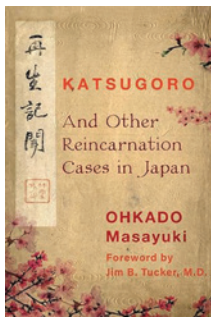


**BOOK AND  
MULTIMEDIA  
REVIEW**

# Katsugoro: And Other Reincarnation Cases in Japan

**K.M. Wehrstein**  
hearth@explornet.com



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English-speaking readers familiar with the body of literature on reincarnation research are of course aware of the Western cultural framing of reincarnation, and will have some familiarity also with how reincarnation is viewed in India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Druze sect of Islam, certain Pacific Northwest Native American cultures and the Igbo tribal culture of Africa, plus some others. These cultures were the main foci of the work of the tireless Ian Stevenson, whose writings continue to dominate, in terms of sheer volume, the field; he investigated only one published Japanese case (Stevenson, 1997, p. 519).

By the release of *Katsugoro*, another nation and culture is firmly placed on the reincarnation research map, and a door into a new world of reincarnation experiences and attitudes generously opened: that of Japan.

Despite the title, the first English-language reincarnation book by Ohkado Masayuki, following four in Japanese (Ohkado, 2010, 2011, 2015a; Ohkado & Ikegawa, 2015), not only reports the cases of Katsugoro and others, but places them within the context of reincarnation-related aspects of Japanese culture and cultural history, and the history of Japanese reincarnation research, and makes some theoretical points as well.

*Katsugoro* also offers the third distinct culturally-mediated authorial approach to reincarnation I have seen. What I mean by this: In a review I wrote of now-retired Indian reincarnation researcher Satwant Pasricha's first book (Pasricha, 1990, 2019), I noted subtle differences in tone and sometimes content between the writing of a scientist raised in a culture that matter-of-factly considers reincarnation real, and that of Stevenson and other Western scientists, who were raised in a culture that rejects reincarnation as a non-scientific belief that originated in Asia. In short, the two opposed views underlie the texts as defaults which the authors argue should be, respectively, enshrined in science as well as religion through scientific testing or challenged and possibly refuted through scientific testing (Wehrstein, 2019).

Ohkado's third tonal approach might be seen as somewhere in between, reflecting Japan's national ambivalence about reincarnation that he also reports. (In a 2018 survey he cites, 63.7% of Japanese reported no religion while 32.1% reported they were Buddhist.) One does not see a reincarnationist subtext as strong as Pasricha's, but, as if expecting greater acceptance by the reader of his reincarnationist bent, Ohkado is unafraid to include personal content, explaining in the preface how he entered the field, and in the afterword sharing personal experiences with past-life memory, both his own and those of his daughter—something most Western academic reincarnation researchers wouldn't dream of doing, lest they be tarred as unobjective.



A much greater emphasis on intermission (or “life between life” in Ohkado’s terminology), *in-utero* and birth memories is another distinctive feature of this book, though I cannot say whether that is culturally influenced or unique to Ohkado, who sees *in-utero* and birth memories as revelatory of a crucial juncture of the life/death, incarnate/discarnate cycle, and thus important to understanding its entirety and human consciousness generally.

Somewhat refreshing, at least to me, is his relatively welcoming stance on hypnotic regression, which is eschewed so much by the Stevensonian school that some adherents altogether reject potential cases on the grounds that regression was used. But, ever a good scientist, Ohkado is careful to keep regression within appropriate scientific bounds, making it clear, for instance, that a regression case is just the same as a spontaneous case in that it must be tested through verification of its facts before it can be accepted as evidence for reincarnation.

Now to summarize the contents: I recommend against skipping the introduction as it excellently orients and prepares the reader for the rest of the book, touching on the post-mortem survival debate within parapsychology generally, listing the typical features of the 2,500 reincarnation cases that have been formally investigated, and laying out how the book is organized. Ohkado also argues, interestingly, that one can find life-between-life memories not only in children who also have past-life memories, but in those who do not, and they are nonetheless scientifically useful.

Ohkado next provides an overview of reincarnation in Japan’s past, including archaeological evidence for belief in it dating to the 13,000-300 BCE period, and mentions of it in multiple forms of literature starting in 611 CE. (From this section I gleaned the interesting fact that much Japanese cultural history has been learned from the personal diaries of upper-class Japanese women starting around the 10<sup>th</sup> century.)

Next Ohkado recounts a great turning point: the discovery of the case of Koyata Katsugoro, a boy born on October 10, 1815 in a village near Tokyo. His voluminous past-life memories, recognitions and past-life-related behaviours, as well as good documentation from multiple investigators at the time, have earned him as-yet undying fame in Japan, and make his case equal in strength to the better ones in Stevenson’s collection. In fact, as Ohkado points out, the essay by Stevenson that launched his legendary reincarnation research career lists Katsugoro as the first case in its literature review (Stevenson, 1960, p. 65). Ohkado’s recounting of the Katsugoro case and

investigation is largely similar to his article about it in the Psi Encyclopedia (Ohkado, 2021) but contains photographs and additional details.

Post-Katsugoro, systematic reincarnation research languished in Japan (except about Katsugoro, as a group devoted to it which includes descendants of his relatives – imagine this happening in the West? – published a report in 2015). Ohkado found this out by searching in vain for colleagues in his homeland after reading Stevenson *et al* and becoming interested in the field. Ohkado characterizes Japanese reincarnation inquiry following Katsugoro as “largely unscientific or rudimentary – limited to unverified folktales and claims of psychics” (p. 72), though he dutifully provides a selection of their cases.

Determined to quell this problem himself, Ohkado spent a one-year sabbatical as a visiting professor at the Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS) at the University of Virginia’s medical school, a division founded by Stevenson, then returned home to become Japan’s first modern reincarnation researcher. In Part II of his book, he reports seven of the cases he has investigated: Tomo, Takeharu, Sakutaro, Kanon, Akane, Kazuya, and Tatyana Snitko. All are fascinating, and together they show a good range of the major features found in reincarnation cases. Some of these cases were first published in English elsewhere (Tomo: Ohkado, 2013; Akane: Ohkado, 2012; Kazuya: Ohkado, 2016; Kanon: Ohkado, 2017); others have been published in Japanese or summarized in the Psi Encyclopedia (see Ohkado, 2022). In some of the cases, you will happily find follow-up information not included in previous publications.

Possibly the most unusual case is that of Tatyana Snitko, who appears despite her being born Russian because she is very Japanese in spirit. She easily learned the Japanese language, displayed highly unusual aptitudes in pursuits unique to Japanese culture such as Japanese calligraphy, Japanese-style theatre and the martial art Aikido, and was said by three independent psychics to have been an iconic ancient Japanese poet. She also recalled having been incinerated in the atom-bombing of Hiroshima. But the other cases are also fascinating, involving all manner of circumstances from death on a massive battleship to sex change to suicide and an ensuing time spent in a “reflection room” in the life between lives.

Part III starts with life-between-life and other pre-birth memories, about which Ohkado has done some groundbreaking survey work (see Ohkado, 2015b) whose results he revisits here. He reprises the results of a study on which

he collaborated with Ikegawa Akira, of 21 children with life-between-life memories (Ohkado & Ikegawa, 2014). Possibly the most fascinating chapter in this section recounts a case of a child's description of her life-between-life memories being sufficiently transformative for her mother to register a score on the Life Changes Inventory developed by Bruce Greyson and Kenneth Ring to measure the aftereffects of near-death experiences. Ohkado notes that such transformations in parents, especially mothers, are common. I suspect it happens more in Japan than in the West.

In this section also he revisits his clever and innovative experiment (Ohkado, 2014) in which a group of native Japanese were asked to judge whether pictures of Burmese children who recalled past lives as Japanese soldiers had more Japanese-looking facial features than Burmese children generally, with positive results. (These days, this experiment could be replicated using software, which no one would accuse of subjectivity.) He then shares an eighth case, one featuring xenoglossy, the knowledge of a language not learned: that of Risa, a Japanese girl who recalled being a village chief in Nepal, and could speak understandable if not proficient Nepali while under hypnosis, as native speakers determined.

In Part IV, "Challenges and Conclusions," Ohkado expertly rebuts the living-agent-psi hypothesis by invoking reincarnation-case phenomena it cannot explain. He does just as well with Michael Sudduth's "auxiliary assumptions" argument by expanding on R.W.K. Paterson's point that we need make no auxiliary assumptions about consciousness since we know much about how it operates. Ohkado next takes on the thorny question of the prevalence of reincarnation, that is, is it just those who remember past lives who have lived them, or is past-life amnesia typical? He infers the latter based on six good points drawn from the aggregated case data.

In the afterword, Ohkado shares behavioural signs displayed and one memory recalled by his second-eldest daughter, plus the results of his own regression session, illustrated with his own drawings. This experience has left him ongoingly able to return via meditation to the ecstatic state he reached after reliving a previous death. As a long-time *qi gong* and meditation practitioner, he suggests – and again, can you imagine a Western researcher doing this? – that those whose interest in post-mortem survival is purely intellectual should try known methods "to experience various altered states of consciousness suggestive of the continuity of consciousness beyond the body and possibly death" (p. 249).

I have two notes of interest to add. First, Ohkado gives the population of Jim Matlock's Facebook reincarnation group "Signs of Reincarnation" as 180,000, which it was in late November 2023; since then it has almost doubled, sitting at 350,000 as I write in mid-October 2024. The group's exponential growth suggests a burgeoning public interest not only in reincarnation, but in the scientific approach toward reincarnation – which is very good news for the field and in general.

Second: Reading the cases in this book I was struck by their internationality. Of the nine featured cases, four indicate reincarnation across a national border (Tomo, Akane, Dr Snitko, and Risa), a vastly-higher proportion than that of the full collection of investigated cases, as there one finds not much more than a handful among thousands (see Wehrstein, 2017). This preponderance among Japanese cases is still vast even if you factor in those not mentioned in *Katsugoro*. Is there a particular Japanese penchant for life-between-life jetting around the globe, even more than that observed among Westerners? Ohkado says he has not made specific efforts to find international cases but selects them for investigation based on their evidential strength, which is standard practice in reincarnation research. He theorizes that the preponderance might be related to modern incarnate travel patterns in developed nations (personal communication). I think it needs more research.

To conclude, anyone who wants their reincarnation research library to be complete should acquire this book, not only for its distinctive voice, copious information and contextualizing of cases within culture, but because it is also well-written, presenting facts and opinions clearly, with copious tables, diagrams and photos. I am grateful to Ohkado for this significant contribution to our literature.

## AUTHOR DISCLOSURES

I published an autobiographical article about Ohkado in the Psi Encyclopedia (Wehrstein, 2021). Ohkado is on the Science Council of the International Centre for Reincarnation Research (along with Michael Nahm and Marieta Pehlivanova), an organization of which I am the president. Currently, he, six other co-authors, and I are collaborating on a major research project.

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