An Ethnographic Study of the Process of Dying Out of *Ubuya*

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The custom of using *ubuya* (delivery huts) has been extinct for years. The regions where it survived for the longest time also saw it dying out from the late 1950s to the early 1960s. The reasons why this custom lingered for a long time vary depending on the region. This paper addresses a fundamental question of why the custom of using *ubuya* died out. People were taught that *ubuya* meant a small hut built separately from the main house to isolate a pregnant woman from her family and prepare meals separately to contain defilement by blood; therefore, many people had a stereotype perspective that *ubuya* should be used for isolation and separate meal preparation to contain impurity by childbirth. However, if the isolation and separate meal preparation were not a matter of course, what was the essence of *ubuya*?

There are two reasons why this paper focuses on the process of dying out of *ubuya*. The first one is because we will never have a chance to interview those who have experienced it if we pass up this opportunity now (in the 2010s). It is urgent to put such experiences on record based on firsthand oral recollections. The more detailed the record is, the more useful it would be. The second reason is because if we go back into the history of *ubuya*, we could reveal the changes in the custom in the region. It is very important to interview those who directly involved and record their experiences now. The results can contribute to the research of the process of dying out of *ubuya*.

Previous studies suggested that *ubuya* had been originated from seclusion to pray for divine protection. The theories of Shigeru Makita, Masao Takatori, and Kenichi Tanigawa focused on the original form of ubuya. In fact, folk customs resemble to the original ones have been handed down in various regions. It is, however, illogical to link modern customs to ancient ones just because they are similar to each other. As referred to in this paper, *koyaba* in Ōmiya, Oguni Town, Yamagata Prefecture, is said to have been built for temporary use for each and every childbirth before 1889 but transformed into permanent facilities based on the opinion of a police chief. This shift can be demonstrated by another example from Ikenokōchi, Tsuruga City, Fukui Prefecture. In Shiraki, Tsuruga City, Fukui Prefecture, *sangoya* had been used until the early 1980s, which means this is one of the last regions where the custom lingered on. Permanent *ubuya* were used, in principle, in a traditional way, but there were regional variations, such as shortening the time of stay and expanding rest areas.
Key words: Ubuya, sangoya, koyaba, obiya, dēbeya, childbirth, separate meal preparation, mutual cooperation, rest