

Images of the Soul and the Circulatory Cosmology of Life:  
Psychological Models of Folk Representations  
in Japanese and French Youths' Drawings

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たましいのイメージと生命の循環世界観

—— 日本とフランス青年の描画による民間表象の心理学モデル ——

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From antiquity to the present time, human beings have imagined the two worlds, that is, this world and the next world after death. The former is directly visible to us and the latter is not, but images of the next world have been incorporated into people's cosmology of life cycle. In fact, every culture has developed its own system of folk representations related to life and death. Of these, the principle of life such as soul has been similarly imaged among many cultures. For example, the soul has been regarded as an animate entity distinct from the body, surviving after death, and/or a spiritual part of human being. On the basis of these essential images of soul, people have constructed their meanings of life, created their relationships with others, and developed a sense of continuity with their former and future generations.

Psychology, founded as a modern science at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and developed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has long overlooked the important meanings of life, death and the soul in peoples' imaginary world. Read (1997) pointed out that, "early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, psychology was considered to be a science of the soul, but by the end of the century, psychology had more or less abandoned the soul and replaced it with the mind." At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even the concept of the mind was rejected by behaviorists under the pretext of making psychology "a true science." With the rise of cognitive psychology in the past three decades, this too radical position has undergone considerable revisions and the concept of the mind has revived within a new context.

The term mind used in cognitive psychology refers to psychological functions such as cognition, intention and competence in human individuals. By contrast, the soul is the concept, not limited to individual level, but related to larger multiple life cycles: a life cycle of human individual, a generation cycle of human beings, and an ecological cycle of all the

lives on the earth (Yamada 2000).

It remains true that, except for some clinical psychologists such as Jung (1964), the 20<sup>th</sup> century psychology has left aside the problem of the soul. In the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we think it necessary for psychology to consider not only the mind of individuals but also the soul related to larger multiple life cycles in the multiple contexts. We need to reconsider the naive images of the life, death and the soul in the everyday life apart from any specific religious positions.

Other human sciences such as cultural anthropology, sociology of religion, mythology, folklore, historical science have already studied the soul in primitive societies and in traditional cultures by examining belief systems, various modes of religious rites, practices, and myths (Ariès, 1983; Evans-Pritchard, 1956; Hertz, 1907; Kuno, 1994; McDannell & Lang, 1988; Obayashi, 1992; Origuchi, 1967, etc.). But it seems that there are very few reports about what images contemporary people harbor of the soul in the civilized society.

In this article, we deal with the soul as one of folk representations that live in our times. More specifically to say, we are interested in how people image and depict the soul not at the individual level but rather at the collective level. We intend to collect a variety of imaginary depictions of the soul and to provide figurative models that enable us to map them. We will lay aside the question of whether the soul has material reality or not.

Our approach is common to the frameworks of folk psychology, cultural psychology, and psychology of social representations (Bruner, 1986; Kojima, H. 1998; Moscovici, 1988; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder, et. al., 1998), all of which consider the importance of socio-cultural constructions and peoples' act of meanings in everyday life. Partially inspired by the research of social representations (Wagner, 1998), we define the folk representation as follows; the folk representation is any imaginary or symbolic entity which people name, to which people attribute characteristics and values, and therefore are able to talk about.

When we say "folk representations of the soul," we should distinguish its two aspects; folk beliefs and folk images. The former is concerned with what people talk about their beliefs of the soul after death, while the latter bears on how people image the soul, no matter whether they believe in it or not. Here we are interested in the latter aspect, not in terms of individual differences or projections of personalities, but in terms of the social/folk representations especially at the collective level.

From the aforementioned point of view, we surveyed Japanese students on the three topics: (1) depictions of the relative location of the two worlds; this world and the next world, (2) transformations of the soul (tamashii) from this world to the next, (3) beliefs about the next world. For the former two topics, we used mainly the technique of freehand drawing with written explanation, while the third aspect was studied using a verbal

questionnaire.

We have already reported our analysis of Japanese students' drawings with regard to the first and second topics (Yamada & Kato, 1998; Yamada, 1998). In their first drawings, the majority of subjects (59.3%) placed the next world in the upper part of their drawings, opposed to this world located in the lower part, while only 27.4% depicted the two worlds in horizontal relation. Their second drawings revealed a variety of depictions not amenable to a single rationally unified model of the transformation of the soul.

These results were obtained from Japanese data, so the question remains whether or not common representations are found in other cultures. Nowadays, modern societies undergo drastic socio-cultural changes under reciprocal influences. It is therefore impossible to imagine that each society has a unique isolated culture independent from others. Japanese culture is no exception. In fact, since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Western civilization has greatly influenced Japanese culture. As a consequence, contemporary Japanese culture is a hybrid of its traditional and westernized components (Kato, 1965). Thus, it is nearly impossible to pick out the pure prototypes or proper unique aspects of Japanese folk representations of the soul separated from others.

Here, we do not intend to emphasize the uniqueness of Japanese culture, but rather to formulate common figurative rules underlying various kinds of images observed through different cultures. Comparing Japanese images with those of Western cultures might be an effective way of constructing models which could contribute towards understanding the commonality and the specificity of folk representations of the soul according to cultures.

It may be worth mentioning, in passing, the methodological value of our model construction. It is true that most of psychological models have been made within the scope of Western traditions of thinking. We, Japanese, have long been under the great influence of Western civilization over one century and a half and have used to introduce their models and to modify them for understanding ourselves. As a result, we have let ourselves being reflected in the mirror of the Western standard of comparison and have judged ourselves as being too specific from this standard. But is this type of modeling really valid for appreciating different cultures? Is it rather Western standard that is not free from cultural bias?

It is the time that we should notice the necessity of the reciprocal viewpoints from different cultures when constructing a comparative model. The models we would like to propose in this article will be constructed on the basis of Japanese culture. Our models will be helpful to understand not only our own culture, but also Western ones from a different perspective. We believe this way of model construction will help us root out biases of Western models and will serve as sharing the common places for mutual understanding of different cultures.

In this study, we conducted a comparative survey of Japanese and French students.

Both countries have their own long civilizations and actually similar standards of modern living. At the same time, because of each of their far geographical situations in the extremities of Eurasian continent, they have very different soio-cultural and religious backgrounds. As for the latter, Japan has an amalgam of Shintoism (indigeneous religion) and Buddhism, while France has a long Catholic tradition. These are the reasons why we compare the two countries. In addition, two countries share the cultural tradition of strong interest in pictorial depictions and this fact will serve as a favorable condition for our study.

The present article is concerned with the second topic of our research : images of the soul appearing in students' drawings, especially the transformation of the soul after death. The four main purposes of our study are :

- 1) To propose a fundamental framework which enables us to construct a model of the transformation of the soul.
- 2) To provide a model which schematizes a variety of images of the soul and their transformational process.
- 3) To find what are common and different imagery forms of the soul in Japanese and French peoples.
- 4) To find what are common and different characteristics of the transformation of the soul in Japanese and French peoples.

Before detailing the methods of the present study, we should first emphasize the utility of the drawing technique to reveal naive representations and elicit implicit images more visually than does verbal expression (Yamada, 1988 ; Yamada & Kato, 1993). Few studies fully use this method for purposes as ours. One rare case is Vaysse (1996), who studied images of the "heart" by asking her subjects to drawing it. She also considers drawing an effective approach to objectify vague mental images, arguing that it locates more precisely the place of imagery in the psychological organization of the subject. The language-free nature of drawing renders it especially suited to use in cross-cultural comparison of images.

## **Method**

### **Subjects**

327 Japanese University students (96 males, 231 females) participated in the present study. They were recruited from three universities : one located in the Tokyo metropolitan area and the others in greater Nagoya (Japan's fourth largest city, population 2,150,000). For purposes of Japanese-French comparison, the instructions were translated into French, and the same survey was administered to 234 students at University of Paris VIII (52 males,

170 females, 12 unspecified). In fact, the French sample showed a wide variety of religion, ethnic origin, age, etc., whereas Japanese students were very homogeneous in these respects. However, separate factor analysis of the French data failed to identify significant differences between such sub-groups. 46 Japanese and 54 French subjects were excluded from the present analysis, because they made no visual drawings of the soul's image.

### Questionnaire

Yamada designed the original version of Japanese questionnaire in 1995. Here, we used a Revised Version (Yamada & Kato, 1998) and its French translation. The questionnaire mainly consists of three parts: (1) A drawing representing the image of the relationships between this world and the next world. (2) A drawing representing the image of the soul going back and forth between this world and the next world. (3) Responses to a 21 item-questionnaire on subjects' beliefs of the afterlife.

This article reports the results of the second drawing task (2). The subjects were instructed as follows: "Do you think that there may be survival of the soul after death? Please draw a picture showing the way you imagine its passage from this world to the next world, and eventually the passage from the next world back to this. You may explain your drawing with verbal explanations." [French: "Pensez-vous qu'il y ait une survie de l'âme après la mort? Pourriez-vous faire un dessin qui représente la manière dont vous imaginez le passage de ce monde vers l'autre monde, et éventuellement, le passage de l'autre monde vers ce monde-ci? Vous pouvez compléter votre dessin par des explications." ]

The entire questionnaire was administered to students in their university classrooms, and took about 40 minutes to complete.

## Construction of the Models

### 1. Meanings of the soul

Here we present schematic models to theorize a transformation of soul and to understand a variety of drawings. To begin with, it will be useful to define the term "soul" for our construction of models. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the core meanings of the word soul are:

- (A) 1) The principle of life in humans or animals: *animate existence*.
- 2) The principle of thought and action in humans commonly regarded as *an entity distinct from the body*: the spiritual part of humans in contrast to the purely physical.
- 3) The seat of the emotions, feelings, or sentiments: the emotional part of human's nature.
- (B) 1) The spiritual part of humans considered in its moral aspect or in relation to God

and precepts.

- 2) *The spiritual part of humans regarded as surviving after death* and as susceptible of happiness or misery in a future state.
- (C) 1) *The disembodied spirit of a (deceased) person*, regarded as a separate entity, and as invested with some amount of form and personality.

The word spirit also shares many core meanings with the word soul. The Petit Robert Dictionary shows that the French words *âme* and *esprit* share the same meanings as the English *soul* and *spirit* in the OED. These dictionary definitions distinguish two core meanings for the word soul :

- (A) An animating principle.
- (B) A non-material or psychological entity separable from the body and surviving after death.

Differentiating the word soul from spirit, we might say that spirit connotes a more ethereal quality, like that of air, breath, or wind (Latin, *spiritus*), but the term soul also derives from a word meaning air or breath (Greek, *anima*). By its very non-material nature the soul is imperceptible and formless. Nevertheless, people are inclined to represent it as having a certain form, because we can image something unknown by only comparing it to our familiar thing. Throughout human history, cultures have created various imaginary forms of the soul that influence us even today. That is why we find such a variety of interesting depictions of the soul in our subjects' drawings.

## 2. Models by figurative mode

We believe that a variety of imaginary forms of the soul are not created at random, but follow certain principles in the process of their transformation. Images might be connected with each other and be organized under these principles. In order to understand the relationships among wide-ranging images of the soul, it is necessary to theorize a fundamental framework and construct effective models on the basis of it. Here, we use the term "model" to refer to a system which helps us organize various kinds of phenomena (Indo, 1973).

Bruner (1986) pointed out, when constructing a model, there might be two different modes of theorizing; one is the paradigmatic mode, the other is the narrative mode. The former can be said to have its bases on logical proposition, while the latter might be closely associated with speech and story. Bruner's classification seems reasonable to us. However, the narrative mode seems to be too language-centered, so we have good reason for proposing another mode, which we call figurative mode. This mode is related to iconic metaphors and images. The models we propose here in this article depend on figurative mode.

### 3. A fundamental framework

Figure 1 shows our fundamental framework from which we could develop our schematic model of the relationships between this world and next world, and that of the transformation of the soul. This framework is constructed on the basis of seven major propositions:

1) Coordinates: Spatio-temporal Frame

Spatial and temporal relationships between this world and the next world can be represented in the coordinates composed of vertical and horizontal axes. These represent-

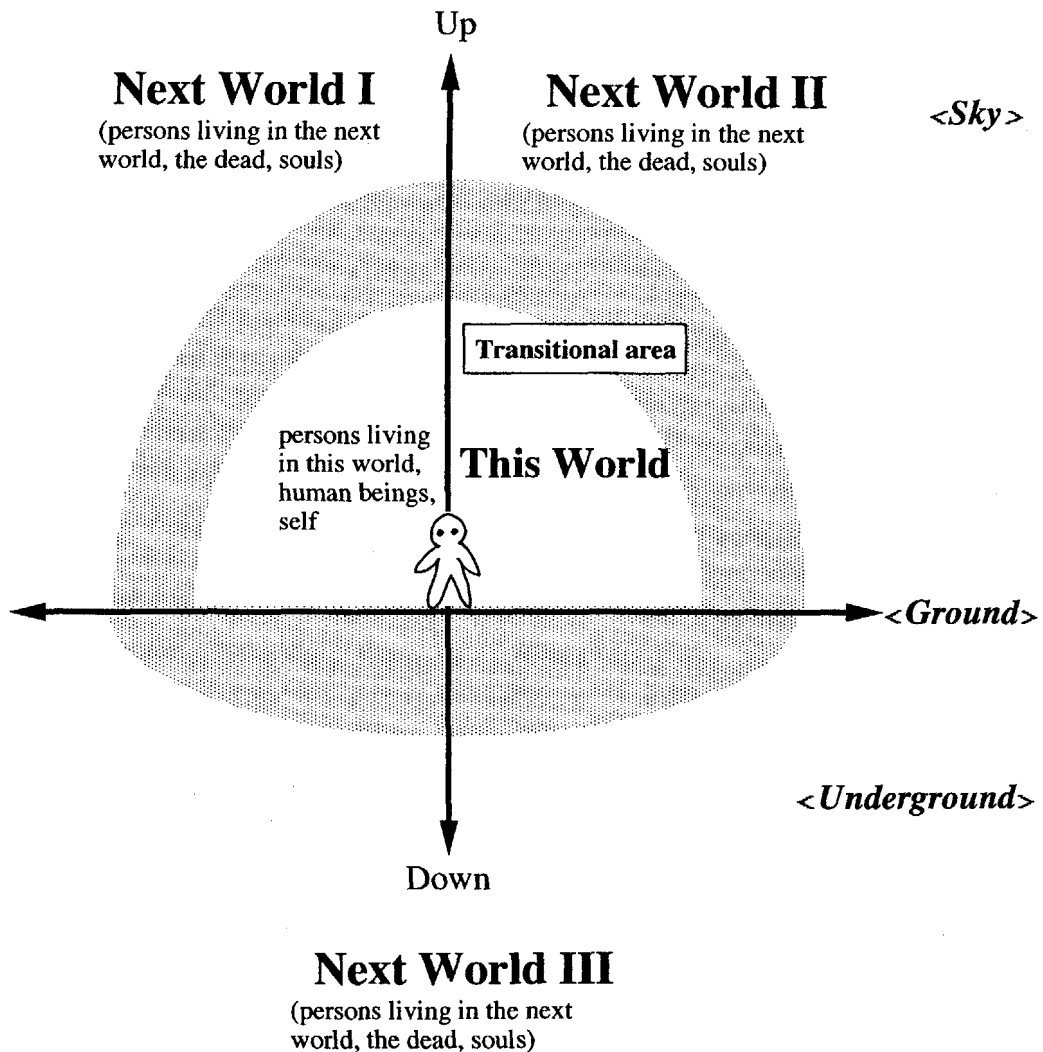


Figure 1 Basic theoretical framework for understanding images of the next world and types of transformation of the soul

ative coordinates are very different from geometrical ones that presuppose empty, homogeneous, and meaningless space, where axes can be arbitrarily set up. Our representative coordinates serve as a Spatio-temporal Frame that provides anisotropic spaces filled with ecological values.

2) Horizontal axis : Ground as a basis

Along the horizontal axis, there extends a zone where human beings live. This zone is named "Ground" and assumed to have a certain range of width in height. The ground affords an invariable basis for all kinds of human perception and behavior, so it has special ecological values for human being. As a land dweller, we cannot live without this basis (Gibson, 1979). The horizontal axis is, in fact, interpreted as a three-dimensional plane, so it is possible to set up arbitrarily any direction upon it according to its meanings, Right-Left might be a good example.

3) Vertical axis : Up-Down

The vertical axis, Up and Down, is not arbitrary, but objectively defined with gravity (Gibson, 1979) and has appropriate values and meanings for human being (Bolnow, 1963). From the ground, it extends to upper and lower directions.

4) Point of Origin : *Human Form*

The point of origin is defined with the intersection of vertical and horizontal axes. The *Human Form*, considered as the most basic depiction of the human shape, is located on it. But, why does the *Human Form* occupy this privilege place? Because we, human being, tend to represent our world from the human centered perspective.

The *Human Form* also serves as the starting point in the process of transformation of the soul in our model (Figure 2).

5) Three zones : Ground, Sky, and Underground

Along the vertical axis, there are three zones : Ground, Sky and Underground. The Ground is the zone for people's living and serves as the base of latter two zones. The Sky zone extends far above the Ground filled with air, full of light and then clearly perceivable. It seems as if people could freely navigate there, but, in fact, it is impossible for them to do so. The Underground zone is located below the Ground. It might be dark, invisible and solid ; therefore people usually could not move through.

6) Psychological topoi : This world and Next world

The two psychological topoi, This world and Next World could be defined with the different distance from the point of origin. The former is found in a central area near the point of origin, while the latter is found spacio-temporally far from it. The Ground is considered as an alternative name of This World, whereas the Sky and the Underground are assigned to the Next World. There assumes to be two different regions in the Sky (Next World I and II) and one region in the Underground (Next World III) in our transformation model.



7) Transitional area

Transitional area is assumed to be between This World and Next World. The term “area” in the common use only refers to spatial dimension, but here, we use it as having a

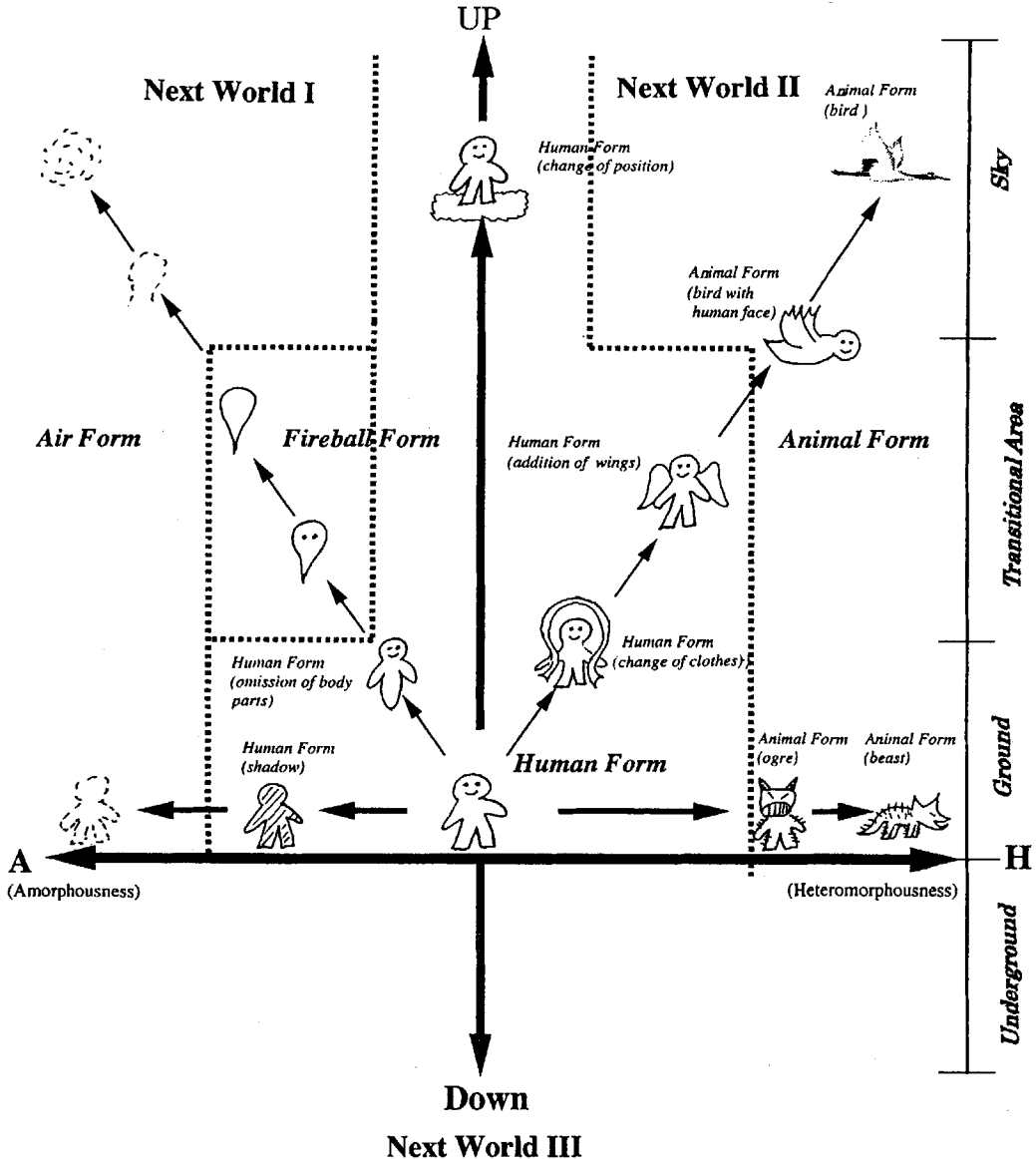


Figure 2 A model of the transformation of the soul

The upward direction of the plan shows the transformation of the soul, which changes by vanishing of solidity, diminution of individuality, floating property, etc. The right side of the plan presents the gradual metamorphosis of the soul into strangers (including animals), while the left side of the plan indicates the direction to the fade-out of the form (amorphousness or vaporization).

temporal connotation. So, this area also means a transitional period that the dead should pass through during the moaning initiation (Gennep, 1909).

The extent of this area depends on cases. Sometimes it might spread out in certain extent and in other cases, it might be a mere boundary line drawn with some indications. In most cases, some marks such as river and gate might be used for the sign of boundary.

Transitional area or period belongs neither to This World nor Next World ; therefore, it is of the neutral and ambivalent nature. It is the area having double meanings such as sacredness and profanity.

#### 4. The Transformation Model

From the above-mentioned fundamental framework, we developed our model of transformation of the soul (Figure 2). It is constructed on the basis of four major propositions: (1) The transformation of the soul is shown as changes of its spatial locations in the model. (2) The *Human Form* is the most basic depiction, which is thus located on the point of origin. The farther the soul is from there along vertical and horizontal axes, the more different attributes it acquires. (3) When the soul climbs the vertical axis (Up), it gains the property of transcendence. (4) The horizontal axis is asymmetric. It is theoretically possible to set up a number of different axes that extend to different directions on the horizontal plane. Of these, we choose the two; “amorphous” and “heteromorphous” axis. In our model, souls moving left of center grow increasingly amorphous; while souls moving right of center take on increasingly stranger forms.

#### 5. Details of the Transformation Model

Figure 2 shows a variety of typical transformations of the soul located in the Ground, the Transitional Area, and the Sky. Transformation from This World to the Next World I, may be characterized by “vaporization”; the farther the soul is from the point of origin along the left-hand “amorphous” axis, the more the soul loses its individuality, specificity, and solidity, so as to vanish in the end. In this transitional process of vaporization, the soul loses the identity it had when alive and embodied. In other words, it is deprived of its individuality, its own name, and its own physiognomy.

The soul’s final state of vaporization might be called an *Air Form*, because air symbolizes the formless, transparent state of the soul. The wind, or airflow, has long symbolized what is passing away from This World. According to Greek popular belief, a person’s soul, described as a breath of air located in the area of the heart, leaves the body through the mouth at the moment of death (Davies, 1997).

Figure 2 displays two main directions of transformation from *Human Form* to *Air Form*; one is an upward oblique direction by way of a *Fireball Form*, the other is a horizontal movement of the *Human Form* (shadow) on the Earth level. It seems that

*Human Form* cannot rise unaided ; in order to rise, the soul changes its form by acquiring wings or losing the hindrances of earthbound legs. Among these intermediate types, the *Fireball Form* is particularly interesting because has long been a common image in Japanese culture. In Japanese, the word for soul is “tamashii”, and in ancient times it was “tama”, denoting a sphere or a ball. So in Japanese, the very word for soul connotes images of the form of a ball of breath.

The transformation from This World to Next World II might be called metamorphosis. Along the right-hand “heteromorphous” axis, the soul changes from the *Human Form* into strange ones such as animals, monsters and other creatures. Studying representations of “Strangers” in Japanese folk culture, Komatsu (1985) identified two characteristics : ( 1 ) that they take forms different from *Human Form*, such as those of animals, monsters, and ogres ; ( 2 ) that they are alien to humankind and belong to outsiders. The former aspect coincides with the modification of form from *Human Form* to stranger forms, while the latter implies how far they are from ordinary human beings in social or spatio-temporal distance. In our survey, these two aspects refer to the changing of the soul with its increase of distance from original human beings.

“Strangers” include myriad monsters, demons, divine spirits, as well, but for the sake of simplicity, Figure 2 groups these all under the term of *Animal Form*. *Animal Form* is representative of “Strangers” in that it is the most popular type of transformation found in every culture of all over the world. Most creations of the human imagination are based upon composites or extensions of already known creatures. Thus humans imagine wolf-men, chimera, demons (human-animal combination), dragons (combination of animals), and the like.

Birds and winged insects like the butterfly, dragonfly, and firefly were the predominant depiction of the soul among *Animal Forms* in our survey. As shown in Figure 2, among the intermediate depictions from *Human Form* to *Animal Form* (bird), the celestial nymph deserves mention (Matsuoka, 1996). While assuming *Human Form*, she has a magic wand or clothing that enable her to hover ; she can easily return to *Human Form* by putting off these things. By contrast, a winged angel combines the *Human Form* and *Animal Form* (bird). A similar compound can be found in the Egyptian depiction of the soul, called bar. Countless legends and myths worldwide relate the transformation of the soul into a swan or a butterfly after death (Tada, 1996).

In contrast to its gradual dissolution into nothing in Next World I , in Next World II , the soul tends to transform into other creatures, preserving its individuality while losing its *Human Form* or identity. The deformation of its appearance and character allows it to establish a new identity by exaggerating some aspects of its previous personality.

## Analysis of Drawings

### 1. Definition of classification categories

Our analysis is focused on what kind of form the soul takes in the course of transformation in Next World I of Figure 2. In this zone, there are three main categories; Human Form, Fire-ball Form and Air Form. As for Animal Form found in Next World II, it is a theoretically important category, but in fact appeared very few in our subjects' drawings. So, we retains three categories useful for our classification. The criteria we used to distinguish the three Forms follow :

#### *General principles*

Classification must be done on the basis of graphic representation, using verbal explanation only for clarification; in cases of inconsistency, priority should be given to graphic representation. (This presumes that students sketch more meaningfully than they explain, that their deliberately added explanations are more likely to distort than to clarify their images.)

#### *Definition of the three Forms*

##### A) *Human Form*

Drawings exhibiting two or more of the following criteria are considered Human : (1) Clear differentiation of head and torso. (2) Depictions of arms or legs. (3) Depictions of facial features.

##### B) *Air Form*

Drawings exhibiting any one of the following criteria are considered Air : (1) Dotted outlines. (2) Lack of clear-cut contour, such as of light, energy, and smoke. (3) Vague, unspecifiable form.

##### C) *Fireball Form* (intermediate between *Human Form* and *Air Form*)

Drawings including representations such as spherical-form, cloudy form, fire form, tadpole-like form etc. are considered Fireballs :

Within the *Human Form* category, the wide variety of depictions of the soul was further classified into five sub-categories using the following criteria :

(1) Shadows retaining the contours typical of *Human Form*. (2) Human bodies lacking some parts (like hands or feet). (3) Human bodies with added parts (like halos, wings or auras). (4) Human bodies with changed parts (like clothing, hats or capes). (5) Human bodies with distortion of size (miniaturization, enlargement).

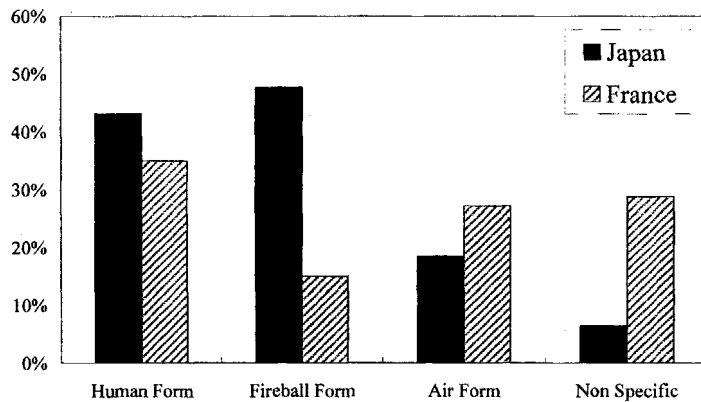
These Modification types were checked in relation to typical *Human Form* or by comparison with the same student's drawing of the living human being. We also attempted

an analysis of drawings in terms of the possibilities of the soul's going back and forth. The methods of this analysis are described later in the results.

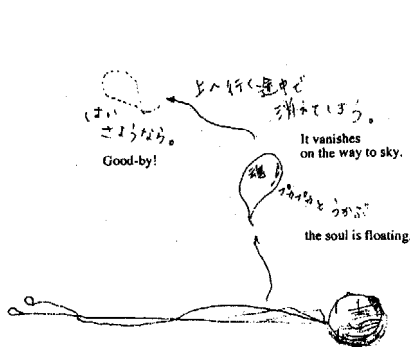
## 2. Transformations of the soul

Figure 3 shows the proportion of the drawings for each of the four categories. Classification made by two independent judges attained a high degree of agreement : 98.6% for Japanese drawings and 92.8% for French drawings.

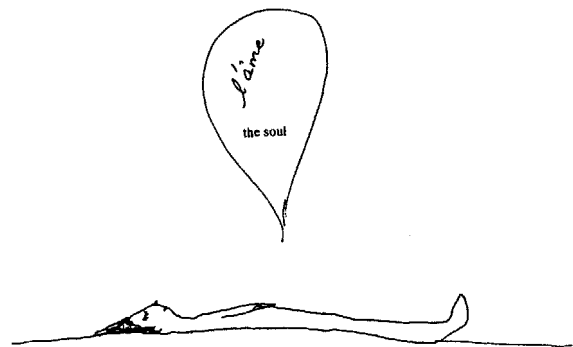
There was no significant difference in the percentage of *Human Forms* between the two countries. The Japanese subjects represented the soul much more frequently in a *Fireball Form* than the French subjects, while the latter were more likely to drawing *Air Forms*. Incidentally, Japanese painting and literature traditionally depicts the soul in *Fireball Form*.



**Figure 3** Frequency of forms representing the soul depicted by Japanese and French students



**Case J 1097 (Japan)**  
 Form of the soul : Fireball Form → Air Form  
 Type of Transfer : Going only, No Rebirth

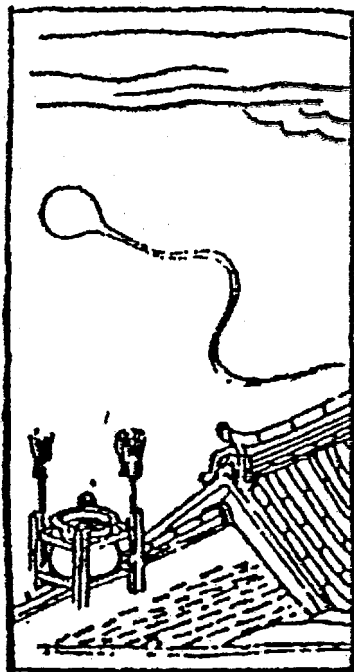


After death, the soul frees him/herself from the body and run away.  
**Case F 409 (France)**  
 Form of the soul : Fireball Form  
 Type of Transfer : Going only, No Rebirth

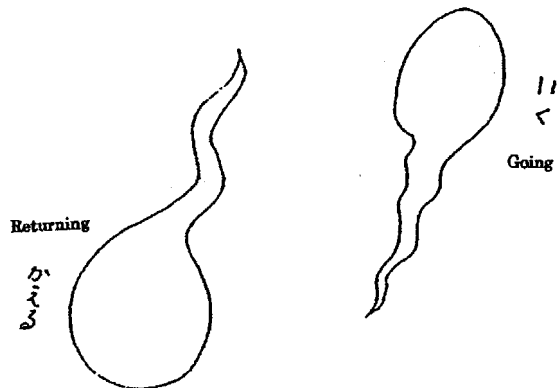
The results of the Japanese students suggest that the *Fireball Form* is a temporary phase of souls shifting from clearly defined entities to shapeless ones.

We can see a good example of typical *Fireball Form* in a Japanese student's drawing (Case J 1097) which aptly illustrates its intermediate nature. That is, the soul leaves the dead body, changing into a fireball, then vanishes in *Air Form*. It is interesting to note that a similar type of *Fireball Form* also appeared, although far less frequently, in some French students' drawings (Case F 409).

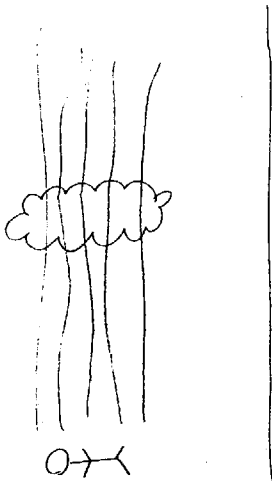
We do not know when the *Fireball Form* came to be a typical Japanese depiction of the soul. The illustrated encyclopedia *Wakan-sansai-zue* published in the early 18th century, shows the same kind of *Fireball Form* drawn by present-day Japanese students (Figure 4, Case J 126). The author, Terashima Ryoan wrote, "the soul takes a *Fireball Form*, that is, it has a round swollen top and a long, pale-colored tail. It flies quietly, at the height of about 10 meters." (Terashima, 1712 [Shimada, I., et.al. (Eds.), 1987, pp.144-145]). The typical Japanese depiction of the soul as *hitodama* is spherical but also has a tail. This feature gives us the impression that its nature is not only floating and gaseous but also autonomic and self-active. This combination of characteristics enables the soul to ascend to the next world.



**Figure 4** An Example of *Fireball Form of the soul*  
Japan, Edo period,  
Terashima (1712)



**Case J 126 (Japan)**  
Form of the soul: *Fireball Form*  
Type of Transfer: *Going & Returning, No Rebirth*

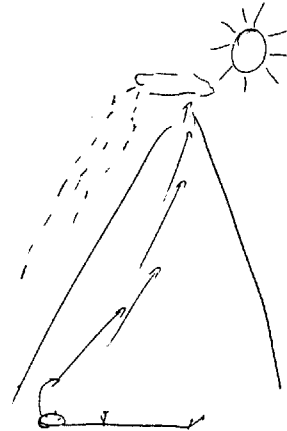


The soul goes up to change into air. The soul comes back as drops of rain.

**Case J 1102 (Japan)**

Form of the soul : Air Form

Type of Transfer : Going & Returning, No Rebirth



The soul is drawn up to the sky and vanishes into the clouds. Then, it falls as rain on the earth.

**Case F 282 (France)**

Form of the soul : Air Form

Type of Transfer : Going & Returning, No Rebirth

As for the *Air Form*, the idea that the soul is a kind of air or breath and therefore has no shape seems accepted worldwide. The Japanese verb to die [shinu] literally means that the breath [shi] departs [inu]. Japanese are familiar with the Chinese concept of chi [ki in Japanese] — a vital energy and animating principle analogous to breath or air. The ancient Greek word psyche, the Chinese hun and the Sanskrit atman all relate to breath; these etymologies suggest that the *Air Form* might be the most basic animistic image of the soul (Umehara & Nakanishi, 1996; Yamaori, 1976). Two examples of Japanese and French students' drawings (Case J 1102, Case F 282) show a similar prototypical image of *Air Form*, which implies that the soul might be incorporated in ecological cycles.

The relatively higher proportion of *Air Form* in French university students further suggests that French culture has conserved the basic image of the shapeless soul as a dominant type, whereas Japanese culture evolved a spherical image as an intermediate form before the soul attains a shapeless state. Of course, will-o'-the-wisps and fireballs are also common in European graveyard folklore.

Japanese and French students sketched similar percentages of *Human Forms*, including its five variations: (1) Shadows retaining the contours typical of *Human Form*. (2) Human bodies lacking some parts (like hands or feet) (3) Human bodies with added parts (like halos, wings, auras) (4) Human bodies with changed parts (like clothing, hats, capes) (5) Human bodies with distortion of size (miniaturization, enlargement).

The shadow retains the shape of the human body in silhouette. This type appears akin to the *Air Form*, but it symbolizes another invisible existence that lives together with us in this world. Many variations of shadow representation are found in different cultures all over the world. Egyptian ones are good examples (Figure 5).

Among images lacking body parts, Japanese students' frequently drew legless *Human Forms*, some of which were stereotypical of Japanese phantom images since the Edo Period (17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century, Figure 6). Such legless *Human Forms* typically float through the air, wandering about the boundary between this world and the next (eg. Case J 452). This lack of legs implies that the soul need no longer walk on the ground, but rather gains a floating nature akin to that of spherical-form soul. This kind of legless *Human Form* can be found



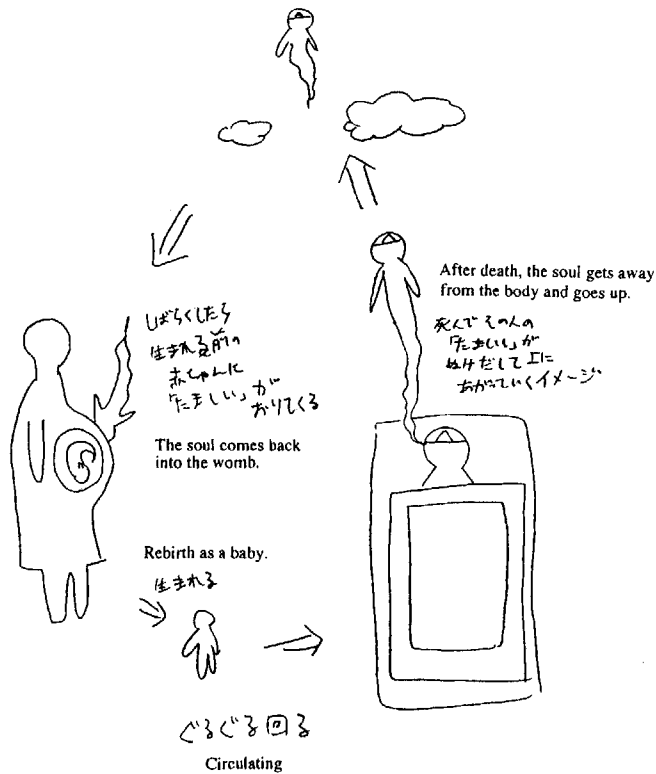
**Figure 5** Examples of Human Form and Animal Form of the soul  
Human Form (Shadow) and Animal Form (Bird with human face).  
Egypt, Old Ages



くろくろわだてのねおしせ  
「曲輪来伊達大寄」  
三代歌川豊国（五渡亭国貞画）天保7（1836）年  
早稲田大学演劇博物館蔵

**Figure 6** An Example of Human Form of the soul (Legs cut off) "A Phantom of Kasane", Toyokuni, Utagawa. Japan, 1836.





**Case J 452 (Japan)**

Form of the soul : Human Form (Legs cut off)→Human Form (Baby)  
 Type of Transfer : Going & Returning, Rebirth (Baby)

in other cultures too (Figure 7).

If both legless *Human Form* and *Fireball Form* share a common intermediate floating nature, then how do they differ? Japanese phantoms (one type of legless *Human Forms*) retain the proper names, faces, and even voices they had when alive. In fact, the reason they are thought to become wraiths rather than fireballs is that they have sworn vengeance against, or remain attached to, some particular person or place in this world. Far from losing their identity, such Japanese wraiths rather become even more distinctively themselves, embodying their bitter hate or regret towards particular people in this world. This is the distinctive nature of phantoms compared to *Fireball-Form* souls. Fireball souls also wander on the boundary of the two worlds but have lost their distinctive identities. The semi spherical hitodama might also be a transformation of the *Human Form* with limbs atrophied, in transition to a spherical shape.

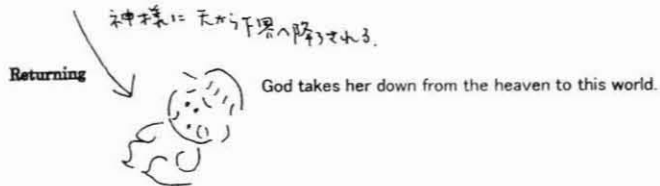
Among the drawings of human bodies with added parts, Japanese students frequently depicted winged angels (Case J 432) or persons with halo (Figure 8). Now winged angels



Figure 7 An Example of Human Form of the soul (Legs cut off, American Natives)

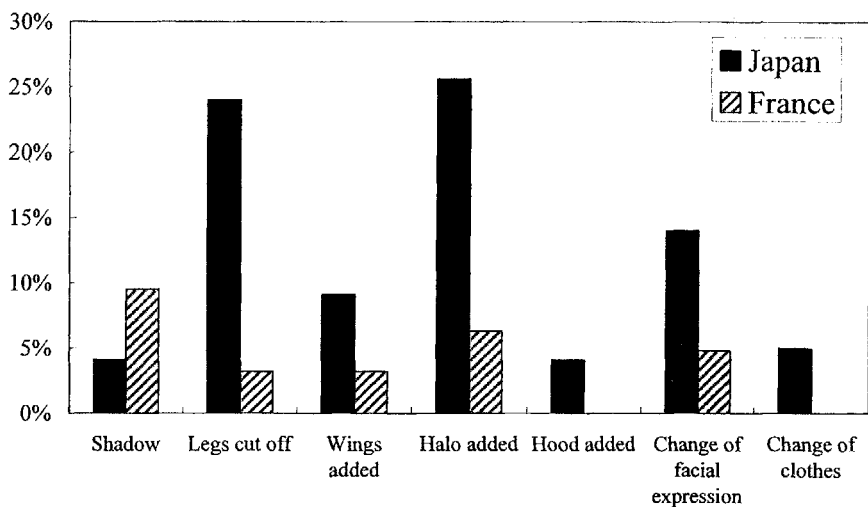


A person is going back to the next world (which is found over the cloud). She has wings on her back, with which she can flap away.



Case J 432 (Japan)

Form of the soul: Human Form (Wings added)→Human Form (Baby)  
 Type of Transfer: Going & Returning, Rebirth (Body)



**Figure 8 Frequency of modifications of Human Form depicted by Japanese and French students**

are far from traditional Japanese cultural images, so this provides interesting evidence that Japanese youth are strongly influenced by Western culture in their conceptions of the soul. However, the function of angels seen in the Japanese drawings differs from Christian angels. Christianity and Islam depict angels as messengers of God (Knapp, 1995), whereas Japanese youth depict angels as an intermediate form of departed souls. The wings sketched by Japanese students seem to symbolize the flying, intermediate state of the soul.

The depiction of the feathered soul is reminiscent of images of birds, and in fact, countless paintings from cultures around the globe represent souls as birds. However, our students never represented the soul by such images as birds. Contemporary youth do not easily associate the soul with animals.

It is pertinent here to remark on the general idea of the transformation of the soul that we propose in our model. The soul is depicted in various forms after it leaves the body. Even when the soul retains a *Human Form*, it may lose its legs or gain wings in order to float off the ground. Further, it may transform into a Fireball, gaining more freedom of movement at the cost of the loss of its identity. Finally, the soul could vaporize into gaseous matter that becomes the medium of other possible transformations.

### 3. The transfer of the soul

#### *The possibilities of the soul's going back and forth*

Figure 9 indicates that the majority of Japanese students (63.7%) could imagine the soul returning to this world after visiting the next, while only 37.8% of the French students made such drawings when instructed to do so. Yanagida (1946) noted that Shinto views

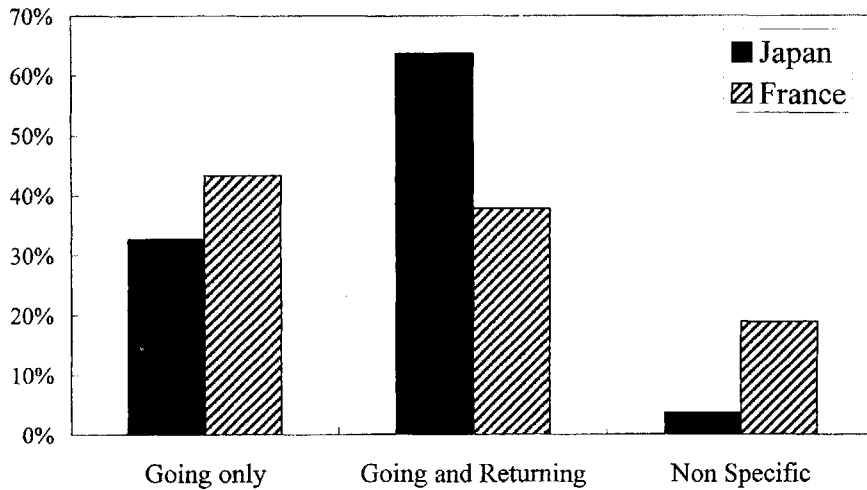
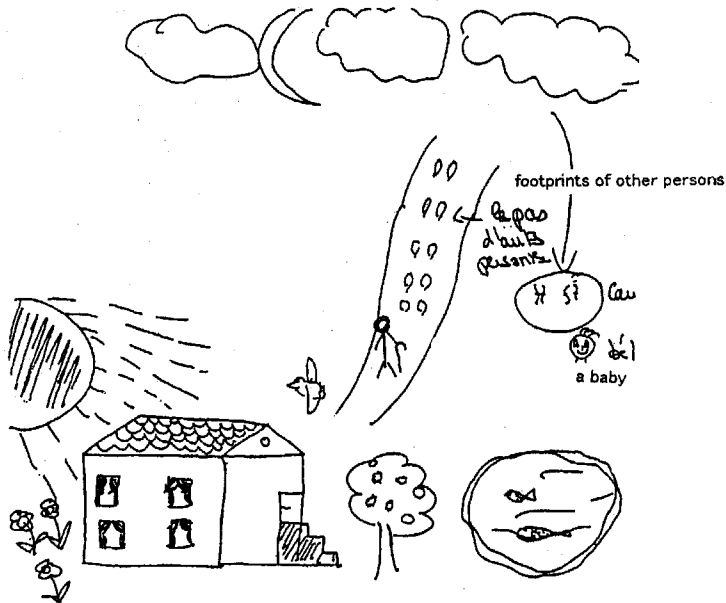


Figure 9 Frequency of the soul's returning to this world depicted by Japanese and French students



When we become old, we are obliged to pass from this world to the next world for finding somewhere we can rest ourselves, because there are too many things that make us tired in this world. It is through the medium of genes that we can come back to this world. Certain genes keep personality traits of our ancestors.

**Case F 018 (France)**

Form of the soul : Human Form (Stick added)

Type of Transfer : Going & Returning, Rebirth (Baby)

of the afterlife are rooted in the notion that souls of the departed can freely come and go between the worlds of the living and the dead. Buddhism presupposes that every person is repeatedly reborn until they transcend the wheel of suffering by selfless detachment. So in traditional Japanese thinking, there are two kinds of ideas on the "circulation of the soul" ; one implies visitations by the dead ancestors, the other is the reincarnation of the spirit of the dead in new babies. According to the Japanese view, we can sometimes commune with intimate souls who come back to this world, as in the summer Bon festival, and all of us can rejoin our ancestors who await us in the other world after death.

The present survey shows that the majority of young Japanese are familiar with this basic cultural representation, although many of them personally may not believe it, and 14% of them are unable even to make such a drawing when instructed to do so.

It is interesting that some French subjects were able to conceive images of the soul "eventually passing from the other world back to this" (Case F 018) Admittedly, our suggestion was closer to the famous French Cathars' idea of rebirth than to the notion of souls flitting back and forth as in Yanagida's Shinto. Despite the difference in their religious backgrounds, the French students' drawings of returning souls might suggest some acquaintance with the notions of "return" in Catharism, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, or popular films, if not in Buddhism.

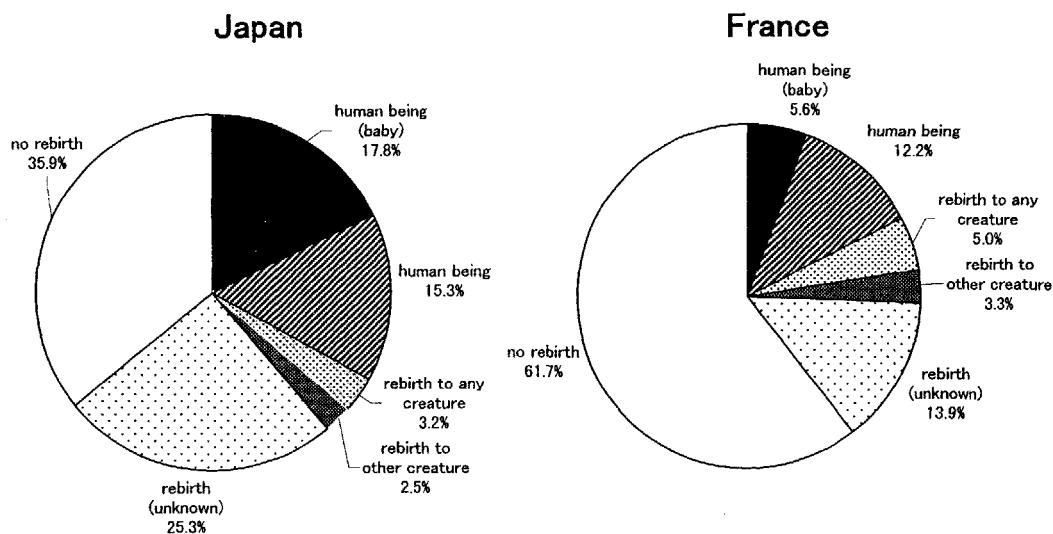
### ***Types of rebirth***

The majority of students who could conceive of the eventual return of the soul from the next world back to this one sketched returning souls reentering human wombs or babies (Figure 10). Very few subjects in either culture produced images of souls being reborn as other animals. Thus, the circulatory worldview represented in drawings by today's college students differs from original (Hindu) ideas of the transmigration of the soul. This may also be due in part to the fact that the French word monde connotes "people in the world" rather than the animal kingdom.

### ***Circulatory cosmology***

The results shown in Figures 9 and 10 demand further consideration of the nature of circulatory cosmology in Japanese culture.

It is easy to imagine that circulatory cosmologies derive from agricultural societies' cyclical conceptions of time. Farmers daily confront "the cycle of growth, decay, and regrowth of vegetation" with the changes of seasons. Agriculture requires intimate and detailed knowledge of this cycle. Tsuboi (1984) suggests that Japanese rites of passage have a cyclical structure modeled on the cycle of rice cultivation. Just as plant life consists of several stages of germination, fertilization, fruit bearing, decay, subterranean subsistence of seeds and ultimately, regrowth. So the human life cycle might be thought to have



**Figure 10** Proportion of types of rebirth depicted by Japanese and French students.

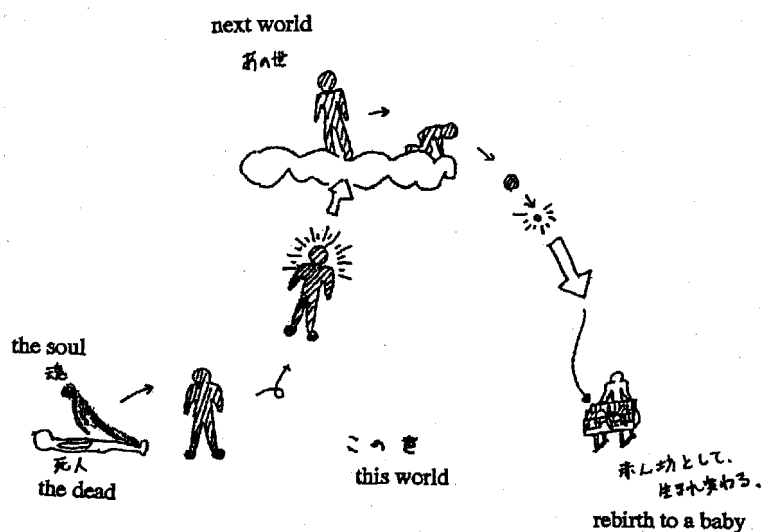
similar stages of birth, marriage, child rearing, death, invisible subsistence of the soul and, then, rebirth.

Japanese culture has long cherished this parallelism between the two. It can be imagined that, just as the vital force of the plant is preserved in the form of the seed after the plant itself decay, so the vital force of the person is preserved in the form of the soul after the person himself decays. This vital force is called sphere [tama] or soul [tamashii] in Japanese language. With the industrialization and urbanization of the last few decades, traditional Japanese worldviews are losing their hold on contemporary youth. In fact, very few Japanese students used the metaphor of seeds or germination to represent the rebirth of the soul in their drawings. A small minority also drew rebirths completely unrelated to either traditional Shinto or Buddhist “circulatory” patterns described above.

In spite of these results suggesting that Japanese youth drift away from traditional ideas, many of their cyclical depictions do draw on Japanese cultural traditions. Good examples are Case J 109, Case J 371 and Case J 452. It is further interesting that similar depictions were found also in drawings by French students told to draw the return of the soul. Facing the same assignment, French students depicted the soul coming back to this world less frequently than Japanese. But the fact that even a Catholic French woman (e. g. case F 118) could draw similar images suggests that cyclical ideas are conceivable in Western culture as well. These images are obviously not derived from Christian orthodoxy, but Greek myths and folk beliefs often differ from systematic theology and influence people’s lives profoundly (Davies, 1997).

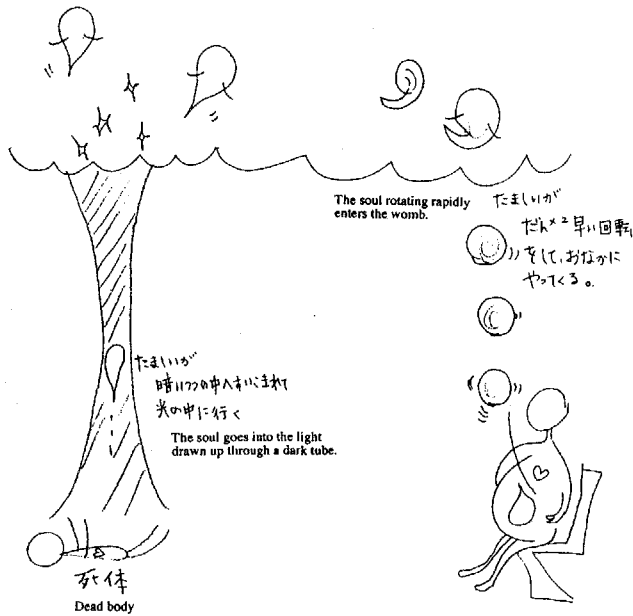
Figure 10 shows that the majority of Japanese youth sketched images representing the rebirth of the soul. However, very few drew images of transmigration into other animals. Yanagida implies that Japanese traditional folk concepts of the soul differ from the Mahayana Buddhist idea that individuals reap the rewards of their past karma after death, so their souls must pass through other existences such as animals, demons, titans, or ghosts, in their next cycles. Both orthodox and heterodox schools of Indian religions including Buddhism presuppose that transmigration of the soul continues indefinitely (Vernette, 1998). The only escape from the suffering of eternal embodied existence is emancipation of the soul from these enduring cycles, through merging with the divine and/or achieving self-extinction.

These Indian ideas of transmigration were introduced to Japan along with Buddhism in the 7th century, but their influence never gained deep hold on popular Japanese thought. Belief in afterlife is a good example of traditional resistance to cultural change. Shinto is more life-affirming than Buddhism, shunning discussion of death, and seeing the cyclical nature of death and rebirth in the generations of living families rather than in invisible other worlds. Japanese Shinto tradition places more importance on belonging to family and community than on individual happiness or liberation, and is more optimistic than Indian religions, believing joy rather than suffering to be the fundamental mode of existence. What is important for Japanese people is not to release themselves from infinite cycles of transmigration as Buddhism would propose, but to feel themselves closely associated with their ancestors. These feelings are based not on a sense of directly belonging to particular



**Case J 109 (Japan)**

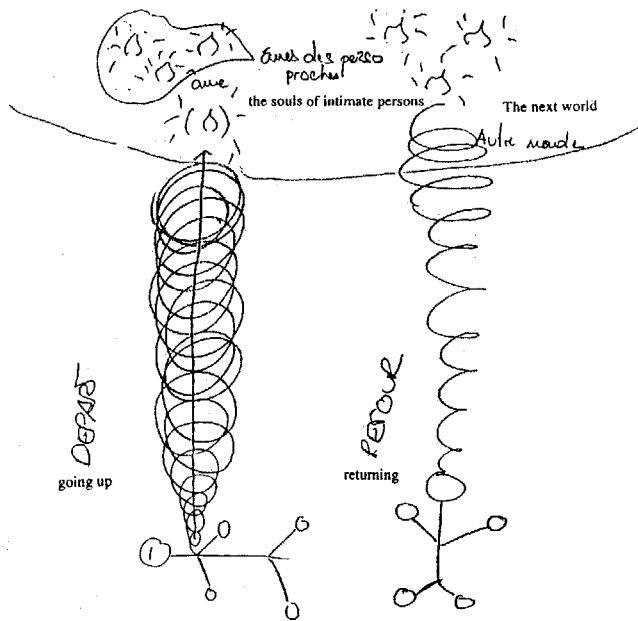
Form of the soul : Human Form (Shadow) → Fireball → Human Form (Baby)  
 Type of Transfer : Going & Returning, Rebirth (Baby)



**Case J 371 (Japan)**

Form of the soul : Fireball Form

Type of Transfer : Going & Returning, Rebirth (Baby)



**Case F 118 (France)**

Form of the soul : Fireball Form

Type of Transfer : Going & Returning, Rebirth (Baby)



kinship groups, as in the Chinese case, but on a sense of being loosely linked to their ancestors in general. The Japanese confirm the identity of their community and of each of its members through community participation in ritual dialogue with the dead. This interaction with their ancestors allows them to feel that they occupy a certain position in a long succession of lives. It is essential for Japanese to feel their lives as a part of a larger cycle of Life from generation to generation, an ongoing project.

In concluding, we should note how the Japanese students' depiction of the soul after death differs from Western traditional ideas, such as Plato's "immortality of the soul." Plato's concept of immortality dualistically contrasts the integrity of the immaterial soul with the decomposition and dissolution of the material body. Since Plato, much of Western traditional thinking has considered the soul an eternally unchanging (Grégoire, 1956; Vernette, 1998), ultimate entity, while Japanese culture regards the soul as an existence always changing in form and content.

In spite of the finding of this clear difference, we must also draw attention to the fact that many similar types of drawings were found both in Japanese and French students. This suggests that there might be the large community of backgrounds when human being represents the soul in the cosmology of life. Our model would open up the possibility to understand a variety of these common and different cultural representations of the soul in a coherent way.

From the suggestions above on the characteristics of Japanese idea of the soul, we might go on to an even more detailed examination of the various modes of its depiction. We might elaborate upon the model we presented in Figure 2, so that it might serve as a scheme for better understanding the represented nature of the soul in multiple cultures. We developed our model of graphic representation as an innovative method to approach the psychology of folk concepts.

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