

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS TWIN BIRTHS IN JAPANESE SOCIETY

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Folklore data on twins are collected from published references. Another source of data is a questionnaire survey of "Legends surrounding twins" by the Association of Twins' Mothers (ATM) in Japan. There are now fewer legends surrounding the birth of twins in Japan. Critical opinions about unlike-sexed twins have drastically decreased. According to the survey of the ATM, 7% of members of the ATM heard pejoratives such as having babies like an animal and 1.3% of the members heard such as reincarnation of a couple who committed double suicide, and these had got on their nerves. From a scientific viewpoint, heredity and the use of ovulation-inducing hormones have been occurred as causes of the twin births.

Introduction

Furuno¹⁾ studied folklore surrounding twins using foreign literature, whereas Kamata²⁾ used Japanese literature to study folk customs related to multiple births. Various legends about twin births have existed in Japan. The purposes of this study are to examine secular changes in legends surrounding twin births and to deal with geographical variations in the individual legends of twin births from Japanese literatures.

Materials and Methods

Folklore data on twins are collected from published references²⁾⁻⁸⁾. Another source of data is a questionnaire survey of "Legends surrounding twins" by the Association of Twins' Mothers (ATM) in Japan⁹⁾. Table 1 shows information about references.

Table 1 Information about sources of data in the present study

Reference number	Examined year	Method	Area	Size of data
Literature survey				
3	1935	Interview	Nationwide	
8	1935	Literature		
4	1947	Questionnaire	Nationwide	6,597 people
5	1947	Questionnaire	Nationwide	6,597 people
6	1950	Questionnaire	Nationwide	6,373 people
7	1982	Literature		
2	1982	Literature		
The ATM survey				
9	1991	Questionnaire	Nationwide	1,084 people

Table 2 Taboo foods for pregnant women in each prefecture

Pref. no.	Prefecture	1)		2)		3)		4)		5)		6)		7)		8)		9)		10)		11)		12)	
		L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A	L	A
1	Hokkaido										+														
2	Aomori	+																							
3	Iwate	+						+																	
4	Miyagi	+								+	+										+				
5	Akita	+				+		+		+															
6	Yamagata	+																							
7	Fukushima	+		+							+														
8	Ibaraki	+																							
9	Tochigi	+				+		+																	
10	Gunma	+									+														
11	Saitama				+	+					+														
12	Chiba	+		+	+	+					+			+											
13	Tokyo	+		+							+														
14	Kanagawa	+		+	+					+	+														
15	Niigata	+																							
16	Toyama	+		+	+																				++
17	Ishikawa	+									+														
18	Fukui	+	+	+	+	+					+														
19	Yamanashi	+									+						+								
20	Nagano	+									+						+								
21	Gifu									+															
22	Shizuoka			+	+		+				+										+		+		
23	Aichi	+		+	+						+										+				
24	Mie	+		+	+																				
25	Shiga	+	+	+			+	+			+														
26	Kyoto				+						+														
27	Osaka	+					+				+														
28	Hyogo	+		+							+														
29	Nara	+		+	+	+					+														+
30	Wakayama			+	+		+				+	+													
31	Tottori	+		+	+																				
32	Shimane	+		+																					
33	Okayama	+									+	+													
34	Hiroshima	+				+					+														
35	Yamaguchi			+	+			+			+														
36	Tokushima	+		+				+			+														
37	Kagawa	+																							
38	Ehime			+		+		+				+							+						
39	Kochi			+																					
40	Fukuoka			+																					
41	Saga																								
42	Nagasaki																								
43	Kumamoto		+																					+	
44	Oita							+			+	+													
45	Miyazaki	+		+							+				+										
46	Kagoshima					+					+	+							+						
47	Okinawa					+																			+
Total		31	3	16	14	13	4	9	0	8	24	2	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	3	0	2	4	0

1) Twin chestnuts; 2) Double-section tangerines; 3) Double-fruits; 4) Forked radish; 5) Double-yolked eggs; 6) Forked *Matsutake* mushroom; 7) Double-eggplants; 8) Double-persimmons; 9) Double sweet potatoes; 10) Cherries; 11) Peanuts; 12) Double-banana, Double-ginkgo nuts, Forked vegetables and Rice split into two parts; L: Literature survey; A: Survey by the Association of Twins' Mothers

Results

Regional folklore surrounding twins

Legends about the causes of twin births

One of legends about the causes of twin births is the eating of taboo foods, including twin chestnuts, tangerins with double segments, double-yolked eggs, etc. (Table 2). A chestnut bur usually contains 3 nuts. One which has only 2 is called a twin chestnut, obviously a symbol for twins. Then it is believed that a woman who eats twin chestnuts can be expected to bear twins. Fig. 1 shows the subdivision of Japan according to prefecture. The number in each subdivision refers to the prefecture number in Table 2. Fig. 2 shows the areas for having legends concerning taboo foods for pregnant women. Such legends are widely distributed throughout Japan, and can be found in 42 prefectures. Legend regarding with twin chestnut is the most widely distributed throughout Japan (31 prefectures). Legends for twin tangerine segments, with two segments enclosed in a single membrane, are found in 16 prefectures, making this the second highest legend. As seen in

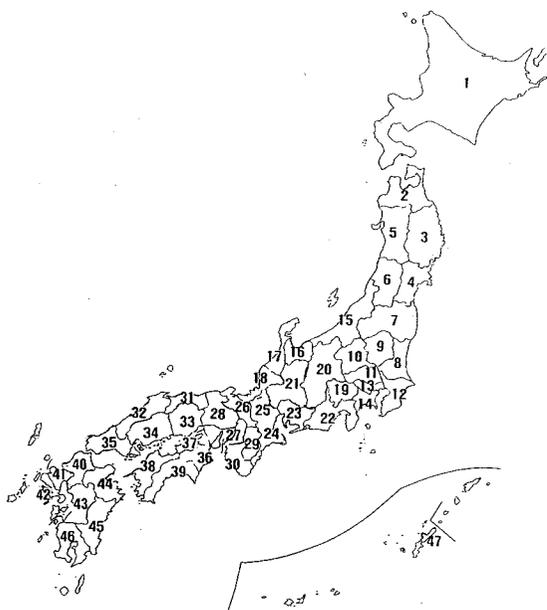


Fig. 1 Subdivision of Japan according to prefecture
The number in each subdivision refers to the prefecture number in Table 2.

Fig. 2, one prefecture has 5 kinds of taboo foods for pregnant women; 6 prefectures have 4 taboo foods; 5 prefectures each have 3 kinds; 15 prefectures each have 2 kinds; and in 15 prefectures there was only one such taboo. There was no report of food taboos from 5 prefectures.

Legends regarding unlike-sexed twins

Legends are more common for the unlike-sexed twins than for the like-sexed twins. Fig. 3 shows the areas for having legends of unlike-sexed twins. The unlike-sexed twins and their mothers are referred to as "shinjumono no umarekawari" (reincarnation of a couple who committed double suicide) and "chikusho-bara" (having babies like an animal), respectively. The former legend was seen in 11 prefectures and the latter in 9 prefectures. Thirty-two prefectures have no reports whatsoever of legends regarding unlike-sexed twins.

Secular changes of legends regarding twins

A survey "Legends Surrounding Twins" was conducted in July, 1991 by the ATM. Members (mothers of twins or triplets) of the ATM reside all over Japan. The survey was conducted by mail, and answers were received from 1,084 mothers. This survey was consisted of 5 items about legends surrounding twin births. Of the 5 items on the questionnaire, we used the following two: (1) Have you ever heard any legends regarding the birth of twins? (2) Have you ever heard any comments, about giving birth to twins, which got on your nerves? Table 2 shows a comparison of legends about food taboos for pregnant women from the literature and the ATM surveys in each prefecture. The geographical distribution of the legends regarding taboo foods for pregnant women can be obtained from the first item of the ATM questionnaire survey. These legends found in 30 prefectures, 12 fewer than those of the literature survey. Forty-four mothers among 1,084 (4.1%) mentioned the legend that if a woman eats a double-yolked egg, she will have twin births. This legend was found in 24 prefectures (Table 2), 16 more than those of the literature survey. A legend about "double-segment tangerins" is found in 14

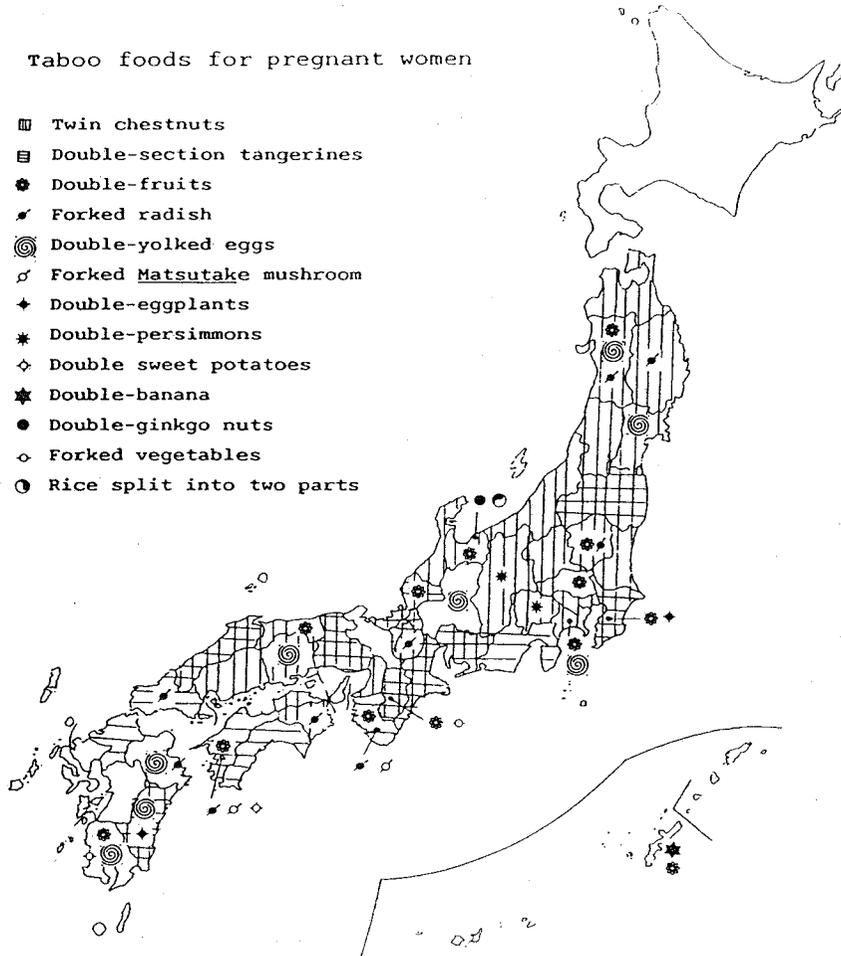


Fig. 2 The geographical distribution of the legends regarding taboo foods for pregnant women

for the ATM survey and 16 prefectures for the survey of the literature, almost the same. The legend of the twin chestnuts was found in 3 prefectures by the ATM, but 31 prefectures by the literature survey. Evidently this legend is not known in most parts of Japan. However, legends concerning cherries and peanuts, as new taboo foods, were found (by the ATM) in 2 prefectures and 3 prefectures, respectively.

Seventy-four mothers (6.8%) replied to ATM's questionnaire item (2), that they had heard the expression "chikushobara" and that this had got on their nerves. These people resided in 21 prefectures. According to the literature survey, "chikushobara" refers to the unlike-sexed twins, and

was found in 9 prefectures (Fig. 3), whereas the answers to ATM's survey show only 2 prefectures in which this expression is used in reference to unlike-sexed twins. Fourteen respondents had been annoyed by the phrase, "shinjumono no umarekawari". These respondents were 1.3% of the total and resided in 7 prefectures. According to the literature survey, the idea that unlike-sexed twins are the reincarnation of people who committed double suicide was found in 11 prefectures (Fig. 3).

Discussion

The twinning rates increased from a low level in the southwest of Japan to a high level in the

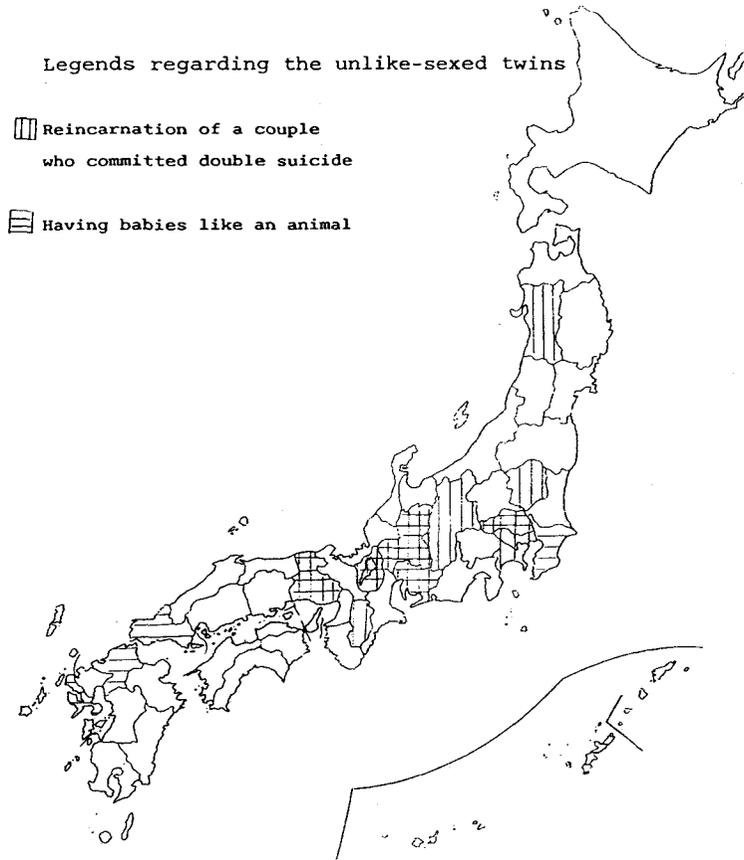


Fig. 3 The geographical distribution of the legends regarding the unlike-sexed twins

northeast, except for Okinawa prefecture located on the southwest tip of Japan (Fig. 4). This tendency was particularly remarkable in the dizygotic twins, but the tendency has been decreasing since 1975¹⁰⁾. Before 1975, the twinning rates were higher in the Tohoku district, but legends regarding food taboos for pregnant women were widely distributed throughout Japan. Despite this, the above-mentioned legends were found in only one (Akita Prefecture) of the 6 prefectures in the Tohoku district. The literature survey covered not only legends surrounding twin births, but also general folk customs about birth and nursing. Because all of the legends recorded in this study regarding twin births were collected from these literatures, data for legends surrounding twin births were not selected evenly throughout Japan. Therefore, even though a high twinn-

ing rate is seen for the Tohoku district, we are not certain whether sufficient data has been obtained regarding legends concerning twin births.

Recently, the occurrence of multiple births has been increasing in Japan, due to the use of ovulation-inducing hormones for the treatment of sterility¹¹⁾. In item (2) of the ATM questionnaire, 40 mothers (3.7% of the total) were asked, "Did you use some type of ovulation-inducing hormone?" Moreover, 33 mothers (3.4% of the total) said that had been told, "A relative also has twins, and therefore, the tendency to have twins is a heredity". (in item (1) of the questionnaire). Therefore, recently, the birth of twins is no longer considered unscientifically as the result of breaking the food taboos for pregnant women. With the growth of scientific knowledge, heredity and the use of ovulation-inducing hormones are now seen

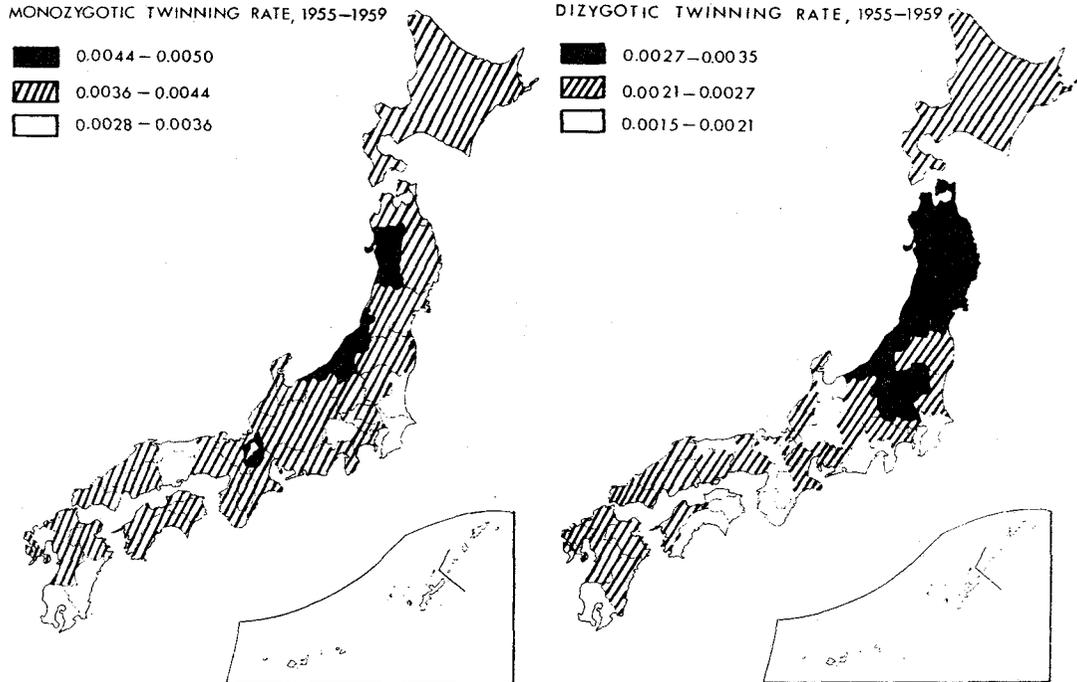


Fig. 4 MZ and DZ twinning rates in each prefecture, 1955-1959 (After Imaizumi (1992)¹⁰⁾)

to be the causes of the twin births.

As shown by the literature survey (Fig. 3), legends regarding unlike-sexed twins have been conveyed by tradition. According to the ATM survey, however, critical opinions about unlike-sexed twins have decreased drastically, although some negative perceptions regarding twins in general, which annoy the twins and their mothers, still remain. These include the expressions, "chikushobara" and "shinjumono no umarekawari".

Legends concerning taboo foods for pregnant women had examined in the present study, where taboo foods were twin chestnuts, double-section tangerines, double-fruits, forked *Matsutake* mushroom, etc. Similarly, double-fruits of corn and papaya were taboo foods for pregnant women in Eastern Bolivia, South America¹²⁾. Therefore, the taboo foods are related to the regional agricultural products in each country.

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日本におけるふたご出産に対する言い伝えの年次的変化について

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わが国では昭和の初期までふたご出産は忌み嫌われ、各地域でふたごに対する言い伝え(迷信)がいろいろあった。本研究は双生児研究の一環として、既存文献をもとに地域別にみたふたごの言い伝えと、ふたごに対する態度の年次変化を調べた。なお、最近の資料はツインマザーズクラブ(以下ATMと略す)会員1,084名のアンケート調査の一部を同会長の許可を得て用いた。

ふたごが生まれる原因の言い伝えとして妊婦の食物禁忌があり、この言い伝えは42県にみられた。異性のふたごに対する言い伝えは、同性のふたご出産よりも多い。異性のふたごを出産した妊婦に対し「畜生腹」と言う地域は9県、「心中者の生まれ変わり」と言う地域は11県である。異性ふたご出産率は東北地方で高かったが、ふたごに対する言い伝えは多くみられなかった。

ATM調査では、ふたご出産に対し気にさわる言い方をされたとして「畜生腹」をあげた人は74名で会員の7%、21県に在住していた。異性ふたごに対する言い伝えは非常に少ないにも拘らず、ふたごの母親に対し、気にさわる言われ方として「畜生腹」、「心中者の生まれ変わり」という言葉がまだ使われている。なお、最近ではふたご出産の原因として食物禁忌の言い伝えは減少したが「二卵黄の鶏卵」の言い伝えは増加し、サクランボ、ピーナツ、「排卵誘発剤」、「遺伝」などの言われ方もでてきた。