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Reincarnation Research: I. An Old Idea Re-Examined with New Methods in the 21st Century

TERRY OLESEN

Abstract: This two-part article provides an update on recent work (including investigators and their work profiles) in the field of reincarnation research. While reincarnation is a very old concept predating history, 21st century methods for studying it are now present, though little appreciated. Researchers of reincarnation mainly come from the field of parapsychology, but numerous journalists, authors and educated lay-people regularly contribute to the field as well. This article explores the various approaches investigators take in collecting evidence for reincarnation phenomena. These includes Child-Memory Cases, Medium and Intuition Derived Cases, and Hypnotic Regression Cases. Here, in Part One, I describe the work of current academic and research scientist/investigators. Almost to a person they work in the manner of the late Dr. Ian Stevenson, incorporating forensic cross checking into the already established Case Study. Stevenson evolved the Case Study method resulting in a database of almost 2900 cases. During his lifetime, Stevenson sought to establish evidence via special focus on current subjects' (mostly children's) memories which hinted at past lives. He also found that current subjects' birthmarks and deformities resembled earlier lifetime injuries. Stevenson established a protocol whereby a current subject's responses could be externally verified by various researcher observations or by witnesses who knew the earlier lifetime persona. In Part Two, I will contrast Stevenson's and Dr. Walter Semkiw's approaches. At present only a handful of investigators in the world do reincarnation research. Despite this limitation, the field will advance more quickly and definitively in the upcoming years as the now-disparate groups start to set aside their prejudices and collaborate.

Keywords: Reincarnation, case study method, case of the reincarnation type, birthmarks, intuition.

INTRODUCTION

In this article I provide a combined update and commentary on reincarnation research. As part of that endeavor I will attempt to do four things:

First, starting about mid-20th Century, I will list the website Reincarnation Research's most recent *investigators* and *researchers* (within the last 75 years). I include among researchers, university trained people who are trained in the scientific method and do scholarly research. I include among *investigators* people who achieved at least a baccalaureate degree; many of these people have been journalists or writers. Finally, also important though often overlooked are educated laypersons who contribute to reincarnation research as volunteer *citizen-scientists*. They are often the first port of call when researchers and investigators want to discover cases of the reincarnation type (CORTs). Citizen-scientists often comment on blogs or online forums. They are a source of inspiration and ideas even if they do not serve as researchers, lecturers, scholars, or corporate funders. These four subgroups are all very important to Reincarnation Research and its future.

Second, I will contrast three different approaches as to how these subgroups have gone about collecting evidence (data) to substantiate or refute (disprove) the purported reality of reincarnation: these being Child Memory Studies, Hypnosis-derived Regression Studies, and Medium/Intuitive-derived Studies.

It is noteworthy that while all three approaches have been used or are being used, most all the members of these subgroups prefer Case Study as their method, and this being so I will emphasise the merits of this method. Specifically, I will outline attempts to improve the Case Study method with newer, more valid ('scientific') methods. This improvement work I title Continuous Improvement.

Third, I will put forward some personal views on likely future directions that reincarnation research will take, including my prediction that the numbers and types of investigators will expand to include ever-widening circles of society, not just academics and journalists, but also science-minded lay people. I will conclude by speculating on how the findings from the last 75 years of reincarnation research may impact the wider societal debate concerning evidence for survival after death.

WHAT IS REINCARNATION RESEARCH?

Reincarnation research is a subtopic within the larger field of life-after-death research, also called post-mortem research or *survival research*.

It is the investigation of the proposal that people after they die, re-inhabit other bodies and lead subsequent lives. This last term will be used in this article. Over the last 50 years significant progress has been made in the field of reincarnation research, particularly in regards to advances in its primary methodology, which is Case Study.

There are very few organisations across the globe that primarily support the study, publishing, and archiving of reincarnation research findings. Currently the largest and most established database of reincarnation cases resides in the United States at the University of Virginia, in its Department of Perceptual Studies (UVA-DOPS). It has been around now for about six decades. This database was designed and established by psychiatrist Dr. Ian Stevenson in the early 1960s. In the most recent two decades it was added to in small increments by some of Stevenson's former collaborators and a few external investigators.

During Stevenson's tenure those outside of Stevenson's team who have accessed this database are few in number—these research associates include two anthropologists, and currently a visiting academic from Japan, Dr. Ohkado Masayuki. In more recent times, at least in 2019, students from the externally managed University of Virginia School of Medicine are invited to volunteer to enter and conduct basic statistical analyses. Occasionally a visiting scholar is funded to visit and contribute to the DOPS research effort, now much reduced since the time Stevenson directed it.

IAN STEVENSON: CHILD MEMORY CASE STUDY

In this article I will not have ample space to cover the history of the Methods of Medical and Behavioural Science, particularly in regards to Case Study. However knowing about Case Study and its development is useful in order to better understand how evidence can support or refute the Reincarnation Hypothesis. That being so, I will confine my comments to Stevenson's contribution to Case Study for reincarnation research and not other areas of parapsychology.

By definition Case Study involves observations of events arising during daily life, occurring spontaneously (as opposed to occurring in a laboratory or field laboratory). In the best of case studies, the events are somehow recorded at the time by two types of people: (1) the experiencer, and (2) by those who were with the experiencer (informants). Later on, trained researchers collate these earlier observations and draft and publish an account, which becomes the actual Case Study. (NB: Stevenson evolved his methods of interviewing and analysis [Case Study] over a 50-year period; see the discussion in Part II in the Summary, Continuous Improvement.)

For early reports of phenomena (from mid 1800s until about the 1930's), Case Study served as the first choice of research method in both early Psychology and in early Parapsychology since so many psychic phenomena would occur spontaneously and in the mental spaces (experiences) of people who claimed to have them (e.g., precognition, poltergeists, telepathy, clairvoyance, apparitions, and so forth). Their existence could not be directly observed; phenomena had to be inferred based on the statements of those who claimed the experience.

By definition many psi phenomena (e.g., precognition, apparitions, telepathic impressions) are not easily captured by instruments, and do not occur 'on demand'. However, they are often remembered by experiencers who often describe them at the time or later on to *informants* (friends, family, colleagues). These descriptions were roughly classed as eye-witness accounts or *anecdotal evidence*. But as time went on and scientific researchers involved themselves in psychic research, many of the anecdotes were gathered and evolved into Case Studies or Reports. Thus the Case Study Method came to be front and centre for establishing the 'scientificness' of such research. Case Study was (and still is) an established and widely used scientific method. It was the primary and logical choice for Stevenson in the early 1950s when he began to dive into reports of children remembering previous lives.

Stevenson trained as a psychiatrist. Case Study was widely used in Psychiatry by the time Stevenson got his appointment as Chairman of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia. He immediately began using it for reincarnation investigations. Before Stevenson, investigators who employed Case Study included major scientific figures such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Charles Richet, Jean-Martin Charcot, and many others. So despite its limitations, Stevenson adopted as his primary tool what was considered a worthwhile and valid (though not perfect) method to study anomalous child psychiatry cases. These cases involved children exhibiting memories, speech patterns and behaviours that suggested they may have lived previous lives. This greatly intrigued Stevenson.

Stevenson was something of a maverick in Psychiatry. After winning an essay prize regarding possible evidence of past lives in the *Atlantic Magazine*, Stevenson was offered a major grant from Eileen Garrett of the Parapsychology Foundation in New York. Building on evidence he gathered during that grant cycle, he then found himself (i.e., his unit at the University of Virginia) being awarded a larger long-term grant from Xerox Founder Chester Carlson. Stevenson was thus freed up to focus instead on the child-based cases he was witnessing. After a few months of collecting leads, case studies, and news clips from around the world, Stevenson concluded that a large majority of these types of cases seemed to arise in Asia, Southeast Asia, and other non-Western regions. This therefore led Stevenson to send

himself and research teams overseas to gather further CORTs. This led to five decades of *steady research*, documenting and analysing cases of purported reincarnation. Starting from many hundreds of possible leads, Stevenson refined his data collection over time, ending his career around the year 2005 with close to 2,900 CORTs.

For a first-hand account of how Stevenson employed his research via Case Study, I would recommend journalist Tom Shroder's (2011) *Old Souls*. In that work, Shroder accompanied Stevenson on his final journey overseas to follow up on CORT subjects and families that Stevenson uncovered some years earlier. In his book Shroder wonderfully describes Stevenson's methods, detailing the many steps involved in this case research, ranging from the selection of reincarnation leads to the recruitment of child subjects to the deployment of research staff, to the collection of data via numerous case study interviews.

Up to a dozen research staff were involved for any particular case study. These included translators and informants. Informants were the primary channels for much of the spoken data; they provided the pathways leading to the villages and families of potential *subjects*—that is, the children who claimed to remember previous lives. At their best, informants were also useful in making and confirming past-life identifications, fact-checking, and spotting potential distorting factors, given that in most families, parents exert tremendous power and control over their children. In addition research teams had to be aware of the possibility of secondary gains that could be had (e.g., notoriety, publicity, claims over land or inheritance) for falsely claiming (or believing) that one's child was someone important reborn.

As of 2013, the Director of DOPS, Dr. James Tucker, claims 2000 cases have been entered and coded into the UVA CORT database. Various observers now put the aggregate number of DOPS cases between 2,700 and 2,900; with the number of solved cases (i.e., verified or 'solved' cases) at about 1,500.

STEVENSON'S OWN WORK

It is difficult to establish accurately the legacy of Ian Stevenson (1918-2007) to parapsychology specifically, and science more generally, because he was nearly always relegated to the 'fringes of science', or 'outside science', according to these sources: Wikipedia (Ian Stevenson, 2020); independent researcher James Matlock (2019), journalist Tom Shroder (Shroder, 2011), and an obituary and commentary by one of Stevenson's successors at UVA (Tucker, 2008). This being the case I recommend the reader go directly to Stevenson's own writings, especially

Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation (Stevenson, 1980), and *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* (Stevenson, 2016). These two sources are highly readable as Stevenson was a skilful and incisive master of the English language. His writing is not polemic or over-excited; instead I found it very level-headed and evidential. In essence it is considered and scientific.

For the serious scientist and hardcore skeptic, Stevenson compiled and published a large summary of his investigations, resulting in three volumes: *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects* (Stevenson, 1997a). This resource would be best accessed via university libraries, as it is voluminous, expensive, and uses much scientific and medico-legal language. However Stevenson was advised of its complexity, and took additional effort to condense and re-issue his work for the public in a more readable (and affordable) 300-page book *Where Biology and Reincarnation Intersect* (Stevenson, 1997b). A sample image lifted from his book is reproduced in Figure 1.

Since Stevenson's passing in 2007, his colleagues at UVA, Jim Tucker, and three or four former colleagues, have added some new cases to the CORT database. From my review of the UVA website, I estimate these additions to be about one dozen (though some may be reprises of earlier unpublished case studies, or updates on cases from Stevenson's earlier incomplete cases). Of these new, previously unpublished cases, I found the most evidential and notable to be Tucker's (2013) case of an American child named Ryan, age four. Ryan recalled memories and had dreams of living the life of a 1930s dancer, Hollywood movie extra, and talent-agency manager. His earliest statements indicated to his parents that he had strong memories of being an adult Hollywood movie professional who lived in Beverly Hills, California.

After months of investigation by Tucker and Ryan's parents, Tucker found a potential previous lifetime match to Ryan, an actor and talent scout named Marty Martyn (1903-1964; see *Miles-10*, 1990-2020). Ryan's numerous statements as to the life of Marty Martyn corresponded to the facts close to 85% of the time (considered a good across-lifetimes correspondence rate). After extensive Stevenson-style cross checking, Tucker and associates determined this case to be solved (authentic), and of several hypothetical explanations, reincarnation seemed to be the best explanation for it.

A solved case was deemed to occur when the present person's (child's) statements, behaviours, or memories were found to correspond to a 'high' degree with the lived experiences of the previous person the child was claiming to be. This was done by meticulous documenting of the child's statements and then matching these up to facts or testimonies of those who knew or lived with the person of the previous life.



Figure 29 Ma Htwe Win's legs when she was 11 years old. A deep constriction ring can be seen on the left thigh and a more shallow one on the lower part of the right leg. There was a band of increased pigmentation at the same level on the left leg. (The area of this band had formerly been depressed like a constriction ring.)

Figure 1. Case of the reincarnation type showing marks across two lifetimes (SOURCE: Stevenson, 1997b).

According to another reincarnation investigator not affiliated with UVA-DOPS, Dr. Walter Semkiw, M.D. (mentioned below) was told by James Tucker that 1,567 UVA CORTs have been solved/authenticated (Semkiw, n.d.). Importantly, Stevenson also found in many of his child cases, distinguishing physical features such as birthmarks or birth deformities. These features he photographed, measured, and documented; Stevenson found that such features would correspond in position and form for the two persons across their lifetimes.

Despite most of his decades of research of CRTs, Stevenson failed to note and work on special correspondences: namely, facial, cosmetic, and hairstyle traits. However, Stevenson (1997a) noted (briefly) that facial features did seem to have correspondences, but his many cases show he did not go to any lengths to document them pictorially as Semkiw later did.

Stevenson acted as a scientist sometimes more than as a clinician, so he was averse to possibly exaggerating or imagining what his data showed or pointed towards. In other words he sought to research apparent reincarnation phenomena using Science with a capital ‘S’, which in his view and motivation included strict adherence to scientific method, paying attention mostly or only to other medical or behavioural science-trained colleagues, recording all details of conversations (who, said what, where, when, and recorded by whom?), and cross-validating any claims, using multiple informants and researchers. Even when Stevenson finally had his work published in scientific journals he would often make the claim that his specific cases “suggested” themselves as “cases of the reincarnation type”; he was careful to never say “proven.” By thus adhering to this approach (with the same caution shown in police investigations) Stevenson improved Case Study as a social science investigative method.

It was only towards the last decade of his life that Stevenson indicated that of the eight explanations (hypotheses) that might best “explain” his 2600 or so current-to-past life matches, the hypothesis of reincarnation seemed best to fit the facts. But again he never said reincarnation is *proven to explain his cases*. Despite his best efforts, Stevenson’s work during most of his life achieved little widespread acknowledgement and standing within his profession of psychiatry; in fact his work was largely disregarded (Ian Stevenson, 2020). Stevenson died in 2007, leaving a legacy of 10 books, about one dozen medical articles, and several recorded interviews (which can be found on YouTube). After his death both his university co-workers as well as other researchers (including writers and lay investigators) took up his careful investigative *case study method* to uncover and study new cases. Stevenson’s surviving friends and colleagues at the University of Virginia thus continue to explore lines of evidence concerning the survival of consciousness after death. This is described next.

DEPARTMENT OF PERCEPTUAL STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

The Department of Perceptual Studies at the University of Virginia is an academic department composed mostly of clinical psychiatrists who, with the occasional help of visiting scholars, sometimes find and publish new studies of the reincarnation type, but they mostly ‘mine’ the older

material in the Stevenson Archives and DOPS database. The department has been the *de facto* institutional leader for the scientific investigation of reincarnation phenomena, due in no small part to Stevenson's long-term devotion to researching the reincarnation hypothesis. Stevenson considered himself a professional scientist, and since he was opening up an unwelcome line of research, that challenged the major tenets and assumptions of both science and western theology, he strove to be extra-diligent in directing his departmental work. Stevenson therefore wrote in a scientific format geared to academics and medical colleagues by publishing in medical and psychiatric journals, and thus avoided publishing or promoting his research via popular magazines, popular books, television and radio. Ultimately, however, his publications were few in number compared to the output of his colleagues in psychiatry and medicine, so Stevenson instigated the establishment of a new scientific journal the *Journal of Scientific Exploration (JSE)* in the early 1980s. The *JSE* continues to cover a wide variety of research studies, essays, and book reviews.

THE GREAT DIVIDE: SCIENCE AND THE STUDY OF THE PARANORMAL

Even after the release of Shroder's (2011) *Old Souls*, Stevenson continued to meet resistance (and sometimes ridicule) for his work; it was rarely accepted for publication by the top tier science journals, especially medical/psychiatric journals. When his submissions *were* accepted by editorial boards, their subsequent editorials would often soft-pedal the findings. In addition, many critics dismissed Stevenson's work beforehand simply because of its foray into what they considered a non-science area (the supernatural, spirituality, religion). As valiant and as widely accessible though his work was, Shroder's book did not create sufficient impact amongst scientists; thus there eventuated no groundswell amongst institutes, donors, universities, or foundations to set up similar research programs to verify or replicate Stevenson's work in regards to reincarnation.

To this author's knowledge, no new organisational entrants or research 'superstars' have continued, in a major way, Stevenson's reincarnation research efforts. No think-tanks, research institutes, or particular endowments have continued this line of important work. Thus the UVA-DOPS program remains the only major institutional provider of research for CORTS, and even that effort is limited to say two or three part-time staff in its DOPS unit. The faculty have to spend most of their time treating patients. In my observation, the UVA research output has been very gradual considering its early head start (since 1960), its large accumulated dataset, its medical school resources, and its prior worldwide contacts built up over four decades under Stevenson's direction. (According to Tucker,

who is the current director of UVA-DOPS, the DOPS database now has just under 3000 reincarnation type cases.)

The DOPS website states that it has access to the resources of their Medical School and, over the years, seems to average two to six research staff, with most devoting their time to seeing patients. In contrast to the days of Stevenson's activity programme, DOPS staff seems to have less resources and time available for researching CORTS. As of this writing, the DOPS faculty has produced six books since Stevenson's writings. These seem to have less to do with (new) research on cases of the reincarnation type, and more to do with the theoretical issues concerning the nature of consciousness and the current weaknesses in the underlying paradigm in science which is materialism (Gleig, 2007). Therefore, at the time of writing in 2020, the only scientific research unit that seems to exist is the one at the University of Virginia, where it all started with Stevenson around 1960. This is supplemented by a smattering of a half dozen investigators (journalists/writers mentioned below) and maybe two dozen lay people. Generally, the situation is dire considering the implications. What if reincarnation actually is the ongoing reality for us? Or what if reincarnation turned out to be some kind of artifact or artifice? Either way, there would be major social implications.

I now turn first to the researchers (academics and scholars) who identity career-wise with reincarnation research. There seem to be a large coterie of retired/inactive ones, which now outnumber the active ones.

CHILD MEMORY RESEARCHERS: ACTIVE

Stevenson intentionally and specifically wrote with academic researchers and medical professionals in mind. He wanted to work as a scientist and be considered by fellow scientists, especially medical scientists. Therefore his writings were not disseminated to the wider mass public. As it turned out, many of the journals to which he submitted did not take his work seriously. In fact it is said some academics ridiculed his work. In any event, Stevenson found more receptive audiences by turning to lesser known journals, including the parapsychological ones (often considered non-scientific). The above notwithstanding, when Stevenson died in 2007 he had produced 13 books and several dozen journal articles mostly dealing with reincarnation themes.

Importantly, Stevenson by the time of his death had amassed a sizable research database of cases numbering between 2700 and 3000 (estimates vary by source and date of the estimate, some of the cases were not as complete or reliable as others). The archive became a deep well from which not only his fellow UVA colleagues, like Jim Tucker, would draw

from, but also a handful of journalists and lay researchers were allowed to dip into it. Among the subsequent UVA research outputs from this well were two books on reincarnation: *Life before Life* (Tucker, 2005), and *Return to Life* (Tucker, 2013), and a 2012 anthology of Stevenson's writings, *Science, The Self, and Survival After Death* (by Dr. Emily Cook, Stevenson's former student).

Since Stevenson's death there has not been a great deal of independent research performed by investigators previously unaffiliated with the DOPS at the UVA. Some of these are mentioned below, but those who are active are few in number. After conducting a search using phone canvassing and online archival searches, this author found the following persons who could be considered 'top-tier' (i.e.. scientific) investigators of COURT. These are now featured.

JAMES TUCKER

Tucker is a Psychiatrist at the University of Virginia, and is seen as the current successor to Ian Stevenson's research, in both a figural sense and in an official capacity. Like Stevenson he has established cases by checking for cross correspondences between the child's claims, memories and behaviours pertaining to a previous life and evidence from that purported earlier life. When the correspondence is patent and numerous the case is deemed to be a *researched case*. When the previous lifetime identity is discovered and corroborated to a high degree via the cross checks mentioned above, the case is considered to be a *solved case*. Jim Tucker has compiled about a dozen such cases in North America and he explored these in his book *Life Before Life* (Tucker, 2005).

In the decade preceding Stevenson's passing, Tucker and his team formalised Stevenson's Case/Informant Interview questions into a standardised questionnaire. The Questionnaire items comprised a checklist of criteria to ensure the quality of obtaining accurate answers and to reduce the likelihood of fraud, distorted memories, and false positives. This is commendable as it will only improve the validity of current and future field investigations. In addition I would suggest such a checklist has likely improved the overall efficiency of data collection (avoiding poor prospects or blind alleys and ferreting out more details where possible). Other (non-DOPS) researchers would be wise to adopt this checklist, or one aligned with it. However, when I scanned through the online literature databases (EBSCO, PubMed, and several databases under Athena), I found only one other non-UVA research study that employed the measure.

JAMES G. MATLOCK (INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER)

Dr. James G. Matlock received his Ph.D. in Anthropology from Southern Illinois University in the 1960s (James Matlock, 2019). SPR's *Psi Encyclopedia* entry for Matlock states that he engages in parapsychological investigation and has written on the history of parapsychology, the anthropology of religion, postmortem survival, and reincarnation. *Psi Encyclopedia* also mentions that Matlock has worked at the American Society for Psychical Research and the Rhine Research Center, and is currently a Research Fellow with the Parapsychology Foundation (headquartered in New York City).

Academics, investigators, and students of reincarnation would do well to obtain and use as a reference his 2015-released book, *Signs of Reincarnation: Exploring Beliefs, Cases, and Theories* (Matlock, 2019). This book outlines the history and development of reincarnation beliefs, from anthropological studies to today's reincarnation research (including some of his own cases). After giving a brief overview of hypnosis-derived studies, the majority of his book focuses on case studies done by himself or others who were co-workers with Stevenson.

Matlock gives an in-depth exposition of various theories of reincarnation including his own lengthy (and rather technical) Whiteheadian "process" view. He has an interesting 'take' on the relevance of reincarnation for modern-day psychology, with his book-jacket blurb stating "it [reincarnation] does not require the acceptance of any radically new concepts or the abandonment of well-established findings in mainstream psychology or biology." The reader may take issue with this last claim, particularly if they are involved in clinically based psychology (such as myself) who have yet to find reincarnation phenomena taught as part of their training, or embedded in the current canon of evidence-based treatments. In fact reincarnation theory/research has been ignored by mainstream schools and adherents of professional psychology since the codification of Psychology as an applied discipline from the 1920's onwards.

In 2016, Matlock co-wrote (with Erlendur Haraldsson) a second book. This one deals not just with the 'tail end' of reincarnation (one's rebirth into a new body), but importantly its 'middle segment' (the so-called *Intermission*). The book is entitled *I Saw a Light and Came Here* (Haraldsson & Matlock, 2017). My initial read of it reveals that it re-visits and restates many of Stevenson's original cases and findings, but it has added three brand new cases. Importantly it explores in more detail the claims of children who report on their existence between lifetimes (the *Intermission*).

Most recently Matlock is a contributor to an online parapsychology course run by parapsychology educators Nancy Zingrone, Ph.D., and Carlos Alvarado, Ph.D.; Matlock has founded and curates his own online Facebook forum called *Signs of Reincarnation*.

OHKADO MASAYUKI

Ohkado originally trained in the Humanities as a Linguist and English language expert, has written two books (both in Japanese) on the post-mortem survival: *Why Are We Born and Die?* (2015) and *A Study of Spirituality, with Special Reference to Xenoglossy* (2012). Ohkado is a Professor in the Faculty of General Education (Humanities) at Chubu University in Aichi, Japan; and a Visiting Professor at the University of Virginia (DOPS) in the USA. He is regularly published in journals that focus on post-mortem survival, mediumship, reincarnation and near-death experience.

I have read and privately reviewed much of his reincarnation research (i.e., his journal articles of the last dozen years), which are CORT studies performed along the lines of Ian Stevenson's case investigations. These are generally sensitively conducted studies of early childhood loss (e.g., stillbirth) followed by (mitigated by) an apparent rebirth.

In the manner of Ian Stevenson, Ohkado generally checks and lists the cross correspondences between the current child's statements and behaviours and those purportedly made by the prior lifetime personality. However, I believe he could have specified more of these to check in his protocols. One shortfall also is that he did not explore the possible wishes (conscious or unconscious) of the parents to have their child 'return' to them. Such wish fulfillment could have been transmitted to the child (e.g., the child identified with such wishes), making the case falsely appear to be an actual case of reincarnation. As to the possibility of fraud and secondary gains, I was expecting Ohkado to address these also. He did not. However this oversight is offset perhaps because he constructed this case in a Japanese context where in my (and many others') view, informants face the possibility of losing 'face,' especially if informants are later found to be falsifying claims or making up tall stories about a newborn. Thus in Ohkado's natural homeland of Japan I believe there was and is an automatic reduction in the possibility of distorted or false reporting (fraud).

In terms of ethnographic case study reporting, I found that Ohkado managed to strike a good balance between being scientific and being able to gather in and describe respectfully the lived experience of the participants; he marshals the facts clearly while narrating compassionately. These ethical considerations are something that I hope present and future reincarnation

researchers will consider. Stevenson in his books took great pains to de-identify (make anonymous) his subjects and the informants connected to them (personal names and locations).

Compassionate reporting is important also since such cases almost always involve evolving levels of distress as during interviews parents may find out they have children who consider themselves children of another (previous lifetime) family, and they discover their son or daughter developing attitudes, values and behaviours which run counter to those of their own family. (For example the child of Hindu parents starts showing signs of being a Muslim in a previous life.)

Such compassionate and sensitive reporting may also have helped Ohkado towards a faster and deeper understanding of the afterlife world (the Intermission) since parents and their child may produce statements or artifacts (drawings) of that world. Ohkado reported on several accounts (two of which he investigated) where the child subjects reported on coming to agreements during their Intermission to be reborn together (Wehrstein, 2017).

In his cases, Ohkado typically presents two narrative arcs which eventually intersect: that of the family who lost a loved one (the mother of the family), and that of a birth two or more years later. In the second event the family is surprised by unusual *signifiers* (e.g., statements, memories, and behaviours) the child spontaneously shows (sometimes including foreign language vocalisations). These signifiers seem to reflect (match) a previous life.

In addition to his finding and highlighting various *synchronicities* and *paranormal events*, Ohkado manages to hunt down and document statements and/or artifacts collected by family members in the first three years of the child's life, *before* the investigators' arrival and interviewing. Just as important, he begins his on-site investigations within one to two years of the date of the subject's statements/behaviours. An example of Ohkado's sensitive investigation and analysis is the case of a girl subject Momoka (Ohkado, 2017). Momoka (meaning 'essence of flowers') became ill for unknown reasons and was treated by doctors and nurses in years 4 to 7 via various medical clinics and hospitals. She eventually passed away due to adrenal cancer at age six years, eight months. A few years after Momoka's death the mother divorced and remarried. After remarrying she gave birth to a boy, Kanon, who fortunately came into the world with no health issues. I find most interesting the fact that Kanon (a boy) exhibited many of the same likes and behaviours of Momoka (a girl), thus going against the (strict) genderised roles found in Japanese society. Ohkado listed these 'Stevenson-style' as nine correspondences in Table 1 of his article (e.g., facial features, likes and dislikes, etc.). I refer to these as *correspondence lists*. Furthermore Kanon (at age one) spontaneously wrote

a letter to his mother, presented it to her, and when asked what it meant initiated a conversation almost word-for-word on the same life and death issues that Momoka had previously aired with her mother during Momoka's last six months.

Ohkado also found, through an online *facial analysis and matching program*, that Kanon (when aged one to three years) had highly similar facial features to Momoka and that three judges (not known to the family) all selected Kanon when presented with a line up of four other similar photos. I mentioned earlier the confounding variable of parental wish-fulfilment in generating a false positive of a CORT. Ohkado reports that the mother and her new husband believed Kanon to be a reincarnation of Momoka, but Ohkado did not fully explore the parents' initial motivation for this belief, or the possibility of secondary gains.

In addition to finding strong correspondences between Kanon's behaviours, words and preferences and those of the previous child Momoka, Ohkado recorded evidence of several *paranormal events* that linked Momoka's death to Kanon's birth. To begin with, Kanon's birth was foreshadowed in an *announcing dream* reported by the mother within hours or days of her conception of her future son Kanon. In addition, her new husband also had a similar dream (at roughly the same time) in which he believed he could hear Momoka at play (Ohkado, 2017, p. 555). Following these two separate dreams, Momoka's presence seemed to be demonstrated via another unique synchronicity. In Ohkado's words:

... on November 20th [2008, two weeks after intuiting she was pregnant], she [Momoka's mother] turned on the TV to find that on a variety program titled *Utaban* the band *Mr. Children* was about to sing a new song. The title of the song was "Hana no Nioi (The Scent of Flowers)," which she thought was suggestive since it appeared to her to imply that Momoka ("Ka" in "Momoka" means "flower" as was explained above) was still present. The lyrics of the song were also suggestive with such phrases as:

Even if this is goodbye forever,
I can hear you breathing
I just know that in some other form, with that same smile
You'll come to see me again.

Even if this really is goodbye
I hear your warm breathing
I just know that in some other form, with the same gaze
You'll come to see me again. (Ohkado, 2017, p. 556)

Ohkado continues to make original contributions to reincarnation research on a year-to-year basis. His CV lists the number of his reincarnation related publications in scientific, peer-reviewed journals number at a respectable 20. As of this writing, Ohkado has authored two books on his CORTs (in Japanese only); in addition, he has made several TV and radio appearances. He currently holds a visiting professorship at the UVA-DOPS, in addition to his professorship position at Chubu University.

CHILD MEMORY RESEARCHERS: RETIRED/INACTIVE

The following investigators/researchers I discovered to be either retired from reincarnation work, or working in a reduced or occasional basis (semi-active status). However, they merit a mention as I believe they have contributed in a significant way to reincarnation research. Like the active researchers above, the following have published their child memory cases in journals or books. Most of these child memory researchers have been past collaborators of Stevenson's at one time or another. Though now retired or inactive, I believe serious students of reincarnation should know of their work.

ERLENDUR HARALDSSON

Professor Erlendur Haraldsson had a long and distinguished career in clinical psychology and has worked with both children and adults. During the 1980s he and two other Stevenson-trained researchers, Antonia Mills and Jürgen Keil, were hired by Stevenson to assist in his overseas field studies of CORTs. Haraldsson originally worked and taught in his home country Iceland, and had previously investigated various other aspects of parapsychology, particularly mediumship (Haraldsson & Gissurarson, 1989).

As mentioned above, Haraldsson co-wrote the book, *I Saw a Light and Came Here* (Haraldsson & Matlock, 2017), which also explores the topic of children's pre-birth memories. In the book there are several accounts of children seeming to remember life in a kind of spirit state between lifetimes. This is commonly referred to as the *Intermission*. So-called intermission memories (and the cases surrounding them) are of particular interest to many parapsychologists, scholars, theologians, writers and the wider public, since they bear on essential questions of the existence and nature of an afterlife.

JÜRGEN KEIL

Dr. Jürgen Keil of the University of Tasmania, a former collaborator of Ian Stevenson during the latter's worldwide overseas investigations, contributed to Stevenson's work in collecting case data from both Asian and European regions. In doing this work he was instrumental in providing evidence for 'experimental birthmarks.' Experimental birthmarks have implications beyond reincarnation research, in that they suggest some mechanism is at work that can transmit physical impressions (e.g., wounds and physical marks) across lifetimes. This could be due to the present parent knowing the mark or injury left on the previous body (corpse) and then somehow facilitating a transfer of this impression to the foetus, resulting in a birthmark in the 'new' body. This process may also imply that there exists an active agency ('soul', 'spirit', 'mind') that operates in a discarnate realm before manifesting in a reborn state. Stevenson himself even in his final writings admitted that he could only offer conjecture about this including the idea of a non-material body he termed a *psychophore* (Stevenson, 1997b, pp 182-185). Related to his conjecture I also found a hypothetical process put forward by Stevenson's former associate, Dr. Jurgen Keil.

Long before his interests in reincarnation developed, Keil investigated macro-PK (psychokinesis) cases, including the purported PK abilities of the Russian psychic Nina Kulagina, mentioned in a popular book at the time (Ostrander & Schroeder, 1979). Later one of Keil's theoretical contributions to reincarnation research is the idea of *thought bundles*. These would be remnants of a personality which, while not constituting a soul, seem able to manifest after a person's death in places, situations or rebirthed bodies (Hassler, 2011; Nahm & Hassler, 2011). In other words it seemed to manifest like a multi-fragmented intelligence, perhaps coming into being or manifesting with time as a *psychophore* (a the hypothetical vehicle of mental heredity).

In 1988, Keil published a book on the work of Joseph Gaither Pratt during the latter's three decades as a research associate at the Rhine's parapsychology laboratory, the Rhine Research Center (Pratt & Keil, 1987). The book gives an interesting insider's view of how the laboratory (and Rhine) worked. In 1970, together with Pratt, Keil was awarded the Parapsychology Foundations' McDougall Award for their research with the research subject Pavel Stepanek. Following a long and fruitful career at the University of Tasmania, Keil is now retired as an emeritus professor.

ANTONIA MILLS

Dr. Antonia Mills earned her Ph.D. in Anthropology from Harvard University. In the 1980s she worked on various Stevenson Projects, particularly in India. She later did reincarnation-based fieldwork with Native American peoples in the Pacific Northwest of Canada. Mills used Stevenson's methods to study CORT cases among the Beaver and Gitxsan First Nations of Canada (Mills, 1988b). This was followed by a grant to continue further study with the Gitxsan and a new study of the Wet'suwet'en First Nations (Mills, 1988a).

Mills has taught Indigenous Culture for the last three decades at undergraduate and graduate levels, most recently through the University of North British Columbia, in the course titled *Indigenous Perspectives on Reincarnation and Rebirth*. She co-authored *Amerindian Rebirth: Reincarnation Belief among North American Indians and Inuit* (Mills & Slobodin, 1994). As of writing, Mills continues to document, research and write about the reincarnation experiences of Western Canada's Amerindian peoples.

SATWANT PASRICHA

Dr. Satwant Pasricha served a distinguished career as lecturer and researcher at NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences) in Bangalore, India (Satwant Pasricha, 2020). Her NIMHANS work began in December 1980 (nearly 40 years ago) as a Lecturer in Clinical Parapsychology; she then rose to the role of Assistant Professor, then Associate Professor and finally Additional (Adjunct) Professor of Clinical Psychology. Pasricha became disillusioned early in her career as a child and family psychologist because she was not satisfied with the conventional explanations of unusual behaviour in a subset of her child clients. In response she turned her sights towards parapsychology, which in turn led her to the work of Ian Stevenson. In the early 1970's, she began working with Stevenson.

The 1970s were an opportune time as Stevenson was turning his attention more towards Asia; Asian families, whose youngest offspring were indicating they had lived previous lives, were presenting themselves more frequently per capita than in other regions such as Canada, USA, and Europe. Stevenson believed this higher frequency to be due to the long term religio-cultural acceptance of reincarnation in Asian (Near to Far East) regions.

During their peak years of research, when Stevenson and his team found leads (often through local media and local lore accounts), they rated

them as to their plausibility and the ability to reach them, and those that seemed worthy of follow-up were visited; once families, informants, and subjects were interviewed, the case had to meet listed criteria. If the case had a high number of criteria met, it became an investigative case. And if it later met certain scientific criteria, it became a CORT.

After these early years of productive collaboration with Stevenson, Pasricha set out to research CORT cases independently. This resulted in a Ph.D. thesis and two books: the first book being *Claims of Reincarnation* (Pasricha, 1990/2019). Her second book is *Can the Mind Survive Beyond Death?* (Pasricha, 2007).

I have managed to review just over half of Pasricha's first book, *Claims of Reincarnation* (Pasricha, 1990/2019). I can vouch that this updated 2019 version is evidence-based, well-organised and generally readable. After the first three chapters with its synopsis of reincarnation history, her own background and several statistical tables, I found to my pleasant surprise that Pasricha managed to provide readers with an additional 60 cases to those originally investigated by Stevenson. In Chapter Four, she compares and contrasts what she found *en toto* with what Stevenson discovered—a highly useful analysis for serious laypeople and researchers of reincarnation.

In addition to providing these additional cases (which serve as additional tests of the reincarnation explanation), Pasricha has offered useful tips for improving upon CORT investigation methods; she describes these in Chapter 2. For example, she was fluent in four Indian languages as well as English, so she was able to eliminate possible “noise” from the use of volunteer or nonprofessional interpreters, often drawn from the local community. In the earlier Stevenson work such interpreters would translate during families' difficult conversations, and many of these took place in short timeframes. Thus there arose the possibility that the interpreter-investigator team would miss an important statement, mistranslate, or misconstrue a meaning.

In addition sometimes Stevenson or his team would arrive months or years after the child initially reported their prior-life memories. Such longer time lapses could introduce possibilities for false or distorted memories. Pasricha sought to obviate those issues; she claims to have arrived and interviewed 94% of her subjects within one year of her being notified, with 60% of these being contacted within six months. These were important milestones for in CORT cases a child's memories will fade away within a half dozen years after they first offer them.

After recently contacting NIMHANS, I was told Pasricha is now retired as an Emeritus Professor. However Pasricha occasionally delivers an occasional lecture or interview on her reincarnation work.

KIRTI SWAROOP RAWAT

In my investigations of active vs. inactive researchers, I found some older websites, and one of these featured the work of Dr. Kirti Swaroop Rawat, who is based in India. Little known in the West, I learned that Rawat has also published in the more general area of parapsychology on topics such as apparitions and clairvoyance; these are mentioned on his website.² On Rawat's website may be found some reprised summaries of Stevenson-derived CORT case studies including those of James Leininger and Shanti Devi. Rawat provides a few non-Stevenson cases independently researched by himself, as well. However, most of these studies are now dated and not as precise as Stevenson's. In 2007, Rawat co-authored a book with Titus Rivas titled *Reincarnation: The Scientific Evidence is Building* (Rawat & Rivas, 2007). I intend to get a copy to help see things from a non-UVA, Asian research perspective.

* * *

This concludes Part I of this article. Part II looks at independent (non-academic) reincarnation researchers (e.g., Walter Semkiw, Dieter Hassler, and Titus Rivas), and will include an extended discussion of improved methods to test the reincarnation hypothesis.

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² <http://reincarnationresearches.org/dr-ks-rawat.html>

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