cannot be thought about. Linguistic relativity suggests that language shapes worldview; for some, this means that different cultures inhabit different worlds because of the separate language-related ways in which they map their

environments.³⁰ Without necessarily subscribing to the strongest versions of these theories, we can see how they shed light on the dilemma of American women who wish to mourn their aborted or miscarried fetuses. Lacking an adequate English term for fetuses/babies that never come to full term, they have difficulty communicating their feelings about their losses. The average reader about *mizuko kuyō* in a post-pregnancy loss manual or online forum probably will not go on to perform a *mizuko kuyō* ceremony. But if comments like those above are an accurate indication, Jizō's healing work is allegedly accomplished on some level when women merely learn about the idea of *mizuko*. This Buddhist practice seems to give them a lexicon and a concept with which to think about what has happened to them. Their religious imagination is expanded and the possibilities of what religion might do to help them or others increase. As scholar of American religion Colleen McDannell has noted:

Religious practice, however, is more than merely lived. Religious practice is also imagined. In dreams, visions, and fictional accounts, people participate in worlds that are not a part of everyday life. These special worlds can eventually become as real as everyday life, or they can remain speculative fantasies. Just as through rituals people learn and construct religious worldviews, so they build religious environments through vision and imagination.³¹

Sharing information about *mizuko kuyō* becomes a site where non-Buddhist women can form supportive networks, whether for a moment or lasting friendships that sometimes

³⁰For an overview of Sapir and Whorf's ideas, see Jourdan et. al, *Language, Culture, and Society: Key Topics in Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

³¹Colleen McDannell. *Religions of the United States in Practice, Volume 2*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001: 3.

continue for years and extend into the offline world.³² Reading about *mizuko kuyō*, printed and online evidence suggests, provokes grief, tears, and catharsis. The ritual performance itself is almost secondary—it is the existence of such a ritual which gives many of these women the strength to carry on.

Using the term coined in the previous chapter, we can see how Miller and other Americans who share her viewpoint may be categorized as “Buddhist appropriators.” Few if any of these women will become Buddhists through their interaction with *mizuko kuyō* concepts. It may be possible to read them as Buddhist *sympathizers* of a sort according to Thomas Tweed’s definition. But I would contend that the category is stretched too far by the people examined in this chapter. Sympathizers do not explicitly identify as Buddhists, but they do have a sustained engagement with some aspect of the religion, such as a regular meditation practice, frequent reading of Buddhist books or magazines, or ongoing participation in online Buddhist forums. Meanwhile, the women and men we are examining here are not only explicitly non-Buddhist, but their interactions with Buddhism are temporary and strategic. Buddhism appears at just the right moment to help them deal with a traumatic or vexing issue, either through actual participation in a water baby ceremony or simply through learning about and reflecting on *mizuko kuyō*. After the issue is resolved, Buddhism is left behind again, perhaps with

³²As one woman who learned about *mizuko kuyō* online and then performed the ceremony during a visit to Japan declared: “the community we have online is my lifeline. and it is a hundred times more helpful to me than the support group we tried or even my therapist. what would we do without the internet?” lauralu, *Life is Sweet, Baby* (lifeisweetbaby.blogspot.com), 10/2/05. This woman at first intended to do her own home *mizuko kuyō* based on Jan Bays’ book, and invited her online friends to attend in person, but then cancelled the ritual when it became clear she and her partner would be going to Japan.

fond memories but rarely with any lasting attachments. In other words, Buddhism is momentarily appropriated, used for a specific end, and then abandoned once more.³³

Even these fleeting encounters and brief appropriations can leave indelible marks, however. While the religion as a whole is left behind, words and concepts may be permanently added to the religious consciousness of non-Buddhists by these appropriations. Beyond the relief expressed in the quotes above, note too the way some women now forthrightly declare that they are the mothers of *mizuko*, not simply babies, children, or fetuses: “I have four Mizuko’s, all lost within the last six years. . .”

If a Woman Talks About Mizuko Kuyō and No One is Around, Does Healing Happen?

A closely related, but not identical, desire expressed by many of the non-Buddhists who discuss *mizuko kuyō* is for recognition of their grief and loss. Gaining a language for speaking about pregnancy loss allows people to give shape to their thoughts and voice to their feelings, and sometimes that is enough. But for many a second step is apparently required: someone else must hear their voices. There is a need or desire for public acceptance of their grief and loss. Without it, a feeling persists that their pain and suffering are not valued by society, and that they have no right to mourn or feel depressed. There is friction between how others see them and how they are actually feeling. If they feel shame around the loss, such as many women feel in the wake of abortion, there is a desire for recognition of their shame, regret, and pain. If they feel

³³While *mizuko kuyō* is the thread we are tracing in this study, there are many other words, concepts, rituals, practices, artifacts, doctrines, and other elements of Buddhism that are or may be appropriated in all manner of situations. Just as an example, here is an appropriation of the notion of bodhisattvas from a post-miscarriage manual: “Marie gave me a note about a Buddhist belief in ‘bodhisattvas’—souls that manifest for someone else’s life and lessons rather than for their own spiritual growth. That made me feel so good. It helped explain the loving gift I have received from Jamie’s life.” See Marie Allen and Shelly Marks, *Miscarriage: Women Sharing from the Heart*, 1993: 30.

robbed of their anticipated status as mothers, as many women do when miscarriage or stillbirth occurs, there is a need to be seen as having been pregnant, as being a mother-of-sorts. Indeed, these two trends are hardly confined to one or the other type of loss: in these accounts many women who have had to make the difficult choice of abortion desire to retain some status as mothers, and women who have experienced miscarriage may feel great shame.

The lack of language compounds this problem but doesn't wholly encompass it.

As described in a popular textbook on human development:

The Japanese word *mizuko* means "water child." Japanese Buddhists believe that life flows into an organism gradually, like water, and a *mizuko* is somewhere on the continuum of life and death (Orenstein, 2002). In English, by contrast, there is not a word for a miscarried or aborted fetus, nor any ritual of mourning. Families, friends, and health professionals tend to avoid talking about such losses, because they are considered insignificant compared to the loss of a child (Van, 2001).³⁴

For the women involved, however, the loss may feel very significant indeed. Cries for acknowledgement of these losses echo through the manuals, books, and forums that discuss pregnancy loss. After discussing *mizuko kuyō* as a comforting approach on pregnancy and loss that regrettably has no American analog, one woman went on to say:

*Perhaps writing about my miscarriage is a way for me to demand recognition from others because it means my suffering is real. When we suffer and grieve, we need to talk about it because we must reclaim what has happened to us. It is important to remember the details: the happiness I felt when the pregnancy test came back positive, the absolute despair I felt two months later, and the anguish I will always feel. I must make my experiences real because, ultimately, I must learn how to live with it. I will never forget the child I lost, and I no longer want to. I simply need to find a way to live with loss. Having the space to speak freely about it is the first step.*³⁵

³⁴Diane E. Papalia, Sally Wendkos Olds, and Ruth Duskin Feldman. *Human Development (Ninth Edition)*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004: 698.

³⁵Monica, *Deviant Woman* (monica.typepad.com), 1/22/04. Emphasis added.

Exactly who these women wish would acknowledge their situation varies considerably, and is often vague. Some specifically want their boyfriend's or husband's attention; others want attention from additional family members (especially parents); some want recognition from "society"; many indicate they desire some sort of religious acknowledgement, usually phrased as recognition from their minister or church; but most often there is no specific object from which they seek recognition. They simply want *someone* to hear their story and acknowledge the legitimacy of their grief. Online forums often seem to work well in this regard: invariably, posts that call for recognition receive numerous comments from readers offering support and encouragement.

So, step one in the process is appropriating Japanese Buddhist concepts to produce an adequate vocabulary around pregnancy loss, while step two is then actually speaking in a public (online or off) space about one's own experiences and how *mizuko kuyō* relates to one's feelings. Speaking out in this way attracts sympathetic responders who provide some level of recognition, and in doing so, often leave their own stories in search of their own recognition and healing. *Mizuko*, *Jizō*, and Japanese rituals for the unborn are particularly compelling topics in these discussions and seem to elicit more replies than many discussions that do not reference these Buddhist concepts. And these testimonials often describe how, after initially receiving the recognition they sought online, women frequently felt emboldened to raise the topic with family, friends, and others offline.³⁶

³⁶This process need not be conducted online: women I have spoken to have learned about *mizuko kuyō* through books or friends and then gone on to use this language to speak about their pain to others in real life, never involving the internet. The Internet simply provides a particularly clear example to examine.

Seeking a Ritual

A major theme that appears again and again in discussions of pain around abortion and other pregnancy losses is the lack of rituals in American society. When a pregnancy loss of any type occurs, it seems that a large number of Americans feel culturally unprepared and bereft of indigenous religious resources to help them deal with their pain. Pregnancy loss precipitates a tremendous feeling of powerlessness (among other negative emotions) and the American response seems to be an overwhelming desire to regain power by some sort of activity, along with a frustration that there seems to be nothing available to do. It is here that rituals like *mizuko kuyō* appear to offer a society with little history of ritualization of pregnancy loss a way to actively deal with grief.³⁷

This attitude is expressed clearly in Sukie Miller's post-child and pregnancy loss manual *Finding Hope When a Child Dies: What Other Cultures Can Teach Us*:

What defines ritual and distinguishes it from other big life events is that ritual can remove us for a little while from the everyday world to the world of the spirit, from the mundane world to the sacred one.

For many people in many places in the world, ritual is actually *part* of the everyday world. Throughout Japan, Jizo figures representing the ritual for the unborn are visible in private homes and public places. People in Bali eat and breathe ritual, rising early to set out offerings of food and flowers for their gods. Islam's day is built around ritual prayer.

In the West we treat rituals differently. . . We may enjoy our rituals, but they don't necessarily connect us with the world where the spirit lives.

But in places where ritual is natural to the people, where it is steeped in the tradition of the people, where its power to move us from the mundane world to the world of the spirit is well understood, it has great healing properties. And for families who have lost a child, rituals to help that child on her journey to the

³⁷Instances of ritualization of pregnancy loss do appear in American history if one is diligent in searching for them. An example would be the baptism of stillborn and miscarried babies by Catholic hospitals, a once uncommon practice that seems to be on the rise. Nonetheless, this does seem to be an area of relative oversight or non-concern, historically speaking, especially on the institutional level. One could point out that Japan too lacks a long history of such rituals, since *mizuko kuyō* as a formal and publicly-acknowledged rite appears to date to the mid-twentieth century. The important point in this chapter is not whether or not pregnancy loss rituals are wholly absent from American religious history, but the extremely widespread perception of such a lack on the part of women from all backgrounds: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Neo-pagan, agnostic, and so on.

next world and, later, rituals to keep her happy in that world are the answer to “What can I do to help my child?” . . . How fortunate are those cultures that incorporate such helping rituals as the Yoruba have for their twins, the Japanese have for their unborn, and the Hindus have for their children who die violently. . . these rituals contain a certain wisdom that bears thinking about, and perhaps there is a way for us to translate them for our own lives—maybe through our churches and temples and communities and traditions that are authentic to us.³⁸

As Miller sees it, rituals like *mizuko kuyō* offer their participants a way to *do something* for the deceased child or fetus, and in gaining that ability to take action, performing such rituals empowers those who feel powerless in the face of loss.

Ritual theorist Ronald Grimes discusses *mizuko kuyō* in his book *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*. While noting Kim Kluger-Bell’s participation in an American Zen water baby ceremony (cited earlier in the previous chapter), he suspects that “Jizo is probably too removed from the experiences of North American women for statues of him to be effective.”³⁹ Perhaps; perhaps not. It may be that Jizō will indeed prove too foreign a figure for many American women seeking a focus for pregnancy loss grief. But so far the indications are that Jizō and *mizuko kuyō* have tremendous appeal to many non-Buddhist Americans, if for no other reason than that Jizō has few if any competitors for the attention of grieving post-abortion/miscarriage women. As the Jizō movement described in chapter three continues to expand and promote veneration of the bodhisattva in America, Jizō has the potential to become a crossover figure, perhaps as an ecumenical figure worshipped across religious boundaries, or perhaps assimilated to

³⁸Miller 2002: 111-112, 117-118. Emphasis in original.

³⁹Ronald L. Grimes. *Deeply Into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002: 315.

another figure (such as St. Jude) in a syncretistic mode similar to Vodou or Santería.⁴⁰

Such speculations may not be too farfetched; such a phenomenon can arise naturally when figures and symbols from one religious system are used to explain those of another, as in this passage from a participant in a forum on grieving lost children:

I found that in the Buddhist faith, they have a bodhisattva called Jizo and there are large Jizo gardens throughout Japan and other parts of the world—a couple of them in the US—where bereaved families are welcome anytime. *Jizo is a little like Saint Christopher in Western Systems.* Jizō is a protector and guardian of bereaved parents, pregnant women, children, travelers. Jizo is called upon in everyday life, acknowledging that any transition can be exciting, but also dangerous, and may call forth grief. The Jizo Garden at the Jizo-in Zen Monastery in Clatskanie, Oregon, is full of Jizo statues that have been clothed or decorated by bereaved people, including notes, toys, memorials to children who have died.⁴¹

The beginnings of such transreligious appreciation of Kwan Yin bodhisattva are already apparent due to the related Kwan Yin movement, and such appropriations of the Buddhist “goddess of mercy” may pave the way for additional Buddhist figures such as Jizō.

There is considerable evidence that after encountering *mizuko kuyō*, either directly or through the descriptions of others, non-Buddhist American women are actually performing their own pregnancy loss rituals.⁴² As discussed above, American Jew Peggy Orenstein’s 2002 *The New York Times* article “Mourning My Miscarriage,” describing

⁴⁰For information on how Caribbean religious such as Vodou have assimilated African, American Indian, and Catholic deities (and, now, Asian Indian ones too), see Karen McCarthy Brown’s *Mama Lola*.

⁴¹Kara Jones. “In Honor and Loving Memory of Our Children,” *Kota Discussion Group*. Emphasis added. The Zen temple mentioned here is more commonly known as Great Vow Monastery, as discussed in chapters three and four.

⁴²This work focuses on Americans’ involvement with *mizuko kuyō*, but it is worth noting in passing that some Christians in Japan have already been participating in the ritual when they could not or would not find solace in their own traditions. See Richard Fox Young, “Abortion, Grief and Consolation: Prolegomena to a Christian Response to *Mizuko Kuyō*,” *Japan Christian Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 1 (Winter 1989), Miura Domyo, *The Forgotten Child*, 1983, and Michael Molloy, “The Healing of Mizuko Jizō,” *Columban Mission Magazine*. (May 2005) for examples. In some cases Christian clergy have actually sent grieving Christians in Japan to Buddhist temples in order to have their abortions memorialized.

her performance of a *mizuko kuyō* at a Tokyo temple, was widely discussed and is approvingly cited by dozens of articles and websites dealing with pregnancy loss. The article even appears as a resource for women in the companion website for the latest edition of the classic feminist workbook *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. This seems to be part of a trend, in fact: for instance, the blog Flying Standby chronicles the travels of a young Midwestern couple who flew to Tokyo in 2006, in part specifically so they could perform a *mizuko kuyō* for their miscarried child.⁴³ This followed in the wake of their attempt to find a Zen temple in Cleveland to perform a water baby ceremony; neither of them are Buddhist (figure 6.1).

Flying to Japan to perform *mizuko kuyō* is a dramatic act and likely a rare one. Much more common are private ceremonies carried out at home by non-Buddhists after encountering the concept of *mizuko kuyō* through one of the channels described in chapter five. Many pregnancy loss bulletin board contain messages from women who announce their intention to, or their previous participation in, *mizuko kuyō*-derived rituals:

Sunnmama: I lost a pregnancy in November—14 wks pg but the babe was only about 6 wks. A week ago, I came across the remembrance/ritual for me in a book. It is part of the Japanese Buddhist tradition for any being lost prior to birth (thru miscarriage or stillbirth or termination). The family buys a small statue called a Mizuko Jizo, and then the parents hand stitch a small garment for the statue from red fabric: a hat, or a bib, or (my choice) a cape. The parents can spend time adding as much detail to the garment as they please. Traditionally, this would go on an altar in a temple, but we are not actually Buddhist so will simply be paying homage this tradition in our own home and our own way. Since dh is a potter/sculptor, he is going to make the statue for us [smiley face icon with hearts]. Then I will handstitch the garment. Making this small tribute to our lost baby with our own hands will be healing for us, I believe. Anyway, I wanted to add this ritual as it has been helpful for us. Maybe it will help someone else, as well. Hugs to all those mourning losses [smiley face icon hugging another smiley face]. . .

⁴³The web address for Flying Standby is flyingstandby.blogspot.com.

BCmamaof5: Oh! I LOVE that idea. That is so beautiful. I think I'll ask a potter friend of mine to make something like that. Thank you for sharing.⁴⁴

Post-abortion and other pregnancy loss support specialists are now emerging both on a professional level and as informal healers ministering to communities of women. Many of these specialists tell their clients to perform *mizuko kuyō*, or they offer it themselves as independent ritualists.⁴⁵ In other cases, post-pregnancy loss rituals are merely one part of a larger, eclectic range of services provided by unaffiliated ritual specialists. For example, Santa Monica-based “bodywork” practitioner Sarah Harper sets up various altars on her retreats. One is a Jizō altar for children who have died at any stage, including prebirth.⁴⁶ There seems to be an echo of the independent spiritualists described by Helen Hardacre, who promote and perform *mizuko kuyō* in Japan outside of a traditional Buddhist framework. Perhaps it is not going too far to suggest that therapists and “healers” (many of whom display a clear debt to psychology and the “therapeutic gospel”) in America occupy a niche served by spiritualists and similar ritualists in Japan. This is in addition to the participation of non-Buddhist women in water baby ceremonies at various American Zen temples already discussed in chapter four. Also, it seems that some of the other post-pregnancy loss rituals that have emerged in the last twenty-five years that do not draw on Buddhism explicitly have in some way been stimulated by

⁴⁴Mothering.com Pregnancy and Birth Loss Forum. “Ritual/Remembrance for miscarriage” thread, 12/27-28/05. Sunnmama describes herself as an American former evangelical Christian, now a Unitarian Universalist; BCmamaof5 is apparently a Canadian.

⁴⁵See for instance Terra Wise. “Midwife for the Soul: Unbiased Post-Abortion Healing Support.” *Vision Magazine* (June 2004); and Dayna Macy. “Unspeakable Losses.” *Salon*. (4/15/98).

⁴⁶Diane Renison [pseudonym]. Personal interview with former Rochester Zen Center member. 2 November 2005, Starry Nite Café, Rochester, NY. Harper’s body-oriented spiritual healing is called “somatics.” Practices of this type fall somewhere within the broad range of New Age and Human Potential movements, and can be considered alternative healing practices. “Renison,” a former member of Rochester Zen Center now living in California, has practiced somatics with Harper.

mizuko kuyō. For example, Charismatic Catholic Jesuit priests Matthew and Dennis Linn have written extensively about their healing ministry that includes prayer and laying on of hands for post-abortion women (and visualized healing of the aborted fetuses). They cite *mizuko kuyō* practices in their book *Healing the Greatest Hurt*, seeming to indicate that the Japanese practice has influenced or possibly even stimulated their own.

To summarize, through the evidence presented in this and previous chapters, we know that unknown numbers of *non-Buddhist* Americans are now participating in *mizuko kuyō*. Some are participating in water baby ceremonies at convert Zen centers in the United States. Others are participating in *mizuko kuyō* at temples in Japan. Some are participating through the aegis of a therapist, or in some cases a non-denominational “healer.”⁴⁷ And many are performing their own private *mizuko kuyō* rites at home, either alone or with small groups of close associates such as spouses, parents, and friends. Furthermore, there is evidence that participation in *mizuko kuyō* rituals by non-Buddhist Americans goes back at least to the 1970s, and seems to have increased considerably over time, especially from the mid-1990s onward. This increase seems tied to changes within American Zen Buddhism I described in chapters three and four (especially the expanding availability of the ritual at more sites), greater circulation of information on *mizuko kuyō* due to key publications—both academic and non-academic—in the 1990s, and the emergence of post-pregnancy loss grief as a significant object of psychotherapeutic attention in the 1990s. Finally, with more American Zen priests intending to offer water baby rituals at their temples, growing interest in the ritual by independent ritualists, and the expanding number of Internet-enabled households, self-publishing programs (such as

⁴⁷While not formally affiliated, many of these healers could be loosely identified as Neo-pagans or New Age practitioners.

blogs), and pregnancy/pregnancy-loss dedicated websites, it seems reasonable to predict that *mizuko kuyō* will become a topic of even wider discussion and greater participation by non-Buddhist Americans in the future. This increase in the visibility of the issue of religious ritualization of pregnancy loss may stimulate the creation of new pregnancy loss rituals in non-Buddhist religions and greater promotion of those that already exist.

Despite this growing participation in American *mizuko kuyō*, there is often considerable ambiguity in the sources about how exactly the ritual provides healing. This ambiguity appears to arise in some cases because the writer has not thoroughly thought through the logic of healing and ritual. The relationship between religion, ritual, and healing is likewise often obscure in these sources. Sometimes religion seems simply to be a default arena within which ritual occurs—ritual is needed, the writer perceives ritual as usually taking place in religious settings, so religion is needed. There is perhaps a sort of spiritual pragmatism here, something a little different from ideological pluralism. Like Eisenhower's famous declaration that our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and he didn't care what that faith was, many Americans seem to be seeking pregnancy loss rituals and will take them wherever they find them. Since Buddhism offers such rituals they are easily picked up for discussion and possible participation. That these rituals originate in Buddhism seems to be of no real consequence: if Hinduism, say, or Judaism offered such resources, they might well be appropriated at approximately the same rate.

Alternately, we may ask what it is about Buddhism that makes it seem available for appropriation by non-Buddhists. While a certain number of people would certainly appropriate rituals from any source, others might be slower to take rituals from religions

that seem too inaccessible, extreme, or otherwise negative in some way. There is a sense in these sources that Buddhism as a religious tradition is open to outsiders and can be partially or selectively participated in without full adherence or conversion. Many commentators explicitly frame Buddhism in terms of open-armed compassion rather than boundary-drawing dogma, and as driven by ritual and practice rather than doctrine or rule. Appropriators present *mizuko kuyō* divorced from a wider Buddhist worldview of no-God, no-self, endless past lives driven by karma, the four noble truths and eightfold path, and so on. The role of the priest as the usual ritual actor—so clearly demonstrated by our survey of Japanese-American temples in chapter two—is omitted, such that lay non-Buddhists can perform *mizuko kuyō*, and fetal spirit attacks are rarely mentioned as a concept, let alone an actual possibility. All of this renders *mizuko kuyō* more accessible to a new audience. While stressing that it is Japan that acts as a model for America, many appropriators simultaneously depict Buddhism as a universal system that is not linked to any one ethnicity or country. Thus, while post-pregnancy loss rituals or beliefs in other cultures are sometimes noted alongside *mizuko kuyō*, it is the Buddhist ritual that is then most frequently recommended as a template for Americans to emulate themselves. We may also note that Buddhism appears to enjoy a positive reputation among non-Buddhist Americans. As Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge report, fifty-five percent of the American populace has had some form of contact with Buddhists, and eighty-two percent of those who have been exposed to Buddhists rated these experiences as positive.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Robert Wuthnow and Wendy Cadge. “Buddhists and Buddhism in the United States: The Scope of Influence.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* vol. 43, no. 3 (Sept. 2004): 369-371.

Considering further the nature of the alleged healing in the performance of these rituals, we may ask who is being healed: the mother or the child? Nearly all the sources I have encountered, both pro-life and pro-choice, which advocate *mizuko kuyō*-type rituals are clear that the ritual is to be performed for the benefit of the mother.⁴⁹ It is she who is in pain and needs healing, a healing that is apparently accomplished by surfacing suppressed or silenced emotional trauma and releasing it through the mechanism of ritual action. This conceptualization closely mirrors that of psychotherapy, wherein unconscious or suppressed feeling and compulsions are brought to light and worked out, through dialogue with the therapist or other means. The possible feelings or plight of the aborted or miscarried fetus are rarely mentioned as justifications for the ritual. They do sometimes surface, however in the accounts of women who have actually performed private *mizuko kuyō*. While all such accounts include personal healing of the mother as a primary motivation, some also express the desire to conduct the ritual as a way to do something for the child. Most often, this is framed as acknowledgment: by apologizing or publicly declaring that the lost child is/was real, some post-pregnancy loss mothers appear to believe they benefit the fetus. The metaphysics of such benefits are rarely explicit, and the impression is strong that the women themselves do not hold systematic theological opinions about what is happening in the ritual. It does seem, though, that the Japanese idea of actually transferring merit to the *mizuko* or calling on Jizō for direct intervention—such that the *mizuko* is sprung from suffering imprisonment and sent on to

⁴⁹Less often, especially in the case of abortion, the father's potential grief is considered as well.

a better place—is usually absent. Rather, the benefits conferred are vague, such as “honoring” the lost one, “saying goodbye,” and so on.⁵⁰

Conclusion

In his discussion of “tactics”—practices that run against the grain of dominant modes in a society—French social theorist Michel de Certeau noted that “other regions give us back what our culture has excluded from its discourse.”⁵¹ There is an ironic form of Orientalism taking place in these therapeutic appropriations of *mizuko kuyō*. Classical Orientalism identified the “mystic East” with superstition, sensualism, and degraded practices such as idol worship.⁵² This construction allowed the West to seem rational, refined, organized, and a bastion of pure religion; and, not incidentally, helped justify the military and economic exploitation of Asia. But with the appropriation of *mizuko kuyō*, a second kind of Orientalism provides America with precisely what it is believed to be missing: compassionate spirituality, nonjudgmental savior figures, and ceremonial practices for an angry, divided, bereaved society lacking in healing ritual. The supposed weaknesses of a foreign region in the previous era are now its strengths, at least in the imaginations of some Americans convinced that their country (and often themselves) are in need of help. The process comes full circle as the earlier characterization of Asian cultures as “feminine”—originally a negative value judgment—becomes a positive

⁵⁰This is not meant to diminish the actual strong emotions expressed in these rituals and subsequent accounts.

⁵¹Michel de Certeau. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984: 50.

⁵²The classic and still most influential text on this subject is Edward Said. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

valuation that provides Western women with gender-related rituals their own allegedly lopsided masculine culture can't offer.

In the conclusion to the previous chapter, we examined William LaFleur's contention that Americans might learn a more pragmatic approach to abortion issues from the Japanese. As we saw, knowledge of *mizuko kuyō* appears to have little ability to sway hardened partisans of the abortion cultural war. Rather, they typically appropriate the ritual in ways that reflect positively on their own side and negatively on their opponents. Nevertheless, as we have seen in this chapter, there are some who wish to use *mizuko kuyō* as a balm rather than a weapon. The key is whether the appropriator is focused on abortion *per se* or on the effects of the battle over abortion. Neither side budes on abortion—it remains a fundamental right or a horrible tragedy—but both pro-life and pro-choice advocates desire a less fractured society and political process. Some, therefore, look to ritual actions as an arena that offers a different way to approach the subject, one that could potentially include participants from both sides. These range from “Christianized *mizuko kuyō*” to simple funerals for the unborn, but all share a common stimulus in exposure to the practice of *mizuko kuyō*.

We should be clear on what is not being adopted by these Buddhist appropriators: a Buddhist worldview. Few American cultural warriors seem willing to accept the Japanese Buddhist understanding of the unborn as life-in-development, neither fully a person nor simply inanimate (or, alternately, just part of the mother's own tissue). While multiple commentators discuss the Buddhist understanding of life flowing progressively into the fetus and the idea that a *mizuko* can be returned to the world of the spirits to be retrieved later, few seem to seriously re-orient themselves around this possible

conceptualization of pregnancy. For pro-life Christians the aborted or miscarried fetus remains a person from the moment of conception, and intentional or other terminations of the pregnancy typically send the soul of the fetus to heaven to be with God. For pro-choice Christians, Jews, and others there is often some ambiguity about when precisely the fetus becomes a person or acquires a soul, but it is still typically thought of as occurring around a particular point of time, rather than in gradual stages. Those who most approximate the Japanese idea of progressive in utero development toward personhood are pro-choice advocates who take a purely secular or scientific approach—for these commentators the issue is frequently framed in terms of the development of the nervous system and degrees of consciousness. But these are still far from the Buddhist views: the idea of return to a nebulous state of pre-life and subsequent rebirth is rarely espoused.

There are only two sub-sets of Buddhist appropriators wherein some significant adoption of Japanese Buddhist views on pregnancy occurs. The minority of women who are basically unchurched but open to religious ideas occasionally do seem to appropriate not only the ritual but the contextual worldview of reincarnation as well. Lacking a strong commitment to a particular religious tradition, they appear in some cases willing to consider Buddhist views that offer comfort in the wake of pregnancy loss. Another sub-set are people who are involved in New Age or similar alternative religions or spiritual paths. New Age, Neo-paganism, and related movements are typically sympathetic to views and practices from a wide range of traditions, and Buddhism features heavily in some of these communities. Since many of these people are already involved in some

aspect of Buddhism, such as meditation, they might best be categorized as Buddhist sympathizers rather than merely non-Buddhists.

So part of LaFleur's vision has—sporadically, in some places—begun to come true: non-Buddhist Americans are appropriating Japanese Buddhist rituals and adapting them to their own uses, and some persons concerned about the casualties of the culture war are exploring whether *mizuko kuyō* could offer a solution. At the same time, another part of that vision is nearly unrealized and seems to show little potential for appropriation: non-Buddhist Americans overall show little interest in adopting the concurrent worldview of life as a developing continuum and as capable of being terminated and re-started with a later pregnancy. This raises the question of what it is that actually leads to the lack of polarization in Japanese society over abortion: is it because they have rituals of mourning and propitiation for their *mizuko*, or because they hold widely-shared views that do not put women and fetuses on equal footing and that frame pregnancy loss as only a temporary obstacle on the road to new life? If the answer is the latter, then *mizuko kuyō* may ultimately prove to be an ineffective treatment for the affliction of abortion-related social malaise.⁵³

There is one other aspect of LaFleur's study to be dealt with. In his concluding remarks, LaFleur suggests that Americans might do well to “explore the possibility that rituals such as those for *mizuko* may have a positive therapeutic function.”⁵⁴ As we have seen, many Americans have begun to undertake precisely this exploration. And many

⁵³Such a pessimistic assessment would assume that Americans will not become more open to fetus-as-life-in-process and reincarnation beliefs in the future. Naturally, it is possible that Americans could become more amenable to such beliefs, perhaps because of changes in American Christianity, greater popularity of Buddhist ideas, or other unforeseen factors. It is not possible at this point to make clear predictions in this regard.

⁵⁴LaFleur 1992: 217. The term *mizuko* is unitalicized in the original.

non-Buddhist women indeed express clear beliefs that participation in *mizuko*-type rituals, or even just exposure to the terminology and idea of such rituals, is healing in some fashion. Given the enthusiasm about *mizuko kuyō* by women who are dealing with pregnancy losses, this form of Buddhist appropriation might continue and expand.

In fact, with the emergence of non-Buddhist participation at American Zen water baby ceremonies and the performance of private *mizuko kuyō* by some women, we could potentially be seeing the restructuring of one strand of American religion along lines similar to Japan. In Japan, Shinto rituals structure many life cycle rituals, but Buddhism is frequented resorted to as the specialist religion for death. This is because Shinto often sees death as polluted and prefers to avoid anything associated with death or dead bodies. In the American situation, large numbers of non-Buddhists cannot or choose not to seek ritual recognition of pregnancy loss in their natal traditions. One outcome could be the emergence of Buddhist rituals—both at temples and in homes—as the commonplace resort for otherwise non-Buddhist women in the wake of pregnancy loss. This ritual compartmentalization would be a new configuration of America's growing religious diversity. Currently, this diversity has created many largely separate communities or subcultures that provide religious services for their own members. But Buddhists may develop an alternative configuration, where some religious groups market services for clients who belong to outside groups that fail to provide such services. There is an old saying that in Japan one is born Shinto, raised Confucian, and dies Buddhist. Perhaps the future of American religion for some will naturally evolve so that one is born Christian and dies Christian, but in the case of pregnancy loss, one mourns as a Buddhist.

POSTSCRIPT: “WHERE IS BUDDHISM?”

In fourteenth century Japan, famed monk Gennō Shinshō helped domesticate the recently arrived school of Zen by exorcising troublesome local spirits. One legend describes the “killing stone” of Mount Nasu, a rock inhabited by an extremely powerful and malevolent ghost who originally arrived from across the ocean. No one could come close to the rock without receiving harm; to touch or even just to glance at the stone could lead to death. But Gennō refused to look away, and he pacified the entity with a Buddhist ritual, eliminating the spirit’s frightening aspects. He carved the shapeless rock into a statue of Jizō, which became an object of widespread worship as a protector.¹

As we have learned, in twenty-first century America, some priests—especially women—are domesticating Zen through engagement with the powerful forces swirling around abortion and other pregnancy losses, forces they see as threatening women’s health and happiness. In the process they are removing the threatening nature of Japanese *mizuko* ideas and offering rituals in an often religiously taboo area. By reshaping the menacing weight of American abortion issues to reveal the nurturing presence of Jizō hidden within the pain, these Zen priests are attempting to transform shame and loss into hope and healing. At the same time, non-Buddhist interpreters are carving the rock of *mizuko kuyō* to reveal very different faces of the ritual, from a rite that

¹ Bernard Faure. *Visions of Power: Imagining Medieval Japanese Buddhism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996: 71.

shows the universality of post-abortion pain to the utter provinciality of various religious ideas about life and death.

We now come to the end of the twisting journey on which Jizō bodhisattva has guided us from Japan to Asian communities in the New World, on into white convert Buddhist groups, and beyond to the fields of battle in the American culture wars and the shoals of grief over lost pregnancies. In the process we have seen many contested meanings applied to a Buddhist ritual, for a variety of different ends. It divides the Japanese-American Buddhist community over issues of superstition and money at the same time that it brings American pro-choice and pro-life foes together to find a way of reconciliation. It provides an arena for male Evangelical ministers to excoriate post-abortive women and a site for female Buddhist priests to offer solace and healing to Christian women seeking comfort they cannot find elsewhere. It moves American temples closer to Japanese religious norms and is subjected to a process of thorough Americanizing alteration.

With *mizuko kuyō* as a lens to view American religious phenomena, many unexpected angles of sight come into focus. From one angle, convert Zen seems rather more like Japanese and Japanese-American Buddhism than we expected, with a host of overlooked rituals uncovered and much community attention paid to saviors, spirits, ceremonies, and emotions unrelated to the rigors of *zazen*. From another angle, we might note that water baby ceremonies most resemble not those of a Japanese or Japanese-American Zen temple but rather those of a New Religious Movement: only the Risshō Kōsei-kai services include women manufacturing their own offerings, meeting in a group,

voicing their hidden feelings over pregnancy loss, sitting in supportive circles, and fully participating in all elements of a ceremony that takes well over an hour.

Again, from one angle Japanese-American Buddhist temples seem to move toward ever-greater acculturation as they use pews, English, original American liturgy, and other elements unknown in Japan. Yet from another sightline we see that new arrivals from Japan bring previously absent rituals and perspectives into these temples, which still deal in a thoroughly Japanese material culture—*hondōs*, *tōba*, *ihai*, *ema*—virtually unknown to converts to Zen in America.

Stories from these communities suggest that enculturation of Buddhism (and perhaps other religions as well) in America is a never completed project, a process that continually slides back and forth along a spectrum rather than one that moves confidently forward from a beginning point called “tradition” toward a destination called “American innovation.” They also reveal that Americanization is often the product of ignorance rather than conscious adaptation, and that the Buddhist contribution to rituals and ideas in some Zen communities is rivaled or even bested by influences from psychotherapy, feminism, and other elements of white middle-class American culture. This points to potential weaknesses in our typologies. The “ethnic” in the category “ethnic Buddhism” seems justifiable when it refers to how certain practitioners understand themselves: as Buddhist by ethnicity, rather than by individual belief. But when it becomes a racial signifier—as in “ethnic” vs. “white” Buddhism—it breaks down, for how can we allege that Japanese ethnic influences are greater in Japanese-American Zen than European-American ethnic influences in convert Zen? What is whiteness if not yet another ethnicity? Convert Zen is not a return to the Buddhism of Shakyamuni (or Dōgen) as

some scholars have suggested but yet another flavor of ethnic Buddhism, one created largely by and for Americans of white cultural background.

Looking at *mizuko kuyō* from within and beyond the confines of Buddhist discourse demonstrates important aspects of ritual in the abstract. Ritual Studies has increasingly favored the term “performance” in recent years, yet ritual is not only performed: it is also imagined, rhetorically appropriated, and painted in prose with no intention of actual practice.² As it turns out, other people’s rituals, reading about rituals you never carry out yourself, and discussion of rituals all apparently produce results without the need for ritual enactment. It may be that on the whole for Americans the main effects of *mizuko kuyō* are derived not from transformations alleged to occur in actually experiencing these rituals, but from the high amounts of activity put into their imaginative production and the alternate worldviews they support. Ritual, it seems, is about so much more (and less) than performance.

For scholars of American Buddhism, I believe this study demonstrates the need to pay attention to non-Buddhists, including opponents of Buddhism and those who strategically appropriate Buddhism, in the story of Buddhism’s ongoing transmission to America. The development of significant Buddhist communities within the United States has not removed the necessity of attending to how the large non-Buddhist community selectively imports, depicts, and adapts elements of Buddhism. Put another way, American Buddhists are not the only producers of Buddhism for Americans, and it would be unwise to assume that the opinions and practices of non-Buddhists ceased to be an essential part of the story at the end of the nineteenth century.

² For an overview of this “performative turn” in Ritual Studies, see Bell, Catherine. “Performance.” *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. Ed. by Mark Taylor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

I also believe this project reveals the need for scholars of American religions outside of Buddhism, especially those who focus on Christianities of the United States, to give attention to Buddhism and other smaller religious groups. The number of Buddhists in America need not be large for Buddhism to make an impact on American Christianity. Just as scholars of Buddhism beyond Asia cannot hope to understand their subjects without knowledge of the ways that non-Buddhist culture directly and indirectly shapes the form of American Buddhism, so too researchers concerned with larger American religious groups cannot afford to overlook how minority traditions influence discussion and practice within the dominant groups. Significantly, we see in this study an example of how the post-Protestant era of American religion holds not only perils for a Christianity that must share the playing field but also opportunities as well: even fundamentalist and other conservative Christian groups have learned to employ non-Christian religions strategically in the fight to maintain their hold on power. Buddhism is thus for these groups not only a threat but a tool that has been provided by the modern religious diversity of the United States.

In the closing paragraph of the anthology *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*, Marilyn Ivy points toward an insight of significance for our study:

When former Zen teacher Toni Packer asks her students to listen to birds outside the practice hall and imitate their cries, where is Buddhism? When the Dalai Lama says, “My religion is kindness,” where is Buddhism then? Where is Buddhism in the practice of radical attention proffered by contemporary mindfulness meditation teachers? Perhaps we should talk about post-Buddhism instead, an amalgam of therapy, breath awareness, and mindfulness technique suited for the inhabitants of postmodernity. Yet as in “post”-anything, the *post*

still bears the trace of that which has been superseded: post-Buddhism is still post-*Buddhism*.³

Japanese-American temples are post-Japan. Zen converts are post-“non-Buddhism.” American Christians who make offerings to Jizō in their backyards are performing a ritual that has arguably become post-Buddhist. Yet the past of each of these is at least as important as their present, and traces remain that have implications for how each will continue to develop. Thus Ivy provides the counterpoint to Orsi’s opening observation of how religious elements may become freely circulating signifiers, detached from their specific cultural grounds and thus available for uses never foreseen in their original context. Orsi’s view is right: *mizuko kuyō*’s entrance into each situation brings about alterations in the ritual’s form and meaning. But Ivy is correct as well: *mizuko kuyō* also carries the “scent” of Buddhism into new arenas that will be reshaped in subtle or overt ways by this contact with the world of Japanese Buddhist post-pregnancy loss rituals. Crossing over into Asian communities of the New World, convert Zen, or Christian America does not completely dispel the karma of these rituals inherited from Japan, which may ripen with implications for their communities that neither they nor scholars of American religion can predict. For there is a footnote to Gennō’s story: some sources claim that the rock continues to emit poisonous vapors even today. When dealing with forces as complex as Buddhism and as potent as life and loss, even the greatest ritualist may find their powers to adapt and transmute them are only partial and conflicted; and the softly smiling Jizō, patiently waiting within the rock, may yet hide deeper surprises for those who come to it for aid.

³ Ivy, Marilyn. “Modernity.” *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism*. Ed. by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005: 328.

APPENDIX A: CONVERT ZEN CENTERS PERFORMING *MIZUKO KUYŌ*

The centers in List A have performed *mizuko kuyō*-based ceremonies for pregnancy losses multiple times. Those in List B have performed a single ceremony as of April 4, 2007. The leaders listed are those who have most often performed these ceremonies at each center; however, many centers have additional priests who have also acted as water baby ritual leaders.

List A:

Chicago Zen Center (Evanston, IL)—Sevan Ross

Diamond Sangha (Honolulu, HI)—Robert Aitken

Empty Hand Zen Center (New Rochelle, NY)—Susan Jion Postal

Floating Zendo (San Jose, CA)—Angie Boissevain

Goat-in-the-Road Zendo (Muir Beach, CA)—Yvonne Rand

Great Vow Monastery (Clatskanie, OR)—Jan Chozen Bays

Green Gulch Farm Zen Center [San Francisco Zen Center] (Muir Beach, CA)—Yvonne Rand

Rochester Zen Center (Rochester, NY)—Amala Wrightson

Santa Cruz Zen Center (Santa Cruz, CA)—Katherine Thanas

Vermont Zen Center (Shelburne, VT)—Sunyana Graef

Zen Center of Los Angeles (Los Angeles, CA)—Wendy Egyoku Nakao

List B:

Berkeley Buddhist Monastery, CA (Berkeley, CA)—Yvonne Rand

Jikoji Zen Retreat Center (Los Gatos, CA)—Angie Boissevain

Zen Community of Oak Park (Oak Park, IL)—Robert Joshin Althouse

Zen Mountain Monastery (Mt. Tremper, NY)—Jan Chozen Bays

APPENDIX B: FIGURES



Fig. 1.1. *Mizuko kuyō* at Enmanin in Ōtsu. Note the use of chairs for the elderly in this relatively new worship space.



Fig. 1.2. *Mizuko Jizō* at Chingodō in Tōkyō.



Fig. 1.3. Mizuko ema at Daishoin in Miyajima.

<p>水子供養一霊一万円</p>		<p>人形供養一俵三千円</p>		<p>安産祈禱 一万円</p>		<p>祈禱 普通 一ヵ月 六千円</p>		<p>普通 一週間 三千円</p>		<p>特別(予約) 一ヵ月 一万円</p>		<p>特別(予約) 一週間 五千円</p>		<p>御符・安産御守・腹帯全 一万円</p>		<p>御守 諸願成就 八〇〇円</p>		<p>一願成就 二〇〇円</p>		<p>安産 一五〇円</p>		<p>絵馬 一五〇円</p>		<p>御影 金帯 一〇〇〇円</p>		<p>三ッ折 一五〇円</p>		<p>三ッ集印 三〇〇円</p>		<p>通称寺丸 一〇〇円</p>		<p>護摩木 二〇〇円</p>		<p>おろろぞく 一〇〇円</p>	
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Fig. 1.4. Schedule of service prices at Sôtōkuji in Kyōto, including *mizuko kuyō* (10,000 yen, about \$100).



Fig. 2.1. *Hondō* of Zenshuji Soto Mission.

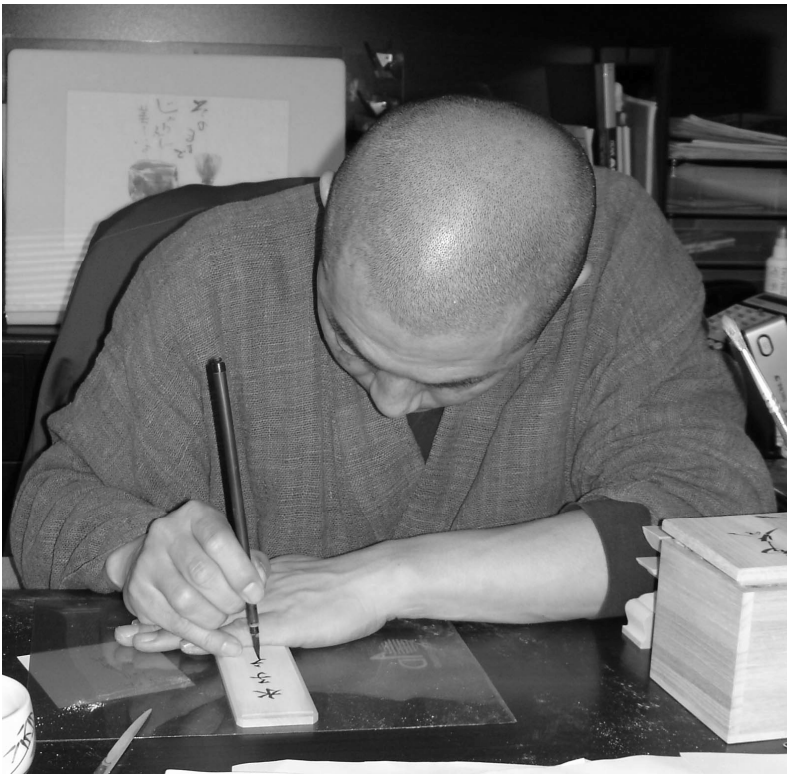


Fig. 2.2. Kojima Shūmyō fills out a *mizuko ihai* at Zenshuji Soto Mission.

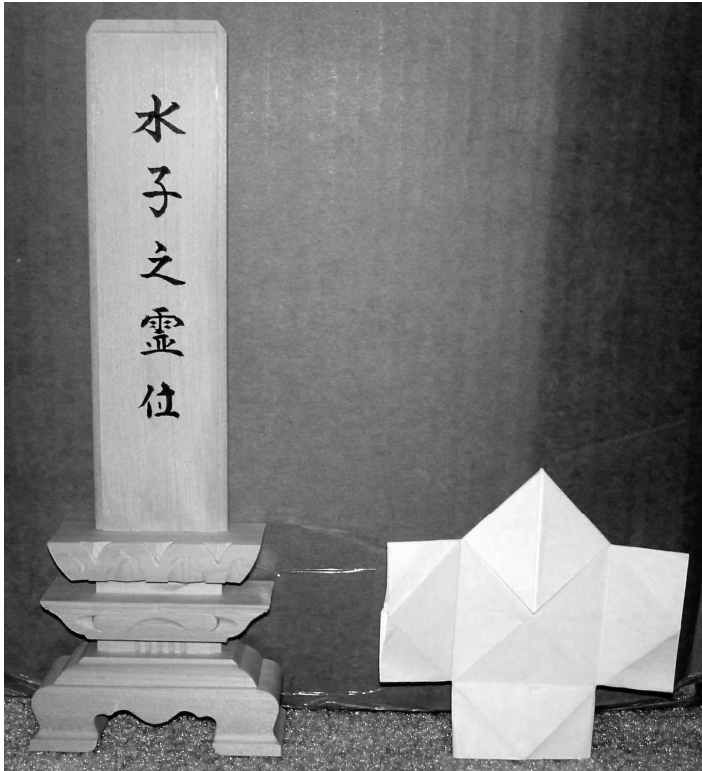


Fig. 2.3. *Mizuko ihai* and origami “baby” made by Kojima Shūmyō.



Fig. 2.4. *Nokutsudō* with Jizō at Zenshuji Soto Mission.



Fig. 2.5. Roku Jizō at Zenshuji Soto Mission.



Fig.2.6. *Hondō* of Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple.



Fig. 2.7. *Hondō* of Koyasan Buddhist Temple.



Fig. 2.8. *Mizuko Jizō* at Koyasan Buddhist Temple.



Fig. 2.9. *Hondō* at Risho Kosei-kai Buddhist Church of Los Angeles.

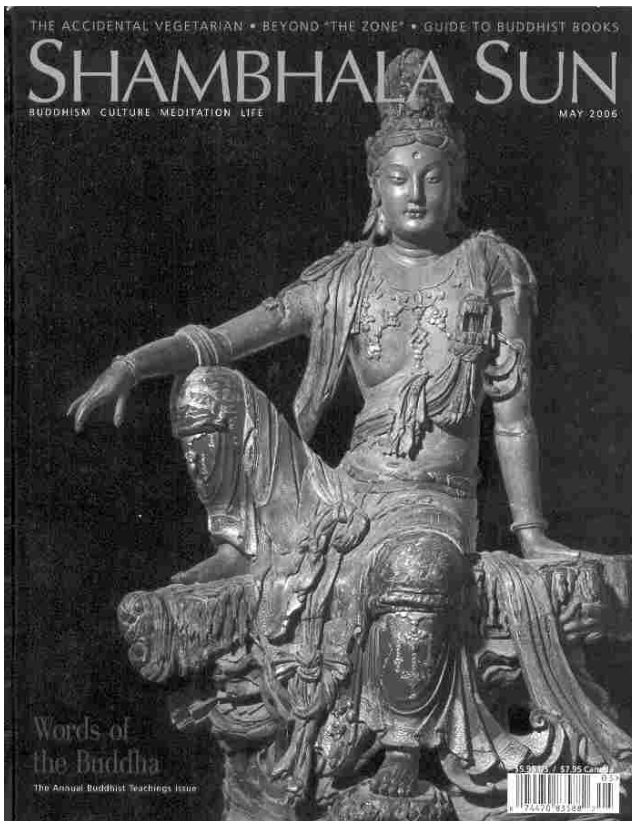


Fig. 3.1. Nelson-Atkins Kuanyin on the cover of *Shambhala Sun*, vol. 14, no. 5 (May 2006).



Fig. 3.2. Jizōs being made for sale in the Zenworks workshop at Great Vow Monastery. The two on the right are *mizuko* Jizōs, the only images Zenworks manufactures that are based on a statue imported directly from Japan.



Fig. 3.3 Kimono with panels made for the Jizōs for Peace project, on display at Zen Community of Oak Park.



Fig. 3.4. Jizō altar at the house of a laywoman who helped introduce the water baby ceremony to Rochester Zen Center.



Fig. 3.5. Great Vow Monastery room prepared for the water baby ceremony on November 4, 2006.



Fig. 3.6. A portion of the Jizō garden at Great Vow Monastery, with offerings made during water baby ceremonies.



Fig. 4.1. Jizōs with water baby ceremony offerings at Rochester Zen Center.



Fig. 4.2. Virgin Mary image with water baby ceremony offerings in the Great Vow Monastery Jizō garden.



Fig. 5.1. Mizuko ema left at Zōjōji by a post-abortion American.



Fig. 5.2. Jizōs in Japan, from *Cincinnati Right to Life Education Foundation Newsletter*.¹



Fig. 5.3. *Mizuko Jizō* from Catholic periodical *Columban Mission* (St. Columbans, NE).²

¹Conroy 2003: 2.

²Fr. Michael Molloy, "The Healing of Mizuko Jizo," *Columban Mission*, May 2005.



Fig. 5.4. “Mizuko Shrine” art installation by two St. Louis students.³

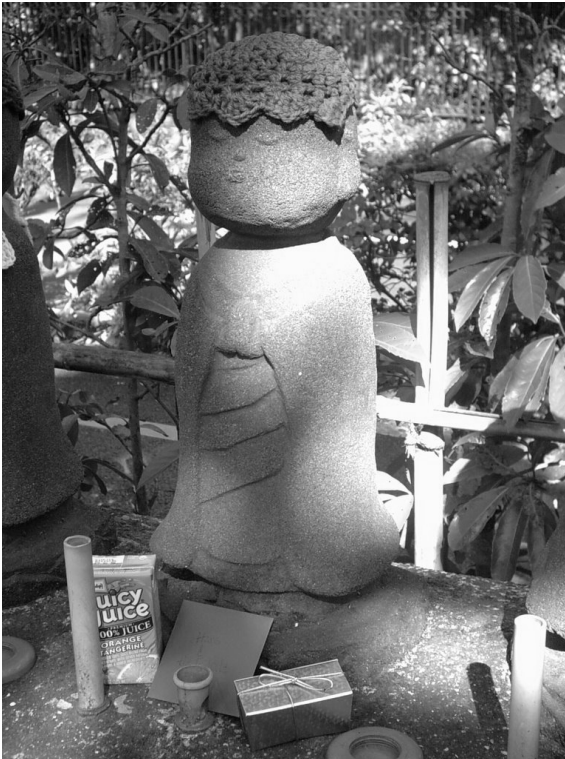


Fig. 6.1. A *mizuko* Jizō at Zōjōji adopted by a post-miscarriage American couple who traveled to Tōkyō, with the offerings they left during their performance of *mizuko kuyō*.⁴

³Ray-Hamaie 2002.

⁴Flying Standby 2/14/06.

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