

Interethnic and Intercultural Reincarnation Cases

In some reincarnation cases, a child has apparently reincarnated into a different culture, religion, language, ethnic group or social caste. Such cases can be seen as strong evidence for reincarnation, as the subjects often display behavioural characteristics reflective of their previous milieu that are striking by contrast with their current one – and sometimes unwelcome. They can even have corresponding physical characteristics, such as skin colour markedly different from that of their parents and siblings.

Interethnic Cases

In 2005, [reincarnation](#) researchers [Ian Stevenson](#) and Jürgen Keil published a paper on 24 cases of Burmese children who claimed to remember having been Japanese soldiers killed during the World War II Japanese occupation of Burma.^[1] Because none of the children remembered their previous names, none of the soldiers have been identified.

One of the best-developed cases is that of [Ma Tin Aung Myo](#), a Burmese girl. She remembered having been a male Japanese army cook who had befriended the woman who would later become Ma Tin Aung Myo's mother, and died in an Allied air attack close to her house. Ma Tin Aung Myo exhibited [cross-sex behaviours](#) that persisted into adulthood and a phobia of aeroplanes. Furthermore, she showed preferences typical of Japanese: she disliked Burma's hot, sunny climate and was made nostalgic by cloudy days; also, she preferred mild and sweet foods over typical Burmese spicy foods and liked to eat half-raw fish. She often pined for Japan, sometimes in tears. At an early age she talked to herself in a language her parents did not understand, and had difficulty learning Burmese, not mastering it until the age of five.^[2]

Stevenson and Keil found that many of the young 'Burmese Japanese soldiers' showed Japanese-style [behavioural signs](#): 'habits of dress, food preferences, industriousness, insensitivity to pain, and other behaviors unusual in Burma, but typical of Japanese people, especially Japanese soldiers'.^[3]

Another well-developed interethnic case is that of [Bongkuch Promsin](#), a Thai boy who remembered the life of a man from Laos who had been murdered at age eighteen. As well as displaying adult-type behaviours, Bongkuch displayed Laotian ones: He washed his hands in Laotian rather than Thai style, ate with hands rather than a spoon as Thai people do, and liked to eat Laotian-style foods such as sticky or glutinous rice, noodles and *namphrik* (a popular dish in Laos) with fermented fish. When his mother reproached him for this, he said, 'I am not Thai. I am Laotian'. He uttered words unfamiliar to her which she learned later were Laotian, reportedly spoke a little Laotian to others, and had a Laotian accent when he spoke Thai.^[4]

Reincarnation researcher Ohkado Masayuki investigated the case of a Japanese boy who apparently lived his previous life in Edinburgh, Scotland.^[5] At eleven months old, Tomo was attracted by Roman letters he saw on TV commercials. He learned to write Roman letters before Japanese characters. At the age of about two years and nine months, he signed his name as 'Tomo' in Roman letters. At this time he was also able to sing along to an English song, 'Top of the World'; later he spoke a few English words that he had not learned in his current life. He pointed out his 'home town' on a globe (pronouncing it 'Edinbia'), recalled eating Western dishes, and remembered hearing about a train accident in Southall, England, in which eight people had died, details which were accurate. A journey with his father to Edinburgh in an attempt to trace Tomo's former family proved fruitless, however,

so the identity of his previous incarnation remains unknown.

In 2003, Stevenson published an early twentieth-century case of a Hungarian boy who apparently remembered a life as a dark-skinned member of a tribe living in a tropical area.^[6] Gedeon Haich was born in 1921, and the first indication of his past-life memories were in art he produced at ages four and five, depicting dark-skinned people. He had a phobia of swimming in open water and told his mother he had previously lived in a different place, had a wife and children, did not go into the water because monsters that bit people's legs lived in it, and had been attacked by a tiger while out hunting, after which he could remember nothing more. He illustrated his memories with pictures of a round house with a thatched roof, men hunting with bows and boomerangs, and palm trees, and demonstrated skill in rowing, tree-climbing and drumming that he had not acquired in his current life. His mother carefully preserved his drawings along with her notes on his statements, so was able to show them to Stevenson. The identity of the previous person was never learned, nor was there enough information to pinpoint with certainty where he had lived. Stevenson opined that it most likely was sub-Saharan Africa and Gedeon had misidentified the large cat that attacked him as a tiger.

The drawings of Tomo and Gedeon Haich may be seen [here](#).

Physical Signs in Interethnic Cases

Following on Stevenson's reporting that associates of the 'Burmese Japanese soldiers' said that their facial features seemed Japanese, Ohkado performed an innovative study. He asked 46 people of Japanese extraction to score pictures of 18 of these subjects on how typically Japanese they looked, compared to a control group of Burmese subjects whose previous incarnations had been Burmese. The results were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$, effect size = .85).^[7]

The cases of the Burmese twins [Maung Aung Ko Thein and Maung Aung Cho Thein](#) cannot be classed as [international](#) as the twins were born in the country in which their previous incarnations had died. However, they are both interethnic cases with corresponding [physical features](#). Maung Aung Ko Thein's previous person had been of Indian ancestry while Maung Aung Cho Thein's had been of Chinese ancestry. The twins had skin tones reflecting their previous ethnicities; the former had darker skin than the latter, reflecting that Indians tend to have darker skin than Chinese.^[8]

In 2012, Ohkado published an interethnic and international case of a Japanese girl who recalled having been an Indian woman.^[9] Though the child did not provide enough information to identify her, indications of her having been Indian were strong: the names she gave were confirmed to be typically Indian by Indians with whom Ohkado consulted, as were the details of houses. She drew pictures of female figures with the *bindi* that Hindu women wear on their foreheads and had a birthmark on her own forehead about which she said, 'This corresponds to what I wore in India. The goddess I met in heaven stamped it on me so that I would not forget about my life in India'.^[10] The girl was blunt about her motivation for changing cultures: 'It was a mistake to be born as a woman in India, where women are treated badly. So I decided to be born in a place where women are treated nicely. [It certainly is true in Japan.]'^[11] Her drawings may be seen [here](#).

In his two-volume study of physical reincarnation signs, [Reincarnation and Biology](#), Ian Stevenson included a chapter on 'Abnormalities of Pigmentation that May Derive from Previous Lives'.^[12] One section focuses on people, mostly in Burma but also in India and Nigeria, who as children remembered past lives as English or Americans and have albinism to a sufficient degree to manifest pale skin, blond hair and Caucasian-shaped eyes that are blue or grey-coloured.^[13]

The first such case Stevenson found dates back to the 1890s and involves a fair-skinned, blue-eyed

Burmese boy who had memories of being a murdered British police chief in Burma and who bore birthmarks that matched the wounds.^[14]

Stevenson presents ten cases of this type that he investigated himself, all of which are from Burma except one Indian case, [BB Saxena](#), and one Nigerian case.

In his Table 22-2,^[15] Stevenson points out some striking commonalities between these ten children, especially the Burmese ones. All gave details of past-life memories. Seven (70%) had Caucasian-shaped eyes – a trait, Stevenson points out, that has never been linked genetically with albinism. Eight (80%) showed behaviours typical of Westerners. Six (60%) had at least one blond brother or sister, despite no history of blondness or albinism in their families, who also showed Western-type behaviour at least to a slight degree. Of those, four recognized these siblings as past-life relatives or associates from the same Western nation as themselves. Seven cases (70%), all Burmese, involved an aeroplane crashing near the subject's family. Some British and American war-planes crashed in Burma during World War II.

Stevenson discusses at some length the cause of these instances of albinism, focusing on three possible explanations: the normal explanation (genetics); selection of an albino body by a spirit that was previously Caucasian; and psychic alteration of the body by the spirit to become more fair-skinned and fair-haired. He lays out the strong points of each explanation, but also the facts of the cases it fails to explain, and admits that no explanation entirely explains all the cases, so that possibly more than one of them is at play.^[16]

Two other interethnic cases are presented by Stevenson in the same chapter:

[U Kalar](#) was born in Burma, a short time after his father had disposed of the bodies of two Indian soldiers of the British army who had been murdered in his village. Named Kalar, meaning 'Indian', due to his dark skin, he vividly remembered having been savagely killed with knives, axes and sticks, and had birthmarks that corresponded with the wounds. At four or five years of age, he met another boy whom he recognized as the reincarnation of his murdered comrade, who also remembered the murder and had a much darker complexion than is typical in Burma.^[17]

[Ma Win Myint](#) was born in 1959 in Rangoon about eight months after her Burmese mother had been visited in a dream by a close British friend, Paul Taylor, who had lived most of his life in Burma but died in England. At birth, Ma Win Myint was observed to have an unusually-red complexion and sharp nose for a Burmese person, and even freckles and a patch of white hair, all of which were reminiscent of Taylor. There were also medical and behavioural similarities.^[18]

Xenoglossy in Interethnic Cases

When a person speaks a language they are known not to have learned, it is referred to as 'xenoglossy'. In reincarnation cases it can come about when a person retains the ability to speak a language learned in a previous life. Xenoglossy is especially common in interethnic cases, such as Bongkuch Promsin. For more on this important subject, see [Xenoglossy in Reincarnation Cases](#).

Indian Intercaste Cases

The caste system in India has mostly disappeared in the cities but persists in villages.^[19] Each caste has its own practices, rituals, foods, attire, manners, habits of speech and other important customs, acting almost as its own culture. Intercaste cases are quite frequent and can feature behaviours on the part of the subject that contrast markedly with those of their family.

In a paper comparing patterns in her investigated reincarnation cases to those of Stevenson, reincarnation researcher [Antonia Mills](#) found that 28.6% of 42 Stevenson cases involved ‘promotion’ from lower caste to higher, 45.2% ‘demotion’ from higher caste to lower, and the rest no change. Her own ten cases broke down as 40%, 30% and 30%, respectively.^[20]

An extreme version of caste change is described in a paper by reincarnation researcher [Satwant Pasricha](#) and Stevenson.^[21] The girl Swaran Lata, born into a family in the highest caste, the Brahmins, recalled being a Chandala or ‘Untouchable’, a member of the lowest caste, in her previous life. Reflective of her former caste role, which involved work such as sweeping streets and cleaning public latrines, she liked washing her younger siblings’ diapers and tidying up after them. She neglected her own personal hygiene, was alone in her vegetarian family in wanting pork and resisted going to school, which traditionally was forbidden to Untouchables.

The case of the Indian boy [Jasbir Lal Jat](#) is a case of [replacement reincarnation](#) as well as intercaste reincarnation. At the age of three and a half, Jasbir was thought to have died from smallpox, but revived, having undergone a personality change. He stated he was the son of another man and refused to eat the food provided by his family because, he said, he was a Brahmin and it was not prepared in the Brahmin manner. He was only saved from starvation by a neighbouring Brahmin woman who agreed to cook for him until, after about a year and half, he acceded to joining his family in their regular meals. He also spoke with a more aristocratic style of usage. A deceased Brahmin man whose life and death matched Jasbir’s memories – and who had died about three and a half years after his birth – was eventually identified.^[22]

Stevenson’s book *Cases of the Reincarnation Type: Ten Cases in India*^[23] contains five more intercaste cases: [Gopal Gupta](#), [Jagdish Chandra](#), [Bishen Chand Kapoor](#), [Kumkum Verma](#) and [Veer Singh](#).

Interreligious Cases

In 1989, Mills published a paper on 26 northern Indian reincarnation cases investigated by Stevenson which involved Muslims, including seven Muslim children who recalled past lives as Hindus and eleven Hindu children who recalled past lives as Muslims.^[24]

Virtually all the children showed some cross-religious behaviour, usually involving food or rituals. Four of the seven Hindu-to-Muslim children refused to eat either meat or fish; in four Muslim-to-Hindu cases, the child asked his vegetarian parents to serve him meat or other Muslim-style foods, sometimes on Muslim holidays. Many of the children resisted their parents’ religion by refusing to say their prayers or insisting on performing rites or prayers recalled from the past life, such as *namaz* (Muslim prayer, facing Mecca) in the Muslim-to-Hindu cases. One child insisted on wearing the Muslim cap like the one that had belonged to him in his previous life despite teasing from his Hindu peers; another former Muslim’s religious inclinations persisted into adulthood, when he would visit a Muslim shrine when troubled.

One case mentioned in Mills’s paper featured a religion-related physical sign: a Hindu boy who recalled a Muslim life was born congenitally circumcised. Circumcision is a procedure often practiced by Muslims but not by Hindus.

In her discussion, Mills contends that these cases rebut the notion that reincarnation cases are constructed by parents imposing false ‘past-life’ identities on their children. She points out that Muslims, whose faith does not admit reincarnation^[25], are unlikely to fraudulently claim their children remember past lives, while, for their part, Hindu parents are unlikely to fraudulently claim their children remember past lives as Muslims due to the regional hostility between the two faiths.

In a case published in detail by Stevenson, a former Christian was born into a Buddhist family. Gamani Jaysena, a Sri Lankan boy, would kneel in the Christian rather than the Buddhist manner when praying, refused to prostrate or lower himself in reverence to monks in the Buddhist way, and asked his parents to hang a wooden cross he found outside the house on their wall. A deceased boy was found whose life and death matched his memories, and who was indeed from a Christian family.^[26]

The works of Rabbi Yonassan Gershom on [reincarnated Holocaust victims](#) contain many accounts of former Jews reincarnated as American Gentiles.^[27] In his book *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, Stevenson discusses the case of David Llewelyn, whose previous incarnation was never identified, but whose statements matched facts of the death camps and the procedures used to massacre the victims. He had knowledge of Jewish customs that observers felt he could not have learned normally.^[28]

KM Wehrstein

Literature

Gershom, Y. (1992). *Beyond the Ashes: Cases of Reincarnation From the Holocaust*. Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA: A.R.E. Press.

Gershom, Y. (ed.) (1996). *From Ashes to Healing: Mystical Encounters with the Holocaust*. Virginia Beach, Virginia, USA: A.R.E. Press.

Matlock, J.G. (2019). *Signs of Reincarnation: Exploring Beliefs, Cases, and Theory*. Lanham, Maryland, USA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Mills, A. (1989). [A replication study: Three cases of children in northern India who are said to remember a previous life](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 3/2, 133-84.

Mills, A. (1990). [Moslem cases of the reincarnation type in northern India: A test of the hypothesis of imposed identification \(Parts I and II\)](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 4, 171-202.

Ohkado, M. (2012). Children with 'past-life memories': A case of a Japanese female child with 'memories' as an Indian. [In Japanese with abstract in English]. *人体科学* 21/1, 17-25.

Ohkado, M. (2013). [A case of a Japanese child with past life memories](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 27, 625-36.

Ohkado, M. (2014). [Facial features of Burmese with past-life memories as Japanese soldiers](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 28/4, 597-603.

Pasricha, S. [K], & Stevenson, I (1977). Three cases of the reincarnation type in India. *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 19, 36-42.

Stevenson, I. (1974). *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (2nd ed., rev.). Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: University Press of Virginia.

Stevenson, I. (1975). *Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Volume I: Ten Cases in India*. Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: University Press of Virginia.

Stevenson, I. (1977). *Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Volume II: Ten Cases in Sri Lanka*. Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: University Press of Virginia.

Stevenson, I. (1983). *Cases of the Reincarnation Type: Vol. IV, Twelve Cases in Thailand and Burma*.

Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: University Press of Virginia.

Stevenson, I. (1997). *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects. Volume 2: Birth Defects and Other Anomalies*. Westport, Connecticut, USA: Praeger.

Stevenson, I. (2003). *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type*. Jefferson, North Carolina, USA: McFarland.

Stevenson, I., & Keil, J. (2005). [Children of Myanmar who behave like Japanese soldiers: A possible third element in personality](#). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 19, 172-83.

References

Footnotes

- 1.^ Stevenson & Keil (2005).
- 2.^ Stevenson (1983). Ma Tin Aung Myo's difficulty in learning her mother tongue is an example of glossophobia, a type of [passive xenoglossy](#).
- 3.^ Stevenson & Keil (2005), 171.
- 4.^ Stevenson (1983), 128-33.
- 5.^ Ohkado (2013).
- 6.^ Stevenson (2003), 114-26.
- 7.^ Ohkado, 2014
- 8.^ For the full case study, see Stevenson (1997), 2034-41.
- 9.^ Ohkado (2012).
- 10.^ Ohkado, personal communication, 26 June 2017.
- 11.^ Ohkado, personal communication, 27 June 2017; bracketed comment is his.
- 12.^ Stevenson (1997), 1725-863.
- 13.^ Stevenson (1997), 1757-862.
- 14.^ Stevenson (1997), 1872.
- 15.^ Stevenson (1997), 1854.
- 16.^ Stevenson (1997), 1859-63.
- 17.^ For the full case report, see Stevenson (1997), 1745-58
- 18.^ For the full case report, see Stevenson (1997), 1752-57.
- 19.^ Matlock (2019), 137.
- 20.^ Mills (1989), 172-73, Table 4.
- 21.^ Pasricha & Stevenson (1977), 36-42.
- 22.^ Stevenson (1974), 34-52.
- 23.^ Stevenson (1975).
- 24.^ Mills (1990).
- 25.^ With the exception of the heterodox Druze, Alevi and Alawite sects of Shia Islam.
- 26.^ For the full the case report, see Stevenson (1977), 43-76.
- 27.^ See Gershon (1992, 1996).
- 28.^ For the full case report, see Stevenson (2003), 80-85.