

## **New Cases in Burma, Thailand, and Turkey: A Limited Field Study Replication of Some Aspects of Ian Stevenson's Research**

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**Abstract**—For about 25 years, Ian Stevenson has presented detailed accounts of his first hand investigations which suggest a substantial basis for the widespread acceptance of rebirth or reincarnation cases in some communities. This investigation was limited to two main questions: Do some children and their families report that information and other indicators emerge which provide connections to other persons who have previously died? Is it necessary to assume that some of the information and that some of the indicators are due to paranormal processes because they cannot be reasonably accounted for by more orthodox means? The results of this investigation are based on a preliminary evaluation of all 23 cases studied in 1988. The 23 cases can be regarded as relatively unselected samples from three countries, namely Burma, Thailand, and Turkey. The answer to the first question is an unqualified "yes." The answer to the second question is also affirmative but due to the limitations of field study conditions, the affirmation can only be justified in somewhat subjective probability terms, nevertheless, in terms comparable to what in quantitative research is called significant. Although the question whether the suggested paranormal results support the reincarnation hypothesis was not pursued, some aspects of this investigation which seem relevant to this question are briefly discussed.

### **Connections Between Children and Persons Who Had Previously Died**

Devoting a major part of his life to this research Ian Stevenson (IS), has argued in numerous publications (1966, 1975, 1977, 1980, 1983, and 1987), that in various communities, some children have memories, behavioral characteristics, as well as physiological peculiarities which seem to uniquely connect them with particular individuals who have previously died. These cases can only be regarded as potentially important with respect to reincarnation or rebirth hypotheses if these connections to previous lives (PLs) include some paranormal aspects. Two publications by IS (1988, 1990) in the *JSE*, although primarily concerned with unusual aspects of the cases studied, provide examples of IS's investigations.

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*Acknowledgments.* This work was partly supported from the Division of Personality Studies, Health Sciences Center, University of Virginia. Thanks are due to the interpreters referred to in this report, to Abdurrahman Karaali, Edip Ediboglu, and Semsettin Duan for their help with contacting cases in Turkey and to Sue Ross for typing the manuscript.

In 1988, I carried out a field investigation which attempted to establish:

1. whether some children and their families report that connections exist which are based on memories and other characteristics of persons who had previously died. These characteristics may include behavior patterns, such as skills and aptitudes, health-related indicators and, other physiological peculiarities such as birthmarks and/or defects and racial characteristics.
2. whether on the basis of a qualitative analysis strong indications emerge which suggest that, in addition to normal aspects of such connections, paranormal ones must have also played a part.
3. whether frameworks and methods—in addition to those already employed by IS—can be introduced which might assist in estimating the probability of (2) above.

Prior to the investigation, it was agreed that if the conclusion was reached that paranormal aspects played a part, it would not be the purpose of this report to pursue the question as to whether such results can be best accommodated within the framework of a rebirth or reincarnation hypothesis. Nevertheless, at the conclusion some aspects of this question will be briefly discussed.

For this investigation, it seems appropriate to define the term *connection* as an identifiable similarity or equivalence between, on the one hand, actions or mental and/or physiological states and characteristics of a previous personality (PP), i.e., of a person who had previously died and, on the other hand, those of a subject (S), usually a child, who is alive. It is assumed that all these connections contain some normal elements, including coincidental similarities and not necessarily any paranormal aspects at all. Nevertheless, paranormal aspects or processes may manifest themselves in these connections, and may be the most striking feature of some of them. Rebirth or reincarnation as a possible and perhaps even as the most appropriate interpretation of such paranormal aspects, could not be reasonably maintained as more than a symbolic concept, if it was assumed that paranormal aspects do not play a part at least in some of these connections.

Since the field work was carried out along similar lines previously employed by IS, other terms already introduced by IS (1987, p. 20) will be used without suggesting that any interpretative conclusions which may be implied by these terms should necessarily be adopted. For the summaries and discussions of actual cases, terms like *rebirth*, *reincarnation*, and *previous life* (PL) will frequently be used because these were the terms which were used by the people concerned.

### Independence of the Study

This relatively independent field work was encouraged and supported by IS. Some comments, therefore, are appropriate which clearly indicate the

limitations of this independence as well as other aspects of my interest in this area which may have had a bearing on the fieldwork itself as well as on this written account of it.

More than 20 years ago, I visited IS for the first time at the University of Virginia. At that stage, I mainly worked in association with the late J. G. Pratt, carrying out experiments quite unrelated to Stevenson's reincarnation studies. During several further visits to the Division of Personality Studies, some of them supported by IS, I have for some time developed a high regard for IS which could best be summarized by such terms as professional appreciation and personal friendship. Some readers may question whether this is a good basis for an independent study. However, my high regard for IS leaves me in no doubt that he would welcome any results in his field of interest which are based on sound research, whether they support his point of view or not. Indeed, I am sure that he would regard it as quite improper if I reported any research findings in such a way that they did not fully reflect my own views based on the research which I conducted.

Prior to this field work, I have not been involved in survival, reincarnation, or rebirth research. It is fair to say that my interest in this area has always been rather limited because I regard a belief in the finality of death as reasonable. I regard the normal influence human beings can exercise beyond their lifespan (on account of their work and involvement with others when they are alive) as a sufficiently humbling, as well as an elating experience which to me does not suggest a need for any additional survival possibilities. I also realize that this apparently quite personal position in my belief system is nevertheless influenced by cultural and other factors and that in a different community setting I might have developed quite a different point of view.

It is also for this reason that I preferred not to be involved in the interpretation of any paranormal results. Although I have no difficulty in considering rebirth or reincarnation intellectually, I am not sure to what extent such considerations can be kept free of unconscious distortions when these considerations begin to have a bearing on my personal belief system. Perhaps more importantly, by avoiding any involvement in IS's interpretation that the rebirth hypothesis provides the best fit for such data, my own investigations remained relatively straightforward and do not require any special expertise with respect to philosophical and religious questions which cannot be avoided when the rebirth or reincarnation hypothesis is included.

### **Procedure**

I investigated all the cases by interviewing the persons concerned with the help of an interpreter. Notes and occasionally tape recordings were made during these interviews.

There are some general differences between the way cases were investigated in this study compared to most cases reported by IS. A large number of IS's cases were based on an initial investigation and frequently on several

follow-up interviews at a later stage after all the details of the initial investigation had been examined. Although such follow-up interviews would obviously be desirable in practically all of my cases, under the time and travel restrictions this was only possible to a limited extent.

Since the second question — whether paranormal processes are involved — very soon became the major consideration in this study, I tried to pursue those aspects which might throw some light on this question and I avoided time consuming, but in the long run, highly desirable tasks such as finding postmortem records, birth certificates, and similar documents. I can, to some extent, justify this choice by pointing out that if there is no disagreement about the existence of a subject and of a PP, official documentation frequently does not have a bearing on the paranormality question. Postmortem reports may be most valuable if birthmarks are a major and potentially paranormal feature of a case, but my cases — to the extent that postmortem reports might have been obtained at all — would probably not have been improved (as far as the paranormality question is concerned) on account of such records.

### Indigenous Acceptance of Cases

Readers in countries in which reincarnation cases are rarely reported may need to be assured that in other communities such cases are, in fact, reported and often accepted. Based on field observations and qualitative evidence, I would argue that the essential aspects of these cases are truthfully reported from the point of view of those who experience them directly or indirectly. Although deliberate deceptions may occur from time to time, such occurrences are quite rare and do not have any real bearing on this first question. My finding that with rare exceptions those who report cases speak the truth as they see it is also based on the following more specific observations:

1. Practically all interviews conducted in Burmese villages (and to a lesser degree, this was also happening in Thailand and Turkey) took place in public. An individual could not make statements without the rest of the village being aware of it. In villages, particularly in Burma, belief in reincarnation is an important aspect of religious and community life. False claims would generally be regarded as major transgressions of the behavioral codes of these communities. In small villages most of the people seem to be aware of existing cases and intentional misrepresentations made by one individual would be obvious to most of those present, who, during interviews, frequently express approval and agreement with statements which correspond to their memories and experiences. I have no doubt that in most of these small communities disapproval would be clearly voiced if false or misleading statements were made.
2. In Thailand and Turkey, parents of children who appear to have connections to PLs, frequently do not welcome these connections. Particu-

larly, some fathers are most upset if their sons tell them something like: "You are not my father, my father's name is . . ." Some parents in Thailand give special food to such children which is supposed to help them to forget their PLs. Particularly in Turkey, at times, some such children are beaten by their fathers when these children try to talk about their PLs.

3. Many parents—whether they strongly oppose their children's connections to PLs or not—make an effort to investigate their children's claim and visit the villages and houses that these children point out to them. Such visits are noticed by others who are not directly related to the case.
4. A study of the details of the cases investigated suggests agreement with the assumption that most of the people involved provided information in good faith and considerable disagreement with deception and conspiracy hypotheses.
5. On one occasion, a professional psychologist, Duansmorn Likitsawat, from the hospital in Surat Thani in Thailand participated in the investigation of the Ourarat Srineel case. She stated at the beginning that she did not believe in reincarnation and she had not changed her mind after our investigation. Nevertheless, she came to the conclusion that the people involved spoke the truth as they saw it.

In general, I am confident that any reasonable person—no matter how opposed to reincarnation or to paranormal aspects of such connections—would come to a similar conclusion about most of the cases. Once the conclusion is reached that children and their relatives do indeed report connections between themselves and PPs, the main question that remains is whether these connections can be accounted for by normal means, including coincidences, or whether paranormal ones appear to be involved as well.

### Assessment of Paranormality

Analyzing the cases in order to estimate to what extent paranormal aspects or processes are involved probably invokes in most readers some negative reaction to the term *paranormal* and perhaps in some a complete rejection of paranormal possibilities. Unfortunately, in the popular literature, the term *paranormal* is frequently distorted and sensationalized to a point which justifies such a complete rejection. For the purpose of this analysis, *paranormal* simply indicates that some information was not obtained by any normal means that can presently be suggested, such as a child overhearing conversations, etc., and later repeating details while the child is no longer aware of the source. Normal information may be mixed up with paranormal information. Similarly birthmarks in themselves may be due to normal physiological processes, but in some cases the location, shape, appearance, color, and texture of birthmarks may be regarded as *paranormal*.

Although it is never possible to rule out all hypothetical normal explanations with absolute certainty, the degree to which this is attempted provides some measure of the likelihood that a paranormal process is involved. Case studies are relatively complex summaries of statements and observations relating to even more complex behavioral responses and experiences, personality characteristics, and physiological peculiarities. Consequently, it is not possible to list conditions which help to exclude normal aspects, in some kind of hierarchical order. Nevertheless, the following conditions are likely to strengthen a claim for the presence of paranormal aspects.

1. S and S's family do not know and have no contact with PP's family until S has made definite and potentially verifiable verbal statements.
2. S makes numerous unambiguous statements which are relatively independent of each other about a PP and a PL which can be verified.
3. S provides information about something not known to anybody—except, in the past, to PP—which can be verified; e.g., some item hidden by PP and recovered by S.
4. Statements made by S—preferably before PP's family is involved—are noted by more than one member of S's family and preferably by others (not belonging to the family) as well.
5. Without any opportunity to learn or imitate, S is able to do something which corresponds to some activity PP was able to carry out. For example, S is able to speak a language or dialect which is not used in S's family, and which is not spoken by persons with whom S had contact.
6. Similar to (5), but S has some opportunity to learn and imitate. Nevertheless, S seems far more proficient than would normally be expected.
7. S has birthmarks and or deformaties which correspond to injuries or other peculiarities of PP. (Several birthmarks which correspond to specific injuries sustained by PP are more impressive than one birthmark which corresponds to a large injury which has no compelling feature in agreement with the location of the birthmark.)
8. Unusual preferences and phobias of S at an early age which do not make sense in terms of S's experiences in his or her life, but which correspond to some important preferences or traumas in PP's life.
9. Although more difficult to evaluate, the intensity and spontaneity with which statements are made and with which emotions are expressed, also have a bearing on the assessment.

This list could be extended. It can also be integrated, to some extent, if it is kept in mind that there are mainly two criteria in operation here on the basis of which paranormality can be assessed. On the one hand, the number and the complexity of relatively independent statements and other characteristics which correspond to verifiable statements, features, and facts associated with PP must be taken into account because a small number of statements based on fantasies could, by chance, be in agreement with some aspects of

PP's life. On the other hand, the question should be raised, to what extent did barriers exist that made it impossible or unlikely that seemingly paranormal connections between PP and S occurred by normal means.

As I indicated earlier in my assessment, deliberate deceptions do not play an important role, but the probability of self-deception errors and distortions must be seriously considered and, as far as possible, eliminated. Witnesses who are not part of the immediate family circle of S may not be completely free from influences which maintain self-deception but the risk of this occurring is reduced. Motivation also has a bearing on this question. Parents who do not welcome reincarnation cases are less likely to interact with S in ways that might lead to self-deception. However, it would be unfair to conclude that parents who are less opposed to reincarnation necessarily encourage such interactions. Children who seem to remember a PL under more favorable circumstances than their present life are more likely to be motivated by wishful thinking but such socio-economic differences are not a sufficient reason to reject such claims. Similarly, memories of a less favorable PL cannot, on socio-economic grounds, be regarded as a sufficient reason to accept such claims.

In order to assess the cases in a way that has some similarity to a quantitative evaluation, I am suggesting the following procedure and criteria. Each case is first assumed to be based on normal processes only and an attempt is made to fit the data into a framework of normal processes. Items which cannot be readily included, and which seem to demand some paranormal aspects can be combined such that each case can be assessed as significantly positive, strongly positive, or moderately positive. A case may also be judged to be neutral or moderately negative, strongly negative, or significantly negative. However, negative cases (in contrast to some quantitative research) cannot be combined with positive ones in order to support (along similar lines as in two-tailed tests) the hypothesis that paranormal processes are involved. In the overall assessment of cases, negative ones necessarily reduce or eliminate the total positive findings. For the purpose of this study, negative cases are defined as those which are regarded as reincarnation cases in the community in which they are reported, but which, after some analysis, appear to be due to normal processes. Most of these negative cases could probably be called self-deception cases. Numbers suggest a degree of accuracy which is not justified for this assessment. Nevertheless, the categories can be visualized by keeping in mind that "neutral" attempts to indicate a .5 and "significantly positive" a greater than .95 probability that paranormality is involved. It is assumed (in a somewhat similar way as in a heads/tails distribution of coins) that seemingly paranormal aspects of cases have a .5 probability given that normal causes and/or chance are responsible.

In order to make the selection processes explicit, all 23 cases pursued in this study were included in a preliminary evaluation. Brief summaries are provided for about half of the cases which are sufficient to illustrate the evaluation. One case, as a kind of anchorage point, is included with full

details. Some of the cases (7) were then excluded from further consideration because, under the existing time limitations, they could not be investigated to a point where a reasonable assessment could be made. This exclusion was carried out predominantly against the hypothesis that paranormality is involved, because such incomplete cases typically look positive in the first place but, without further checks and information, this assessment does not yet seem justified.

In the following list of cases, a call name which refers to a particular feature of each case is added, and these names will be used when cases are compared and discussed. These names are introduced for convenience only, since most of the real names of the subjects concerned are unfamiliar to many readers, and somewhat difficult to remember.

#### *Cases in Burma*

- 8 August 1988: Ma Aye Aye Maw (5)—Shy girl case (S at first would not talk to us).
- 8 August 1988: Ma Nyo (36)—Sex change, dacoit case (PP died as a dacoit).
- 8 August 1988: U Tun Kyi (50)—Firewood chestmark case (PP's chest was burned by a piece of firewood).
- 9 August 1988: Ma Tin Sein (17)—Pierced corpse case (PP's body was pierced when it was pushed into a grave).
- 9 August 1988: Ma Myint Myint (22)—Discarnate terror case (S claims PP died of fright by a discarnate).
- 10 August 1988: Mg Myint (26)—Old age case (PP died at age 73).

#### *Cases in Thailand*

- 18 August 1988: Ourarat Srineel (8)—Hospital case (S was taken to a hospital when S started to talk about her PL).
- 4 November 1988: Sripha Ruken (16)—Buffalo case (PP died when looking after a buffalo).
- 4 November 1988: Scrimon Manokhan (34)—Retribution case (S believes that her foot deformity is due to misconduct in the PL of the PP).
- 6 November 1988: Tutkhorn Chitpricha (6)—Bangkok, long distance case (S lives in Bangkok, PP lived and died about 500 kilometers away). (Full details are provided).
- 9 November 1988: Todsac Gowana (11)—Great grandmother case (PP is claimed to be the great grandmother of S).

#### *Cases in Turkey*

- 19 November 1988: Amed Biiyukasik (56)—Execution case (PP was executed by mistake).
- 19 November 1988: Gomol Büyükasik (10)—Suicide case (S claims that PP committed suicide).
- 20 November 1988: Mehmet Arikdal (5)—Adana case (S claims to have lived in Adana during his PL).



- 21 November 1988: Demet Kiziltan (8)—Murdered wife case (S claims PP was murdered by PP's husband).
- 21 November 1988: Bedia Gulbahar (24)—First Istanbul case (S claims as PP she lived in Istanbul).
- 22 November 1988: Izzettin Genc (35)—Sweet shop man case (S has a sweetshop at the highway to Antakya).
- 23 November 1988: Yildiz Octay (19)—Second Istanbul case (S claims as PP she lived in Istanbul).
- 25 November 1988: Zeynep Sonmez (6)—Doctor's case (investigated with the help of an MD from Antakya).
- 26 November 1988: Aziz Güzel (30)—Reluctant case (PP's family gave information, but S was unwilling to talk).
- 26 November 1988: Emire Koc (7)—Turkish shy girl case (S would not talk to us).
- 29 November 1988: Fatma Altinoz (30)—Pin case (S found pin from PP's life).
- 30 November 1988: Semsettin Menken (21)—Motorbike case (PP died in a motorbike accident).

In the following brief summaries of about half the cases which I studied, only a few aspects will be summarized. All available details of these cases are on file at the Division of Personality Studies, Department of Behavioral Medicine and Psychiatry, School of Medicine, University of Virginia. In addition to the brief summaries of about half the cases, one case which I regard as relatively important from the point of view of paranormality will be presented in more detail. This example may also be of help in clarifying the categorization and overall assessment of all the cases.

### Brief Summaries of the Cases Studied

#### *Cases in Burma*

IS had studied cases in Burma previously and made arrangements for Daw Hnin Aye (DHA) to prepare preliminary information about new cases in different localities. Visits to Burma in 1988 were restricted to seven days, and several visits (up to five) had been planned. Even in five weeks it would not have been possible to study all the cases DHA had located. In consultation with IS, I selected a number of cases that seemed particularly interesting because of birth marks, sex change, age of S, etc.

As it happened I arrived in Pyawbwe (a town on the railway line between Rangoon and Mandalay, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours by train from Mandalay) on 8 August 1988. This was the day when major disturbances started in Rangoon, and soon spread throughout the country. On the 8th I visited Pattar village (about 3 hours drive by jeep from Pyawbwe) and investigated the case of Ma Aye Aye Maw (the Burmese shy girl case), the case of Ma Nyo (the dacoit, sex

change case), and the case of U Tun Kyi (the firewood chestmark case). Because of the limited time during that day only one of the preselected cases, the dacoit sex change case, was investigated.

On account of the disturbances, only three additional cases near Pyawbwe could be pursued. Among these six Burmese cases, only one was preselected. DHA participated as an interpreter for all of them.

*The Shy Girl Case.* As a three-year-old, the subject (S) said she was the previous personality (PP), who had died at the age of 19. In my presence, S, then 5-years-old, initially would not talk at all. We obtained statements from S's elder sister and S's mother. After much prompting, S later spoke a few sentences. I could not really direct any questions to her. It is difficult to judge how far S was influenced in what she said by those who were present. According to DHA, the contents of S's sentences were unrelated to the encouragement which she received. S spoke only briefly and what she said was limited to claiming to be PP and to a short account of how, as a discarnate, she followed a cow into the village. I do not feel confident that S's statements were her own, but it is possible they were. I had no opportunity on that day to talk to members of PP's family who lived in the same village some distance from S. S's mother claimed that PP was not mentioned in the presence of S until after S had started to talk about her PL at the age of three. I am confident that S's mother and other present members of the village believe that S is a reincarnation of PP. Apparently neighbors had heard S talk about her PL.

*Evaluation:* As the case stands I would regard it as neutral. However, since a good deal of additional information could be obtained in the future, I regard this case as sufficiently incomplete to be excluded from the overall evaluation of this study.

*The Dacoit Sex Change Case.* PP's family lives in the same village as S. I interviewed S (aged 36 in 1988) and S's father. DHA had previously spoken to S's mother and to Mg Aye Myint from the same village who remembers various details about PP. We had no opportunity to talk to a member of PP's family. PP, as a dacoit, was remembered by various people in the village including by villagers who were present during our interviews with S and S's father.

S at 36 seemed to remember a good deal about her PL which is unusual at that age. Her explanation was that every day her deformed feet reminded her of her PL. S's statements agreed with those made by her parents. S's behavior was clearly moderately masculine. S was noticeably independent, i.e., she did not seem to modify or change her statements in any way in order to accommodate expectations by others. Her birthmarks agree with PP's injuries, but not to a significant extent because PP received multiple injuries at death. S apparently was able to indicate where she had hidden some money in her PL. The money was found, but on the day of my visit, I could not contact anybody who could independently verify these events.

There was a suggestion of which I had not become aware until after we had left the village, namely, that S's deformities were due to leprosy and that S tries to conceal this by referring to the injuries PP suffered at the time of death.

*Evaluation:* The case is rich in detail and seems to receive support from various sources, and although additional information is needed, it seems likely that such information will strengthen rather than weaken the case. Although leprosy was mentioned as a possible motive for deception, it seems unlikely that leprosy was actually involved. A dacoit in general, and this PP in particular, on account of his misdeeds, cannot be regarded as a suitable basis for deception which S's parents might have started. Since S started to talk about her PL at the age of three, it is unlikely that S used normal information about PP which may have been available in the village at that time. In summary, I regard this case as moderately to strongly positive.

*The Firewood Chestmark Case.* The subject (aged 50 in 1988) can still remember, but added that members of his family reminded him of PP and that this is the reason. As PP, he fell into a lake, and in this life he fell into a river. S is afraid of water. S has a birthmark which is still visible on his chest which is supposed to be due to a piece of firewood which burnt PP on the same spot when PP was four-years-old. The firewood event was unrelated to PP's death. PP had fished without permission, was beaten by monks, and died three days later.

We had no opportunity to talk to other members of S's or PP's families. None of the statements could be verified. S is a village elder and there is no good reason why he should wish to deceive us or others. The birthmark on his chest, although visible, is not disfiguring and does not seem to provide a good reason for deception which might have been initiated by his parents. Nevertheless, the amount of information available is very limited at present.

*Evaluation:* On the basis of the available information at present I would rate this case as neutral to moderately positive. The case is sufficiently incomplete to be excluded from the overall evaluation of this study.

*The Pierced Corpse Case (Ma Tin Sein).* We interviewed S, (aged 17 in 1988), her father, PP's sister, a witness (who had heard S talk about a PL), as well as a witness who was present during the preparation of PP's funeral.

PP died when a lorry overturned outside his home village. According to local customs, the corpse must be kept outside the village, and the corpse had started to bloat before the funeral could be arranged. PP was buried in a tomb but the corpse could not be easily fitted into the tomb. Sticks were used to move the corpse and one thigh was pierced. This account of PP's death was given by PP's sister and later confirmed by a witness who was present during the funeral preparations. S has a birthmark on one thigh which is still clearly visible. S's parents did not know PP who lived in a different village about 35 kilometers away. S's parents had no direct contact with PP's village, but a sister of S's father lives in PP's village. S had started to talk about a PL

when she was two- or three-years-old. S spoke spontaneously about a PL until she was 5. This was confirmed by a neighbor who had heard S at that time. S gave PP's name and details about PP's accident. When PP's sister became aware that S made these statements, S was taken to PP's village. S recognized PP's clothes. S also inquired about a tree that PP had planted but which was no longer there.

S is a girl, PP was a man. S, as a child, had a preference for boys clothes and participated in some games which are usually only played by boys. However, S cried easily.

*Evaluation:* S said that she could still remember some aspects of her PL, but since the statements which she had made as a child were known by various people, and since contact had been established with PP's relatives for some time, it is difficult to judge to what extent S's statements can be regarded as independent memories. Nevertheless, it seems clear that S's parents did not know the PP, and that S gave information about a PP without any apparent contact with persons who could have known PP. The witness (not related to S) who had heard S's statements about a PL some years ago, was intelligent and not inclined to accept reincarnation stories easily. However, she accepted S as such a case. Factual details provided by S agreed with statements made by PP's sister and the person who participated in the preparation of PP's funeral. If it had been possible to investigate the case when S was still younger, the case might have been judged to be significant in its own right. As it is, I rate it as moderately to strongly positive.

*The Discarnate Terror Case.* The subject (aged 22 in 1988) can still remember her PL, but she could not give us many details. Apparently, as a child, she recognized and pointed out objects that belonged to PP. During my visit, we were only able to talk to S and her grandmother—who could give us some information about PP. Other members of S's and PP's families could be contacted but were not available during my visit.

*Evaluation:* On the basis of the information available at present, I would rate this case as neutral to moderately positive. The case is sufficiently incomplete to be excluded from the overall evaluation of this study.

*The Old Age Case.* The subject (aged 26 in 1988) can still remember his PL. He gave a fair number of details. Apparently, he spontaneously recognized some items that belonged to PP.

S also remembered that, as PP, he gave some scriptures to his second son (in his PL) who still has these scriptures. Apart from S, we were only able to talk to S's mother, who confirmed his statements.

*Evaluation:* Although the information available is limited and based on only two persons, some of the items and events appear to be substantial. Further inquiries should be pursued. Nevertheless, on the basis of the information available to date, I feel sufficiently confident to include this case in the overall evaluation with a moderate positive rating.

*Cases in Thailand*

As indicated in the introduction to the Burmese cases, the problems which occurred in August 1988, prevented the investigation of most of the cases which I had planned to pursue there. On short notice, I had to turn to Thailand for the continuation of my research. IS had studied cases in Thailand some years ago but, unlike in Burma, there was only one case to which I could turn immediately. Although I had most useful assistance from a number of Thais who had been associated with IS's research before, generally it was not possible for any of them to participate in the actual investigations during my visit. It took more time to find and pursue cases in Thailand. On the other hand, it was possible to follow various leads and to travel freely throughout Thailand for this purpose.

Although Thailand is predominantly a Buddhist country and most people accept reincarnation in an abstract kind of way, few Thais expect to experience these strange connections which some children claim to have. Most Thais are decidedly uneasy when they are personally confronted with such events in their own families. Many believe that these memories will create problems for their sons and daughters, and usually children are discouraged from expressing their alleged memories. In some regions it is even customary to prepare special food which is supposed to help these children to forget their PLs.

This relatively negative attitude toward cases probably developed fairly recently, and may not have been equally predominant 20, or even 10, years ago. Relatives of the great grandmother case told me that the custom to mark dead bodies in order to recognize corresponding birthmarks on reincarnation cases was abandoned about 30 years ago. A number of senior monks could not remember having heard of any cases in their districts during recent years. Some had no knowledge of any cases at all. Although this indifferent attitude toward cases appears to be fairly widespread, there are regional differences. It must also be mentioned that professional and academic groups expressed a good deal of positive interest in these case studies. I would not be surprised, though, if most of the people in these groups would be equally uneasy if it concerned their own families.

For the investigation of the retribution case and the buffalo case, Dr. Boon Nilakesh from Chiang Mai University participated as interpreter. Dr. Boon also translated when we contacted PP's father, brother, and former wife in connection with the Bangkok case. PP's sister speaks English and except for a few words which Dr. Boon translated, no interpretation was required. Both Dr. Chieng Siriyananda from the Siri clinic in Bangkok and his son, Mr. Chutinun, translated for me when we interviewed the parents of the Bangkok case (i.e., s's parents).

Nathapong Muadtip, from the Nakorn Sri Thammarat teacher's college, participated as an interpreter during all the interviews associated with the

Ourarat case. The great grandmother sex change case I initially contacted with the assistance of a monk, Mr. Putsupat Karahong from Wat Tha ton, Tumbon Tha Ton, Amphur Mae-Ai, who speaks a limited amount of English. Mr. Jirapon Kurenak, an architect from Bangkok who was temporarily in Tha Ton, kindly volunteered to translate during a second visit during which we obtained the information for this case.

*The Ourarat Srineel Case (Hospital Case).* We met S, S's mother, and PP's father. S was seven-years-old in 1988. PP had died suddenly when she was eight. S's parents have a shop about one kilometer from PP's house. Until S was two-years-old, S's parents lived somewhere else, and there was no contact between S's parents and PP's relatives. There was little contact later, but PP's father occasionally visited S's parents' shop.

S started to talk about a PL when she was two. S cried a lot, and particularly wanted to be with "her father" but not with her real father, i.e., S's father. One day, when S saw PP's father in her parents shop, she called him father and was happy to be with him. S's parents were concerned about these events and took S to a hospital. Nevertheless, S's parents also noticed that S was much more content and did not cry after she had met PP's father. S eagerly waited for further visits by PP's father and kept food items for him.

When S visited PP's house for the first time, she pointed out where PP had slept even though this house was no longer used. In the meantime, PP's parents had built a new house. PP recognized photos and other items.

Information was mainly provided by S's mother, who is a thoughtful and reasonable woman. S's parents are in a better socio-economic position than PP's parents. A local psychologist, from the hospital that S's parents had consulted, accompanied us during these interviews. She said, she did not believe in reincarnation but also stated that she believed that the people spoke the truth as they saw it. When we met S she could not really remember details from a PL any longer. S has become involved in religious matters and associated religious beliefs with her views of her PL which seem to be based on what her parents had told her about her earlier behavior. Although we had no opportunity to interview other persons not related to these families, apparently a number of persons had heard S talk about a PL because many people visit the shop.

*Evaluation:* It is possible that S may have overheard some discussion when she was two, and that she incorporated some information into what seemed to be memories of a PL. Nevertheless, I was positively impressed with this case because S's parents had not welcomed S's behavior, and had tried to modify it by taking her to a hospital. I was unable to obtain records or direct accounts about these consultations from hospital staff, but there is no doubt that they took place. Gradually S's parents accepted S's claims. There was no possible contact between S and PP's relatives until S was two, and it is unlikely that S could have obtained any details when S's parents moved to the shop. It was shortly afterward that S started to talk about a PL. S expressed an

exceptionally strong emotional need for "her father," which seemed to have been satisfied when she met PP's father. The socio-economic position of PP's parents is clearly less favorable, and S's behavior cannot be regarded as wishful thinking. The information provided by S's mother and PP's father are in good agreement, and the events took place fairly recently. S's mother was reluctant to consider reincarnation as a possibility but gradually accepted this interpretation. It would be desirable to contact other people who witnessed S's accounts of a PL when S was younger; as it stands, I rate the case a strongly positive, but not as significant in its own right.

*The Sripha Ruken Case (The Buffalo Case).* The subject (aged 16 in 1988) does not now remember a PL. We talked to S's sister and S's parents. According to S's mother, S may have started to talk about a PL before he was 5. When he was 5, S indicated to her that in his PL he looked after a buffalo. S took his mother to PP's place. He told her the name of PP's father. In PP's house, S identified some photos. PP's parents confirmed some statements that apparently were made by S but there were also some discrepancies. The discrepancies do not suggest deliberate misrepresentation.

*Evaluation:* Although a number of details are available which are in agreement when statements made by S's relatives and PP's parents are compared, most of these details could be explained by normal means, particularly if S did not start to talk about a PL until he was 5, or close to 5. It is difficult though to assume that all the details are due to normal information transfer. Until additional interviews can be conducted I rate the case as neutral.

*The Srimon Manokhan Case (The Retribution Case).* The subject (aged 34 in 1988) apparently still remembered her PL. S has a clearly deformed foot in agreement with (according to S) more severe but otherwise similar deformities of PP. S believes, that as PP, she could also remember a PL during which, as PP2, she had kicked her father. When PP2 was reborn as PP, the deformity occurred as a retribution for PP2's behavior toward her father. S can remember a number of details related to her PL. Apparently, S recognized people and objects when she went to PP's village for the first time. We met S's parents (S's mother was 82 in 1988) who were still in good health, and who confirmed what S had said. They also added some details. S's mother had known PP and confirmed PP's foot deformity. A sister of S's mother also confirmed S's statements. Several additional relatives who were not available during my visit, could provide information which has a bearing on this case.

*Evaluation:* Additional interviews are desirable. As it is, a sufficient amount of detail seems available to include this case in the overall evaluation, and I rate it as moderately positive. In this moderately positive assessment, I have not considered the retribution claim, i.e., that PP also remembered a PL.

*The Todsac Gowana Case (The Great Grandmother, Sex Change Case).* During a preliminary meeting with S's parents (when a monk with limited

English accompanied me) and a second meeting with a volunteer interpreter, I had no opportunity to talk to S (aged 11 in 1988) who was at school on both occasions. S's mother (S's father was at work on both occasions) and S's grandmother were the main informants. There was agreement between the informants, and a number of details emerged. S referred to and recognized personal items of PP. He started to talk about his PL when he was two-years-old. S used phrases characteristic of PP. S's relatives did not encourage S to talk about his PL, but they all accept that he is a rebirth case of PP.

*Evaluation:* Although PP is S's great grandmother, and information about PP could have been conveyed to S inadvertently, this does not readily account for such details as the names of villages where PP had lived, and which apparently were not mentioned during the time when S might have unconsciously assimilated such information. S started to talk about his PL at 2. S's parents did not encourage S to talk about his PL. On the other hand, S's mother who had a close relationship with her grandmother, i.e., with PP, might have been motivated through dreams to see S as a rebirth of PP. Interviewing S and S's father would be desirable, but this is not likely to add much because S apparently no longer remembers his PL. No other relatives or other persons are available who could provide relevant information. Sufficient details seem available to include this case in the overall evaluation, and on the basis of the information received to date, I rate the case as moderately positive.

*The Tutkorn Chitpricha (Bangkok-Long Distance Case).* (Full details are presented for this case.) This is the only case for which the families involved requested anonymity. All the original details are on record. Critics may view requests for anonymity with suspicion. All the indications which I have suggest that this request, although perhaps unnecessary, is a reasonable one on account of the socio-economic positions of the families. A reincarnation case would probably be regarded as a sign of irrational views by some foreigners with whom the families have contact, and even some of their Thai associates may have negative reactions. There were certainly no indications of any kind which might suggest that the people concerned were trying to mislead the investigators.

Knowledge about this case is almost entirely restricted to the circles of the two families. I became aware of it through a Thai academic who knew of my interest in such cases. Without being aware of any details, he had heard something about S from PP's sister. Through him I was introduced to PP's sister, Nit, who speaks English. All other interviews were carried out with the help of Dr. Boon Nilakesh (BN), Dr. Chien, and Mr. Chutinun Siriyananda. Although we met S, a boy who was 6 in 1988, on three occasions, we agreed not to interview him because his parents were concerned that reviving memories of PP might also bring back fears and nightmares which S apparently experienced when he spoke spontaneously about PP. For these reasons S's



parents had encouraged S to forget about PP and apparently S had not referred to PP during the last  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years. S's parents believe that S no longer remembers PP. We interviewed PP's father and PP's brother before we had an opportunity to speak to S's parents. We had no opportunity to return to PP's relatives in order to check out some of the statements made by S's parents.

S's father Tosarot Chitpricha is a professional man in a government position. S's mother Chongdee is a high school teacher in a distinguished school. S's mother has a good knowledge of English but she preferred to communicate with the help of an interpreter. S, Tutkhorn Chitpricha, is their only son. PP, Dang Chitpricha, was Tosarot's brother. Until Tosarot went to University and later married, he grew up as one of PP's siblings in a town (A) approximately 500 kilometers from Bangkok. PP's father was, and is, an important person in A. He has one of the major business enterprises in that district. Nit now has lived for sometime in another town (B) several hundred kilometers from A. She has followed a professional career and has advanced qualifications. PP's brother Korn who was present when we interviewed PP's father, works in his father's business.

In November 1988, PP's father (of Chinese descent) was 66. PP's mother is of Thai-Chinese origin. Their first child, Nit, was then about 41. Their second child, Korn, participated in our interview. Their fourth child, Dang, was PP who died in 1981 at the age of 26. He would have been 33 in 1988. Approximately one year after PP, Tosarot (S's father) was born. Tosarot has moved to Bangkok, got married, and Tutkhorn (S), who was 6 in 1988, is their only child.

The following information about PP was supplied by PP's father and PP's brother, Korn, in a joint interview, and by Nit in a separate interview. In the joint interview, PP's father was mainly speaking; BN translated. The local abbot was also present. He had kindly agreed to accompany us because, without him, PP's father may not have agreed to talk to us.

According to PP's father, PP, as a child, was self-interested and selfish. He liked meat and rice the way it is prepared locally. As a child he was afraid of spirits. He was also afraid of death particularly when he was not well. PP completed class 10, aged about 18. At first, he worked with his father. He had a good relationship with most other people, especially with ladies. His relationship with ladies was a little bit too good. He especially liked cars and ladies. He was a man of high tastes. He liked music as well. All kinds of music. He had a good gift to play almost any kind of instrument. He was very good at entertaining others. He would stop his business and entertain first. He was very good with anything connected with entertainment. He was regarded as a leader among the young with respect to anything connected with entertainment. When there was a festival in the district, he would be entertaining young people. He was not hot-tempered but good-humored. Due to his good temper, he would not be offended by anyone, and was good

friends with almost everyone. Before marriage, a young person should become a monk first. He did not. Maybe he wanted to become a monk later but he liked to be married first. He had a good family life. After marriage he worked for his own family. With his business he was successful. He supplied equipment for building constructions to another province.

PP died when a large 20-wheel truck hit the pickup truck in which PP was traveling. The accident occurred 97 kilometers from PP's and PP's father's house. The street and district in which the accident occurred was given by PP's brother, Korn. PP's father agreed. The accident occurred in a curve. The pickup truck was on the correct side of the road. The oncoming truck was too far in the middle of the road with no room to avoid it.

PP's father gave us the name of the surviving driver. We were unable to locate him during our visit. PP's father said he cannot reject that S is PP, but he cannot really accept it either. Korn agreed with this. He also agreed with the statements his father had made and could not think of anything to add. (There was no opportunity to meet PP's mother, but this might be of interest in the future.)

We met Nit in a town several hundred kilometers from A. Nit speaks English well and BN did not need to translate. He occasionally helped with a particular word. She was clear but not overconfident. According to Nit, PP and Tosarot (S's father) were very close. The age difference is only about one year. As children, they slept together in the same room and prayed together. On the other hand, Nit is about eight years older than PP, and theirs was not such a close relationship. According to Nit, PP was married, had one boy, and his wife was pregnant when he died. PP was happy with his family and children. PP's sister gave further details about PP's life and death which agreed with the statements made by PP's brother and father. BN was present during this meeting.

We then visited S's parents. Dr. Chien and Mr. Chutinon Siriyanda translated. Both parents are intelligent, clear, reluctant about what happened, but also amused by it, particularly now after the events have stopped. They both talked together, there was no disagreement between them. When things happened, S's father was more concerned than S's mother. The following statements were made by both.

Before S's mother was pregnant, she dreamt a bad dream about PP's home town. There was a funeral ceremony. She asked who had died and then woke up. S's mother told her husband not to go to PP's home district. The next morning, the accident with PP happened. S's father was supposed to have been there. Perhaps the dream saved him, and perhaps PP died instead of S's father. They also heard of a dream that Korn (PP's brother) had. Korn dreamt about the accident: PP came and told him that this is not the time to die, that he did not want to die, rather to go back, but his body was injured. In the dream, Korn told PP to meet Tosarot and ask for his advice. Then PP left and went to the temple. Korn woke up. When S's mother was about three

months pregnant, she dreamt that PP wanted to live with them. She was frightened because she knew that PP had died. Nearer the time when she expected the baby, she dreamt that PP came to her with a smiling face. Also PP came with luggage to stay with her. She was frightened and dreamt this "luggage dream" more than once. She may have agreed, in a dream, that PP could stay with them. She was also frightened of these dreams.

There were no complications during birth or pregnancy.

S has a birth mark (dark pigmentation about three centimeters in length and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  centimeters wide) on his lower left arm. There is no clear relationship to PP's injuries, which were mainly chest injuries, although arm injuries may have been present as well.

S started to talk when he was about nine-months-old. When he was 18 months-old, he started to talk about a PL. He said he was afraid to die. His parents told him that it is difficult to die at a young age. S spoke about an accident. S said there would be an accident and that he would die. S said that it is a road accident. S had these memories and talked about it about once a week until he was about 27-months-old. (S's parents looked at family photos and checked the age in relation to other events depicted in the photos.)

When S was about 2, he went to PP's place for the first time in a car with his aunts. S's parents were not in the same car. When S came to the point where PP had died, he said to stop the car because an accident has happened there. The driver of the car in which S and his aunts traveled knew where the accident had happened, and confirmed that S was correct. S's aunts apparently did not know the locality but S's parents were not quite certain about this. S's parents are not sure now who the aunts were who traveled with S. It would also be difficult to pick out the driver now. There are quite a number of drivers who worked for PP or PP's father's business.

In Bangkok, PP had used S's father's address for an account he had there. When a letter came addressed to PP, and the postman asked the maid whether someone by the name of PP is living here, the maid said no. S heard this and claimed the letter, saying it was his letter. S was then about 21-months-old.

About five months before PP died, he had bought a new earth-moving machine which was probably an excavator. PP liked this machine very much. When S went to PP's home for the first time, he asked for it. S asked his mother every morning to bring him to this machine. He would sit on it. He stayed for 4 or 5 days during this first visit. Every day, he wanted to sit on this machine, every morning and every evening. When S was  $2\frac{1}{2}$  years-old, he went to PP's home a second time. S was no longer interested in the machine. They stayed three to four days during the second visit. Nothing related to the PP happened during this second visit.

Two former drivers for PP came to visit S's parents in Bangkok. S's parents knew their nicknames, but not their real names. S called them by their nicknames and addressed them as inferiors. This is done through a particular

language form. It would have been the way PP had spoken to the drivers. S also postured himself as a kind of boss putting his hands behind his back. (S's father demonstrated). According to S's parents this would have been a typical posture of PP in that sort of situation. At other times, other drivers who had not previously worked for PP, came for a visit, but S did not recognize or react to them. During this period ( $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $2\frac{1}{4}$ ), S could understand a different dialect, quite different from the way his parents speak, and the way Thai is spoken in Bangkok. This dialect from PP's home district is difficult to understand. S also spoke this dialect but not many words. S does not use these words any longer. When S met the two drivers who worked for PP, he used the eastern dialect. He could also understand the drivers and was able to reply but his vocabulary was limited.

When S spoke of his PL—although quite young then—he spoke like an adult. He usually talked about it before going to sleep. His voice was sad and he looked sad almost to the point of crying but not actually crying. Later, he stopped talking about it. S's family now lives in a new house in Bangkok. S has not talked about a PL in this new home. When S spoke of his PL he expressed fear of death. S sometimes had nightmares which S's parents believe were associated with S's memories of a PL. S did not call his grandparents parents. PP liked sticky rice that is popular in the east. S still likes it, but S's mother does not encourage it. This rice is quite differently prepared and can be clearly distinguished from the more common rice dishes. S's parents did not like S to talk about a PL. Particularly, S's father did not like it. PP's father met S five years ago. S did not say anything to them but immediately came to his own car (i.e., PP's car) and tried to drive it himself. There were other cars around. This happened when S's mother walked with S. As soon as he saw "his" car, he immediately went for it. S did not like to go back to Bangkok. This was a problem for PP's father. When PP was alive, he and his father were not always on the best of terms. PP's father felt that his relationship with S was similar.

*Evaluation and Discussion:* Points which may be raised against the assumption that paranormal processes are involved:

1. S's father and PP are closely related, and were close friends for many years.
2. S's mother and paternal uncle had an announcing dream, and may have unintentionally influenced S to identify with PP.
3. All information revealed by S was known by S's parents, and might have been unintentionally conveyed to S.
4. Similarly behavioral characteristics of PP which S displayed could have been unintentionally conveyed to S by S's parents.
5. Food preferences by S in agreement with PP could be regarded as coincidences.

The involvement of paranormal processes is supported because:

1. S made specific and correct statements about PP's death.
2. S apparently recognized the locality (a section of road) where PP died.
3. S changed his behavior when he spoke about his PL and, in specific ways, when he spoke to two visiting drivers who had worked for PP.
4. S spoke a dialect which was not used by S's parents when he addressed the two drivers. This dialect is not spoken in the environment in which S lived.
5. S has food preferences (sticky rice) in agreement with PP.
6. S's parents did not favor the idea that S is a rebirth case and tried to discourage S from talking about a PL.

It seems unlikely that paranormal processes can be completely rejected. S's recognition of the accident locality 90 kilometers from PP's home is difficult to explain by normal means. S spoke about a PL at an early age. It is unlikely that he would have absorbed enough information from PP's parents—assuming they provided information unintentionally—to speak coherently about PP's death. Also, S's mood changed when he talked about his PL. Although S might have noticed some behavior patterns, it is unlikely that this explains, in a satisfactory way, S's behavior when he met the two drivers who had worked for PP. S differentiated between these drivers and others who visited Bangkok. S's reaction to the delivery of a letter addressed to PP seems more comprehensive than could be assumed on the basis of information which S's parents may have unintentionally conveyed. On the basis of the data available to date, I would rate this case as moderately to strongly positive, but not as significant in its own right.

### *Cases in Turkey*

My investigation of cases in Turkey was planned within a short time span of a few weeks, when it became clear that I could not return to Burma during 1988. IS had carried out research in Turkey approximately ten years ago (Stevenson, 1980) and had obtained the cooperation from Dr. Can Polat from Istanbul. In recent years, Dr. Polat has also completed investigations of some cases on his own. Dr. Polat was unable to disengage himself from other commitments during the time of my visit to Turkey, and he kindly arranged for Murat Senova to participate as an interpreter (Turkish/English) during the major part of my stay. Murat Senova had not been previously involved in reincarnation research. During a period of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  weeks, all interviews were conducted in the Hatay region of Turkey. All the cases are situated in communities in which Arabic is predominantly spoken as the first language. The people are known as Alevis. They follow a particular version of Islam that, among other variations (from the Sunni interpretation of Islam), also accepts

reincarnation. Alevi are a minority in Turkey but probably not in the Hatay region where some villages are entirely populated by Alevi. Rebirth cases are not as frequently reported as in Burma, but are more common than in Thailand. Alevi believe that if a PP has died in an accident, prematurely or through illness, the reborn child is more likely to remember the PP's life. Sex change cases had not been reported by IS before, and did not come to our notice during 1988. Most adult Alevi speak Turkish fluently, but during interviews with some elderly people and preschool age children, we had to rely on relatives to translate from Arabic to Turkish before Murat could continue. With one exception, all first interviews were conducted with Murat assisting as an interpreter. One case, the doctor's case, was investigated with the help of Dr. Abdurrahman Karaali from Antakya. After Murat returned to Istanbul because of professional commitments, I conducted some follow-up interviews with the help of Naim Bilgin and Cemil Karaca—when I had time for a few more days in Turkey. Both have a limited knowledge of German.

Analyzing the Turkish cases in a similar way, four were excluded because of insufficient details. Among the remaining eight cases, I evaluated one as moderately negative to neutral, two as neutral to moderately positive, one as moderately positive, three as moderately to strongly positive, and one as strongly positive.

As can be seen from the Results section, my evaluations of Turkish cases show a similar distribution over the various categories compared to the cases in Thailand and Burma. In order to avoid excessive length and repetition, brief summaries of Turkish cases are omitted except for the following case which I rated as moderately negative to neutral.

*The Mehmet Arikdal (Adana) Case.* This case was studied in a preliminary way by Dr. Can Polat from Istanbul who rated it positively with respect to paranormal aspects. Dr. Polat also obtained information about PP's home in Adana. I had no opportunity to investigate PP's background. My evaluation is based on two interviews with two different interpreters. In 1988, S was five-years-old. S had started to talk about a PL when he was two, or younger. He gave the names of PP's parents and details about PP's home in Adana. Some of these details agree with information Dr. Polat was able to obtain. Various details were difficult to verify. When S first started to speak, he spoke Turkish in spite of the fact that his siblings started to speak Arabic first, which is typical for this region of Turkey. S's grandfather whom we met, and who lives with S's family, can only speak Arabic. When S started to speak about his PL he spoke in a deliberate way, which differed from his normal way of speaking.

Most of the information was provided by S's father. S and S's mother confirmed S's father's accounts. When S spoke, I had a strong impression that the information which he provided was meant to be in agreement with

his father's views and that, to some extent, S's accounts of his PL may have been modified or even induced by his father. I do not believe that S was deliberately misleading us, but it seemed that information provided by S was strongly influenced by his father, and I cannot accept S's accounts as relatively independent statements. Similarly, S's mother who only provided minor details, was strongly influenced by her husband. Although PP's background is viewed as superior to their own by S's parents it is difficult to see what S's father is trying to achieve if he was deliberately misleading us. S's father's behavior has a kind of theatrical quality, which may be entirely due to completely innocent personality characteristics. I have no direct evidence that S's father was trying to deceive us, but because of some suggestion of this I have presented this case with pseudonyms.

S may well have started to provide paranormal information about a PP at an early age, but for some reason, at some stage, S's father apparently became very interested and now appears to control the case. It is difficult to see how S's father could have started to deliberately induce memories of a PL in his son but he may have misinterpreted and modified them at a later stage. Perhaps, this does not justify a negative evaluation but I am sufficiently uncertain to opt for a somewhat negative category. The two interpreters who assisted us came to a similar conclusion without being particularly adamant about it.

S does not have much contact with children from other families, and it was not possible to obtain confirmation from persons outside S's family of the way S provided information at an earlier age.

*Evaluation:* Although the case has several features which could lead to a strong positive evaluation, such as detailed information by S, a substantial separation between S's and PP's families and apparently no contact between the families to date, for the reasons outlined above I rate the case as neutral to moderately negative.

## Results

Twenty-three cases were investigated in 1988. Seven were excluded because of insufficient details. None of these seven cases appeared to be negative. The remaining 16 cases were evaluated as indicated below:

	Burma	Thailand	Turkey
Moderately negative to neutral			1
Neutral		1	
Neutral to moderately positive			2
Moderately positive	2	2	1
Moderately to strongly positive	1	1	3
Strongly positive		1	1

Although there are, in my evaluation, no particular cases which I rated as significantly positive in their own right, the distribution of positive cases strongly suggests that the total sample contains paranormal aspects which, in a comparable quantitative analysis, would be regarded as significant.

### Discussion

If, on the basis of an experimental study, statistically significant results are reported which are unexpected and unusual, the question arises whether the apparently significant results are really due to chance. Perhaps, many similar experiments which did not yield significant results were never reported.

Particularly, if there is evidence that some unreported experiments did not produce significant results, the reported findings may be dismissed completely. Such dismissals are justified if it can be shown that the results from all the experiments carried out (including the "significant" one) follow a distribution which is in reasonable agreement with what is expected by chance.

It is important to realize, though, that the distribution of all the results could also turn out to be even more significant (than the single significant experiment reported in the first place), if a substantial proportion of the insignificant experiments show a common trend. Indeed, a number of separate experiments without a single significant result may reach a high significance if analyzed together. It is certainly possible to think of experimental conditions (e.g., involving small numbers of particular subjects who cannot repeatedly participate in the experimentation) which do not produce statistically significant results and which, in spite of apparent trends in the results, cannot be improved to a point where statistical significance can be demonstrated under the existing limitations. Nevertheless, if similar trends occurred in a number of comparable, separate investigations, the combined results may well be highly significant in statistical terms.

Unfortunately, when the significance of unusual results is questioned, it is practically impossible to obtain the necessary information about all relevant experiments which may have been carried out elsewhere. At any rate, evidence that another comparable experiment produced statistically insignificant results needs to be scrutinized in order to see whether, on account of these insignificant results, the overall findings are strengthened or weakened. Without such scrutiny it is certainly not justified to dismiss the first set of results.

In the Results section, I have summarized my evaluation of the paranormality question by suggesting that the overall result is equivalent to what, in a statistical evaluation of quantitative experimental data, would be called significant. In a way, this conclusion is not very different from what IS has stated in qualitative terms on a number of occasions. Nevertheless, my attempt to present the qualitative studies in semiquantitative terms may help



to clarify one aspect which previously has, perhaps, not been specifically discussed; and that is: how far the selection and subsequent reporting of particular cases may have been misleading.

IS has never claimed that any one case can be regarded as paranormal with absolute certainty, and I would agree with IS's assessment. It could then be argued that, if even the best cases have weaknesses which cannot be completely eliminated, and if these cases had been selected from a very large number of otherwise extremely weak or negative ones, then the apparent significantly positive cases can be readily explained as chance coincidences which must be expected when all unreported cases are taken into account. Indeed, IS's careful selection of the best cases and his rejection of doubtful cases could have contributed to the emergence of a false significance. By considering all the cases which I have studied in 1988, and from the brief summaries of half of them, and from the detailed evaluation of one of them, it should be clear though, that what I call "significant indications of paranormality," cannot be easily rejected by claiming that the apparently paranormal features are just unrecognized coincidences.

The cases which I studied strongly suggest that with most subjects who are seriously regarded as rebirth or reincarnation cases in the various communities, some paranormal elements are associated, and that if the best cases are left in a larger sample rather than evaluated separately, the overall significance is increased rather than diminished.

### **The Question of Bias**

In the fieldwork carried out in Burma, DHA participated as an interpreter. She had previously located the cases which I investigated there. Although only briefly, DHA had also previously worked with IS. It seems unlikely that DHA's previous work with IS could have introduced any bias in my findings. The question of how far an interpreter who had previously worked for IS might consciously or unconsciously distort information in order to present a particular point of view is only relevant to the cases in Burma and, perhaps, to a very limited extent, to two cases in Thailand. For all the other cases, the interpreters involved had no direct or indirect contact with IS. Since the cases investigated with the help of the latter do not differ from the former I cannot see any justification to reject any of them on account of the interpreters. I am not suggesting here that original statements are always translated without distortions, but it seems clear that the essential aspects of the cases were not substantially modified through the interpretation process. I had more direct evidence of this when on two occasions I had the opportunity to compare translations between two interpreters.

I have excluded three cases which came to my attention from consideration because the reincarnation or rebirth claims are based entirely on meditation experiences with no opportunity for investigations. Some Thais are

satisfied with findings entirely based on meditation, particularly if made by a revered monk or abbot.

Although all the cases which I investigated in 1988 and for which I could obtain a reasonable amount of information, are included in the evaluation (and brief summaries are provided for about half the cases), the question must also be considered whether these cases can be regarded as relatively representative samples of the various regions or whether they had already been preselected from larger pools. Prior to my visit to Burma, DHA had collected preliminary information about more than 30 cases. Initially, I had intended to select from this group cases which appeared to be particularly interesting, not necessarily because they looked potentially strong as far as the question of paranormality is concerned but in order to include, for instance, sex change and birthmark cases. From my introduction to the Burmese cases, it will be apparent that, due to external events over which I had no control, my investigations in that country were limited to only six cases. Among these six cases, only one happened to be among those that I had previously preselected.

Because of the paucity of cases in Thailand and the relatively short time available for preparations in Turkey, in both of these countries, I studied all the cases that we could find during the time at my disposal. Therefore, it seems justified to present the cases included in this evaluation as unselected and relatively representative samples of the countries and regions that I visited.

It is now also sufficiently clear that the positive results obtained by IS cannot be readily dismissed by suggesting that IS may have intentionally or unintentionally misrepresented some aspects of his research. Apart from my investigation, Mills has recently carried out an independent study which agrees with IS findings (Mills, 1989).

### **The Question of Intentional or Unintentional Deception**

Rejecting selection (and any peculiarities in IS's research) as a possible explanation for paranormality still leaves the question open as to how far deliberate fraud or unconscious or unintentional distortions and errors in the reports of our informants may have been responsible for the apparently overall significant indication of paranormality. Although deliberate fraud may occur from time to time, such occurrences are rare, and I have earlier pointed out why I reject fraud as a relevant explanation when a group of cases is considered. In relative terms, the weakest section in the structure on which the suggested paranormality is based, consists of possible unintentional and unconscious distortions and errors introduced by the informants. Such distortions and errors may add up to provide examples of apparently consistent and meaningful cases. Particularly, if it is kept in mind that young children may be fairly easily influenced by suggestions and behavior patterns

of which those in contact with these children are not aware, the risk of unintentional leakage and subsequent absorption of information which is later interpreted as paranormal, cannot be ruled out with absolute certainty.

Lack of contact between the S's family and the PP's family, as well as other factors discussed earlier, help to reduce this problem but cannot entirely eliminate it. Indeed, it is in this area where I can appreciate that critics may be less impressed with those aspects of the cases which I rated positively, i.e., in favor of paranormality. It is also in this area where I would later like to suggest some new approaches.

IS has, for some time, paid particular attention to birthmarks and birth defects in children which seem to be connected to PPs. I agree that such physiological indicators can carry more weight than verbal ones because physiological changes cannot be easily misrepresented without awareness, and may provide a better way of assessing the paranormality of a particular case. IS is preparing a major publication about birthmark and birth defect cases, and IS's findings are bound to be discussed in some detail in the not too distant future.

With respect to the cases which I have studied, birthmarks did not play a major role in the assessment of paranormality, although a number of my Ss had birthmarks and/or defects. In cases where PP had multiple injuries, a relatively large number of birthmarks on S could be regarded as being in agreement with PP's injuries, and consequently one mark on S would not carry much weight. Other problems which arose were the difficulty of obtaining clear descriptions or pictures of apparently corresponding injuries, and defects which PPs were reported to have had. These problems do not suggest that birthmarks and defects could not be very strong and significant features in connection with some cases, but that among the cases which I studied this did not occur.

A question which must be raised, but which cannot be readily answered at present, is whether there are any particular personality characteristics which distinguish persons who seem to have paranormal connections with a previous life from the general population or more specifically from other siblings. For the distinctly different cultural settings, the more familiar personality assessment procedures would first have to be carefully adapted, and then administered by qualified persons who at least can easily communicate without the assistance of an interpreter.

There are additional problems which make comparisons difficult. In some communities, for instance, in Turkey, children with such memories are apparently readily accepted by their peers when they are at school. This is not the case in some areas of Thailand. If an individual child is compared with its siblings, it is also difficult to assess how far the child was affected by those assumed memories, by expectations of its parents and/or by the reactions of others to these memories and how far the child has particular dispositions which are relatively independent of early childhood experiences. Distinc-

tions also need to be made between children who are recognized as rebirth cases from the time they are born, and children who had not been regarded as possible reincarnation cases until they started to speak about a PL.

Finally Ss with birth defects and/or birthmarks which have a substantial bearing on the physiological development and appearance of these Ss, must be compared with children who are similarly afflicted, but do not claim to have memories of a previous life.

Keeping these problems in mind, there were, on the basis of my subjective observations, no particular personality characteristics that I can point out with any degree of confidence.

### Some Comments on Future Research

One of the aims of this study was to look for methods and procedures beyond those already employed by IS which may help in the assessment of the paranormality of cases. In a moderate way, this was pursued by considering all the cases and by evaluating the qualitative findings in a semiquantitative framework.

I found that a control method which occurred to me independently had already been initiated by IS; that is, an attempt to obtain photographic records of corpses which in some communities are marked (e.g., with charcoal) in order to facilitate identification of rebirth cases. The marks made on the corpses are expected to correspond to birthmarks on rebirth cases. As the discussions with relatives of the great-grandmother case in Thailand suggest, in some communities the opportunities for such controls have already been missed because such practices are no longer continued. Even in Burma, where such identification marks are still made in some communities, I did not get much encouragement for organizing such a scheme because of the small numbers involved quite apart from the logistic problems.

Returning to the problem of unintentional and unconscious influences which by normal means may create, in young children's minds, imagined connections to PPs, it seems to me that the study of further cases by similar methods is not likely to throw much light on this problem. Of course, additional strong cases, which appear to eliminate any possible normal explanations to an even greater extent than before, will contribute to the overall strength of this research. However, it is unlikely that they would eliminate the problem completely, and it is unlikely that they would throw much light on questions which have arisen in this area.

Although, difficult to execute in practice, it seems to me that it is now time to concentrate on two main aspects; one is the cultural background which seems to be responsible for certain details in these case reports. In Burma, the subjects as well as the relatives often mention that memories of previous lives occur most frequently on dark and gloomy nights. A study of families in which rebirth cases occur, as well as of families in which there is no occur-

rence, may help us to understand how rebirth is viewed by adults in a general sense, as well as in a particular sense when a rebirth case occurs in a family. More importantly, the normal references to relatives who have died need to be examined from the point of view of how this is experienced by young children.

Folklores and customs in general, and in relation to aspects of the rebirth cases, also need to be studied; e.g., what is generally associated with dark and gloomy nights in Burma and what relevance can be found with respect to the reincarnation cases. More importantly, how do young children become aware of this? What are the games and stories that have a bearing on these questions? How are birthmarks and deformities interpreted in the communities, and how are they related to community beliefs and customs? Such a study would take some time (probably one or two years), and would require frequent access to two or more families in a village. The investigator would need to speak the local language and would need to be familiar with local customs. He or she would need to be accepted by the village community. All this is not easy to achieve, but it is in my assessment a worthwhile goal and perhaps not that difficult to attain if compared with the considerable difficulties IS had to overcome to date. If the internal conditions in Burma improve sufficiently, such a plan could be carried out in that country.

A second and somewhat related approach would be an attempt to study, in a similar but longitudinal way, an emerging case from the birth of a S. My visit to Turkey in 1988 indicated that cases which are believed to be reincarnation cases occur from time to time under suitable conditions; i.e., occasionally a child is already regarded as a rebirth case at the time of birth or even earlier. One such case was reported during my visit: A senior student (medicine, psychology, anthropology) would again need to observe and record all relevant interactions between the child and any persons with whom the child has contact. If possible, the interaction between S and others should also be compared with those that are experienced by S's closest siblings. Cultural aspects mentioned above should be studied as well, but the main emphasis should be on the child and how information about a PL (if any) manifest themselves and how they compare with information available to the child by normal means. Such an approach would have the additional problem that a particular S under observation may never refer to a PL, and that the time scale for such a study (even if not necessarily continuous) would need to be of the order of four years. Nevertheless, it seems to me that such an approach is a very promising one which may well strengthen the argument against unintentional leakage of information, but which could also contribute some important leads to the understanding of rebirth cases in general.

Additional studies, which would be useful, but less crucial from my point of view, should concentrate on obtaining background information on communities in which cases occur relatively frequently. From my experience,

Burmese and perhaps some Turkish villages would be most suitable for such purposes. Background questions which are relevant for a more detailed assessment of particular cases include: (1) How often do birthmarks and defects occur in the general population and in the rebirth population of a village or small community? IS's body drawing forms could be used to obtain some information about the relative distribution over the body of birthmarks. (2) Are birthmarks of similar size and vividness recognized as such, to a similar extent, in the general population compared to families with rebirth cases?

### Some Comments on the Question of Reincarnation

This study did not attempt to evaluate cases for evidence in support of the reincarnation hypothesis but was restricted to an assessment of the paranormality of information and other indicators that seem to connect children and adults who are alive, with persons who have previously died. Within the communities in which these cases were studied, these connections were usually regarded as manifestations of a rebirth or reincarnation process. The meaning that is attached to these terms varies to some extent between individuals and families within the same community, as well as between communities with different customs, traditions, and religious views.

Some Buddhists reject the idea that rebirth indicates the continuation of a previous individual personality. They would argue that the karma of a PP is transferred to a new and different individual. In terms of the practical consequences for a community this view is not really very different from one which does not allow for any notion of rebirth at all but which acknowledges that the good and bad deeds of persons who have lived before influence—by normal means—the present generation. The difference of this Buddhist's view is limited to the assumption that the karma of a particular PP is transferred to a particular S, and that this transfer occurs in a—from a Western point of view—paranormal way.

On the other end of the scale, a degree of continuation of an individual previous personality is accepted; i.e., S is accepted as a continuation of a PP. Although this belief was widely accepted on a somewhat abstract basis among the communities that I had contact with, virtually all the parents and relatives of Ss seem to regard the Ss as distinct new personalities. These observations may be misleading because in some communities, particularly in Thailand and Turkey, parents and relatives do not necessarily welcome indications that a child may be a rebirth case. Consequently, they may try to reject personality patterns outside a certain range of expectations. An acceptance of S as a genuine continuation of a PP would also require that S's parents have detailed memories and/or information about the particular PPs, and that does not frequently happen.

Nevertheless, my observations of an admittedly small number of actual cases seem to support my view that it is appropriate to provide a relatively

neutral framework through the use of the term connection. My observations do not seem to provide strong indications that the Ss are necessarily continuations of PPs.

Although the S of the sex change dacoit case behaved in a way that may be regarded as unusual for a female in a Burmese village, and although the Bangkok case also displayed unexpected behavior patterns apparently in agreement with the PP, I do not see these examples as clear signs that some continuing aspects of a PP is responsible for this behavior. If it is accepted that both cases contain some paranormal aspects, my observations of the cases would agree with the assumption that a limited paranormal influence which probably occurred during early childhood, could be regarded as the main and perhaps as the only source of the observable verbal and other behavioral indicators which suggest a connection to a PP. The assumed influence may become integrated into a relatively unformed but otherwise distinct personality of S, and may still be recognized in distinct behavioral characteristics many years later.

In a different context, I had suggested earlier (Keil, 1980) that the behavior patterns of most Ss who can be observed, agree with what I would expect from a normal experience or influence. For example, a city child might have had such an experience from a month long visit to a farm. Certain aspects of the child's view of the world and, in a sense, even certain personality aspects may have changed noticeably and almost permanently. We may even use the expression that after an important experience a child or person is not quite the same any more but this does not mean that the child has adopted a different personality. In a similar way, it seems to me that although some of the cases which I studied, apparently developed behavior patterns which had a noticeable and long-lasting bearing on some personality aspects of the Ss—compared to what one might expect from the observations of siblings who are not regarded as rebirth cases—this difference seems neither qualitatively nor quantitatively dissimilar from the country visit example above.

If it is assumed, as I do, that the cases support the view that paranormal aspects played a role in these connections, and if it is further assumed that the paranormal aspects can be accounted for by a temporary influence—in most cases retrospective—during early childhood, the question arises whether ESP or psi could account for this kind of influence. Those aspects of the connections between Ss and PPs which provide the strongest indication that paranormality is involved (but excluding birth marks as far as my cases are concerned) suggest that ESP would have to operate at a remarkably successful level in order to provide the necessary information to the Ss. It could be argued that the best ESP tests do not show a success rate which is in agreement with those requirements and that, consequently, ESP or psi should be rejected as a possible framework to account for the paranormal influences experienced by an S. The term "super-ESP" is sometimes used to emphasize that impossible demands have to be met. It must be kept in mind

though, that experimental tests suggest a goal directness (Schmidt, 1970) which is quite remarkable. That is, subjects in some tests apparently were able to be successful even though they could not, in any way, understand how the desired outcome had to be achieved. For example, subjects were asked to change the rate at which radioactive decay occurred or/and at which this decay was registered. If it is also kept in mind that some spontaneous cases apparently require a great deal of accurate information; e.g., a person becoming aware (without any sensory information) of the detailed circumstances of a nonfatal accident involving a relative—it seems to me that psi cannot be completely ruled out as an alternative suggestion compared to one that maintains that PP continues to exist as S after PP's bodily death. In other words, there is at least a greater than zero probability that thoughts, emotions, and even some aspects of the personality of a person who is still alive but, for example, injured in a serious accident (on account of which death occurs within minutes) are maintained for some time and eventually transmitted, and that the relatively unformed personalities of some children are influenced by these transmissions.

This suggestion may account for apparently paranormal information about some traumatic events which PPs experienced, often just prior to death, but it does not really account for apparently paranormal information which refer to a variety of events over a longer period of a PP's life. It seems, at least, somewhat strange that the thoughts of a dying person reaching out (so to speak) to find some acceptance and resonance should contain such details as to where a pin or other minor items are hidden. It is possible though, that a rapid review of a fading life may contain various relatively unimportant items—perhaps only from the point of view of an observer but perhaps also, because during traumatic conditions, significant and unimportant details may be mixed up in an irrational manner, as in a dream. Indeed, given that some subjects do provide rather detailed information about some important events in a PP's life—as well as apparently unimportant ones—it is often surprising that other, perhaps even more important, events of a PP's life are not remembered by S if S's life is regarded as a continuation of the PP.

The above comments in agreement with my subjective belief system are not offered as an argument against the reincarnation hypothesis, but as a clarification and justification as to why I can suggest paranormal processes in connection with my cases without necessarily accepting reincarnation as a continuation of a PP in a new life of an S.

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