

## **Birth-giving and Avoidance Taboo: Women's Body versus the Historiography of *Ubuya***

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The article argues against the widely held modern understanding of birthing practices in premodern Japan: that birth took place in *ubuya*, or parturition huts, which were constructed away from the home in order to contain birth-related pollution; that this practice finds its historical origin and authentication in the ancient texts, the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*; that the practice was universal and continuous from ancient times through the early twentieth century; and that birthing women, polluted and isolated as they were, were miserable and oppressed. Through the examination of writings from ancient through early modern times, we found that the “*ubuya* trope” proponents had misread and misinterpreted passages in historical texts. The *ubuya* in the *Kojiki* did not connote birth pollution. The term *ubuya* in aristocratic writings did not refer to an isolated birthing hut. The instances of *ubuya* that can be observed in early modern times were few and located specifically in coastal and mountainous regions. Moreover, far from turning women into passive victims of an oppressive “tradition,” the *ubuya* structure sometimes seemed to have met purposes other than giving birth, such as committing infanticide and sexual liaison, and thus invited the warrior government’s censure and order for its removal. Irrespective of *ubuya*, however, the notion of birth-related pollution developed and expanded in accordance with the evolving power relations of the imperial, aristocratic, religious, and warrior institutions. Not a simple story of female oppression, the actual history of the institution of *ubuya* points to the misconceived universality in the modernist construction of the “unchanging tradition” and to the need to appreciate women’s agency in giving meanings to their birthing process.

**Keywords:** *UBUYA*, PARTURITION, BIRTH-GIVING, PROCREATION, TOYOTAMA-HIME, BIRTHS, POLLUTION, *KEGARE*, WOMEN, PREMODERN JAPAN, SHINTO, *KOJIKI*, MENSTRUATION, BLOOD, CHILDBEARING

## Ōbara *Ubuya*

The Kyoto Tourism Federation News Archive English-language website, created in 2004, advertises “The Natural Wonders of Kyoto Prefecture: A shrine for pregnant women and a fantastic limestone cave.”<sup>1</sup> One can find the first of these two “natural wonders” in the rural town of Miwa 三和. Ōbara 大原 Shrine (“Ōbara,” written with the characters for “large field,” metonymically represents “grand womb”), known for protecting women in safe delivery, is located at the foot of a local mountain.<sup>2</sup> Standing atop the stairs that lead to the shrine’s inner sanctuary, one sees below a tent-shaped structure with a thick, thatched roof. This unusual tourist attraction is said to be a replica of the original Ōbara *ubuya* 産屋, a birthing hut designated by the prefecture in 1985 as a Kyoto Prefectural Tangible Folk Cultural Property (Kyōto-fu yūkei minzoku bunkazai 京都府有形民俗文化財). It was in use, according to local records, until the 1910s. The structure is about 3.2 meters deep, 1.6 meters high, and 2.4 meters wide at the entrance, which faces the shrine. The floor space is about the size of three *tatami* 畳 mats. At its center, sand is piled up, and in it stands a branch with sacred paper. A thick rope hangs from the rafter reaching down almost to the sand. From inside the hut, one can easily see the shrine, a distance and direction that suggest an intimate association between the two structures.<sup>3</sup> The caption for the *ubuya*, written by the Tourism Federation, reads:

When an expecting mother finally gives birth to her baby, she stays in this small hut for 7 days to recover. Being in the hut is said to help the mother feel free from housework or family stress. The hut was believed to be very sacred, and that the deity actually descended from heaven into the hut when the child was born. This custom was held until early the Taisho 大正 period (1912–1926). Now the hut is preserved as a valuable heritage of the local tradition.<sup>4</sup>



Figure 1: Ōbara *ubuya*. Courtesy of Ōbara Shrine.



Figure 2: Ōbara *ubuya*. Courtesy of Ōbara Shrine. Photograph similar to that in the Kyoto Tourism Federation News Archive.<sup>5</sup>

This description characterizes the Ōbara *ubuya* as a protective and sacred space that offered solace to birthing women. This image of the *ubuya* that shows women’s agency and autonomy dramatically differs from the usual representation, which emphasizes its oppressive physical isolation, the misery of its occupants, and by implication the polluted status of women. By displacing the notion of pollution (*kegare* 穢れ or *fujō* 不浄) with sacrality and

that of isolation with restful solitude, the Ōbara *ubuya* website not only inverts the meaning of *ubuya* but also rescues women's alternative voice from the dark history of birth-giving practices.

### The *Ubuya* Trope

In postwar historiography, the very presence of *ubuya* in records, however few, serves as proof that birthing women were seen as polluted. In this view, the *ubuya* is an instrument built to isolate the source of contamination to prevent it from spreading to the rest of the community. The *ubuya* seems to have had no other function or meaning. Historically, it cannot be denied that a space called *ubuya* existed or that the concept of birth-related pollution was evident. However, this does not mean that one concept is inextricably connected to the other. Nor is there a monolithic meaning that can be attributed to either *ubuya* or pollution. A balanced understanding of *ubuya*, and hence the history of parturition, requires a deeper examination of this institution that answers questions such as: When, where, and under what circumstances did the term *ubuya* come to be used and an isolated structure constructed? What meanings did it hold and how were such meanings transformed over time and space? How and when did the concept of birth-related pollution emerge and how did its meanings change? To whom was pollution a liability or an opportunity and what rules emerged to manage it? How did these rules relate to women's physiological process of parturition? How did the idea of pollution come to be associated with *ubuya*? And, how did its occupants and non-occupants view the institution? It is impossible to answer all these questions in the limited space of this article. Instead, my modest goal is first to introduce the established, modern view of *ubuya*, which I call the *ubuya* trope, and to provide historically based evidence that undermines it. Through this process, I hope to demonstrate how the voice of the women who experienced the Ōbara *ubuya* is at once unconventional and unsurprising. The place to start is Japan's folk ethnology (*minzokugaku* 民俗学).

The Agency for Cultural Affairs (Bunkachō 文化庁) undertook a massive oral survey project in the 1960s “to urgently preserve folk cultural materials from across the country.” The project led to the publication of *The Atlas of Japanese Folk Culture* (Nihon minzoku chizu 日本民俗地図) in 1969.<sup>6</sup> The map of the “taboo on delivery” (*san no imi* 産の忌み) shows at least thirty-five villages across the country that at one time had *ubuya*. Most of these were located along the coast and on islands. Where no *ubuya* per se was found, however, other arrangements, such as giving birth in a separate building and not sharing meals, are recorded.<sup>7</sup> The government's goal to record and preserve Japan's past cultural forms without delay in the face of their rapid disappearance echoed the earlier goals of folk ethnologists, among whom Yanagita Kunio 柳田国男 (1875–1962) is arguably the most famous.

Segawa Kiyoko 瀬川清子 (1895–1984), a disciple from the 1930s of Yanagita, has written and lectured extensively on *ubuya*. Initially interested in the lives of female divers (she published “Hegura no ama” 触倉の海女 [Divers of Hegura] in 1933), Segawa was instrumental in energizing other female followers of Yanagita to champion women-centered research.<sup>8</sup> Her 1935 oral survey of a mountain village community that “extends from Shinshū” 信州, for example, gave special attention to interviews with women in their sixties and sev-

enties who comprised the last generation that had personally experienced the *koya* 小屋 (as the *ubuya* was called in the local dialect). According to these women, during periods of the birth and menstruation taboos, they spent time in the *koya* and were not allowed to enter the room in a house with a portable shrine or a storehouse. They also were not to touch the well, and while they could take cold food, such as miso and pickled vegetables, to the *koya*, cooked food was off limits, because sharing cooked food would pollute the fire of the main house. (Fire was considered a conduit for pollution.) Once the taboo period was over, they went into the river to wash their hair, body, and clothes. Prior to reassimilating in the main house, the women first had to be served a cup of tea at someone else's house.<sup>9</sup>

Segawa's article "Ubuya ni tsuite" 産屋について (About *ubuya*), published in *Yanagita Kunio sensei koki kinen bunshū: Nihon minzokugaku no tame ni* 柳田国男先生古稀記念文集：日本民俗学の為に (Essays in Celebration of Professor Yanagita Kunio's Seventieth Birthday: For the Promotion of Japanese Folk Ethnology),<sup>10</sup> contains a few cases of the use of *ubuya* from several regions. One is located on Shino Island 篠島 in Mikawa Bay 三河湾, Aichi Prefecture. This land had long belonged to the Ise shrine, which was an imperial shrine of the highest order, and villagers had a strong sense of awe for *kegare*. According to Segawa, women would give birth in the corner of their own house, but after giving birth they went to the *ubuya* with the newborn and stayed there for thirty to fifty days. Relatives brought water and cooked food for them. The *ubuya* apparently was a temporary structure, built beside a menstrual hut called *kariya* 仮屋 (temporary structure), and was destroyed when not in use. An official document addressed to the villagers, dated 1621, shows among other items that the shrine official approved the appeal of the villagers to have *kariya* constructed near houses.<sup>11</sup> Although the document is silent on the reason behind the villagers' appeal, Segawa assumes that "according to this document, the *kariya* of this island was located far from houses. Villagers must have found [this distance] unbearable and therefore appealed to the shrine official."<sup>12</sup>

Segawa also cites in the same article a Tokugawa-period topographical record (*Nanpō kaitōshi* 南方海島志) that describes the condition on southern islands:

In each of the villages of the island, on the mountain side away from houses were built several thatched structures with no floor. Menstruating women and women in their full term of pregnancy entered them and stayed there, menstruating women for eight to nine days and expectant women for more than fifty days. During this time, women had no communication with family members. Even if their father or mother were ill, they could not look after them. Even if the woman herself became deathly ill, her child could not come see her. Many women felt miasmatic, some died, some developed a chronic illness, and young women invited sexual misconduct.

The situation was so bad, the record continues, that the patrol official dispatched by the bakufu lamented the "deterioration of the custom and loss of teaching" and admonished the islanders: "On the homeland, this does not exist. There is no greater violation of benevolence and filial piety than this. It destroys industriousness, leads to sexual immorality, promotes poison, and invites illnesses. From now on, prohibit this practice." In response, the islanders explained that "it is this way because we fear divine retribution" but promised to follow the admonition and abandon the custom. However, according to Segawa, their fear was such that

the practice remained alive “until recently.” She also remarks that the comment made by the official about the absence of these practices on the homeland “of course is a huge error.”<sup>13</sup>

Based on her extensive research and oral interviews, Segawa concludes: “From these examples, we understand that the *ubuya* had to be built far away from human habitation (*bitoazato* 人里). It was a separate and temporary building that would be destroyed in time. [Staying in the *ubuya*] was an excessively wretched and restricted life.”<sup>14</sup> The ethnographer’s attitude toward her subject is extremely sympathetic, as expressed in her usage of dramatic phrases such as: “in a hut all by herself in true solitude; desolate and alone, amidst the field, as the cold wind blows down from the mountainside,” and “a solitary and wretched condition that keenly touches us.” She also comments on how she realized that “all women in the past spent nearly half of each month in this hut, and although I tried to feel their fate as they experienced it, I was simply shocked and dismayed (*akirerubakari* 呆れるばかり) by the appearance of lonely isolation and the subservience of the women of old who had accepted such wrongful treatment.”<sup>15</sup>

The miserable conditions described here must have been a reality for some women, but these examples come from island, coastal, or mountainous communities. Despite these limitations, Segawa eagerly generalizes from them **in her other writings and claims a uniformity** of cultural rules related to *ubuya* or *kariya* throughout the country.<sup>16</sup> In Segawa’s construct, not only did *ubuya* cover the Japanese archipelago from corner to corner, but they also existed continuously from time immemorial. In seeking “the silent flow of the ways of living and thinking of the Japanese people from ancient times,” she considers that the “problem of *ubuya* should find its point of departure in the world of ancient myth.” She identifies “the myth of Toyotamahime 豊玉毘売 in the *Kojiki* 古事記 (Record of Ancient Matters; comp. 712)” in which the *ubuya* is a significant motif.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in Segawa’s citation of Japan’s oldest extant writing, the work that chronicles the country’s origin from gods to the imperial line, is born a powerful trope of timeless *ubuya* that the inhabitants of the nation have commonly shared throughout Japan’s history. The *ubuya* trope is a totalizing discourse that fuses the analytically distinct notions of women, pollution (*kegare*), parturition, isolation, misery, and disempowerment into an unbroken circle of timeless Japaneseness that is tangibly confirmed by its very physical form and ontologically sustained by its imagined mythical origin.<sup>18</sup>

Recent critical discussion of modernity has led to a reconsideration of Yanagita Kunio’s scholarship that, in the face of developing capitalism and concomitant imagined and real loss of what was conceived as traditional ways, romanticized past history, especially that of ordinary folk, into a seamless and immutable culture.<sup>19</sup> As Stephen Vlastos eloquently states in his *Mirror of Modernity*, tradition, with no clear beginning, “aggregates and homogenizes premodern culture and posits a historical past against which the modern human condition can be measured.” Borrowing from Anthony Giddens, Vlastos points to the “ontological security” that tradition offered in the face of the new condition of “radical doubt” that modernity was institutionalizing. The institution of “*ubuya*” would fit perfectly as a visible reminder of “life in traditional society, where kinship, religion, custom, and ceremony impart feelings of belonging.” “*Ubuya*” also can be understood in what Vlastos calls the second usage of “tradition,” which refers to “a continuous cultural transmission in the form of discrete cultural practices of ‘the past’ that remain vital in the present.” Building on Edward Shils’s (1910–1995) formulation of the “normative transmission which links the generations of the dead

with the generations of the living,” Vlastos accentuates the point that the “core of tradition is strongly normative; the intention (and the effect) is to reproduce patterns of culture. In this conception, rather than representing the culture left behind in the transition to modernity, tradition is what modernity *requires* to prevent society from flying apart.”<sup>20</sup>

*Ubuya*, both real and imagined, played a crucial role in this modernist construction of tradition. Folkways researchers such as Yanagita’s followers sought out *ubuya* structures that remained and documented them. Once some had been found, their existence proliferated in the imagination of a universal folk. The *ubuya*, whether or not it still stood, was everywhere, and the same meaning and purpose were ascribed to it: to contain female-specific pollution. From this formulation, it was a short step to defining the universal female, whose undeniable biological essence was pollution. The analytical distinction between cultural interpretations of the essential quality and the essential physiological make-up itself often was blurred. Modern ethnologists constructed a “history” that was more normative than descriptive, and strongly influenced the way society viewed the female gender. Meanwhile historians of pre-modern Japan whose professional goal was to investigate premodern sources rarely discussed the topic of *ubuya* precisely because their sources scarcely mentioned it.

### Standardizing the Meaning of *Ubuya* in Lexical Dictionaries

Definitions for “*ubuya*” given in authoritative Japanese-language dictionaries conform to the *ubuya* trope. The reputable multi-volume *Nihon Kokugo daijiten* 日本国語大辞典 (NKD, or Grand Dictionary of Japan’s National Language), published in 1979 by Shōgakukan, gives three definitions for “*ubuya*.” The first reads:

A house structure built separately (*betsu ni* 別に) [from the home] *in order to* avoid (*imu* 忌む) birth pollution (*shussan no kegare* 出産のけがれ) and isolate (*kakuri* 隔離) the birthing woman. Even today, there are regions where cases of [women] living apart [from the family] in a communal hut remain<sup>21</sup> (italics added).

This definition emphasizes the link between the structure, the pollution, and the need to isolate the source of pollution: namely, a woman. It takes precedence over the second definition, which simply points to the functional relationship between parturition and its location: “A room arranged for the purpose of accommodating childbirth.” The third explains the interchangeability of the terms “*ubuya*” and “*ubuyashinai*” 産養い (nurturing the newborn), which refers to the series of ceremonies held for the newborn child, a practice observed by ancient aristocrats, including the ceremonies held on the first, third, fifth, and seventh days.<sup>22</sup> The second and third definitions are devoid of explicit connections to either the notion of pollution or isolation of women.

Another popular dictionary for classical Japanese, *Sanseidō’s* 三省堂 *Kogo jiten* 古語辞典 (Dictionary of Archaic Japanese), also presents this definition: “*Ubuya*: A detached building for birthing. In antiquity, it was set up *because* birthing was considered pollution/polluting and was feared/avoided”<sup>23</sup> (italics added).

According to the NKD, the term “*ubuya*” has multiple meanings. On what basis, then, does a dictionary prioritize one definition over another? Why does the meaning that emphasizes pollution appear first? The NKD’s “Principles of Compilation” give a partial answer.



One contributing factor for ordering multiple definitions is the date of supporting historical material or representative example illustrating the particular definition.<sup>24</sup> Among the three definitions offered for “*ubuya*,” the first cites *Nihon shoki* 日本書紀 (Annals of Japan; comp. 718), the eighth-century source that describes the “age of the gods” (*kamiyo* 神代). References for the second and third NKD definitions date from the Heian period (ca. ninth–twelfth centuries): “Furnishings in *ubuya*,” in *Utsubo monogatari* 宇津保物語, probably written in the late tenth century, and an expression, “People composed poetry during *on-ubuya*” 御産屋 (“on” is an honorific) in *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語, from the early Heian period.

Ironically, the meaning attributed to the oldest example, from the *Nihon shoki*, reformulates itself to contemporary relevance, as it is followed by the phrase “even now” *ubuya* are still found in some regions. By juxtaposing the actual physical presence of *ubuya* that can be witnessed today concretely in identifiable geographical locations against the term’s manifest form in Japan’s most remote past, the first definition casts *ubuya* as an institution of deep historicity and stability, whose ontological significance has endured from Japan’s beginning to this day.

The NKD’s *Nihon shoki* reference for the term *ubuya* is a passage in the story about the daughter of the Sea God (Watatsumi no ookami 海神 or 綿津見大神), Toyotamahime, an earlier variant of which appears in the *Kojiki*. The *Nihon shoki* itself has several variants. All share the same narrative outline, focusing on the *ubuya* that Toyotamahime requests her husband, Hiko hohodemi no mikoto 日子穗穗手見命, to build.<sup>25</sup> Descended directly from the supreme goddess Amaterasu 天照大神, Hiko hohodemi no mikoto is the Heavenly Grandchild and grandfather of Japan’s first earthly emperor, Jinmu 神武, whose putative reign began in 660 B.C.E. The story represents an important segment in the imagined progression from myth to the creation of the imperial lineage around which the first Japanese state emerges. Embedded in the foundational mytho-political text, the story carries the weight of historical and historiographical authenticity that legitimizes Japan’s national origin.

In one *Nihon shoki* variant, the Heavenly Grandchild had been living under the sea with his wife Toyotamahime. She announces: “I have already conceived. I should not deliver the Heavenly Grandson’s child in the sea. Therefore when I give birth, I will go to your land. If you would build an *ubuya* for me on the beach and wait for me, that would be just what I wish.” Hiko hohodemi returns to his homeland, and applying cormorant feathers, builds an *ubuya*. Even before the roof is completed, Toyotamahime arrives on a tortoise, accompanied by her younger sister. Because her delivery time is imminent, she enters the structure without waiting for the thatching to be completed. She declares to her husband: “I beseech you not to look when I am in delivery.” The husband-prince becomes suspicious, peeks, and sees that she has transformed into a large crocodile (*ōwani* 大鰐). When Toyotamahime learns of this violation, she feels deeply ashamed. Nonetheless, the husband asks her “what name should be given to this child?” Having named the child, she leaves for the sea, and the prince writes a love poem and appoints various women as wetnurse, hot-water giver, food-giver, and bath-giver.<sup>26</sup>

The same story in the *Kojiki*, to which Segawa refers in establishing a lineage to contemporary *ubuya*, is more elaborate and graphic. It includes Toyotamahime’s initial observation that “All persons of other lands, when they bear their young, revert to the form of their original land and give birth. Therefore, I am going to revert to my original form (*moto no mi*

本の身) and give birth. Pray do not look at me.” The prince then sees her “crawling and slithering around.” Awe-struck, he runs away. Realizing that her “form has been seen, [Toyotamahime is] exceedingly ashamed” and returns to the sea, leaving the child on the shore and forever separating the land and sea. “Later, although she was bitter at him for having looked at her,” she still longed for him and sends her younger sister to nurse the child.<sup>27</sup>

At both the descriptive and symbolic levels, the depiction of the *ubuya* in any version of the story differs greatly from the meaning given in NDK: “A house structure built separately *in order to* avoid birth pollution and isolate the birthing woman.”<sup>28</sup> In the story, the *ubuya* is a structure built to accommodate a birthing woman, away from outside elements and from peering eyes, and to allow her to return to her “original form” in her moment of delivery. Nowhere does the story state, or even suggest, that birth pollution was the reason why the *ubuya* was built. Moreover, it was Toyotamahime who requested that it be built. At variance with this, the dictionary’s definition situates the woman as an object of containment instead of as a constructive agent. In the source texts, *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, it was a self-initiated solitude, not an externally-imposed isolation, the purpose of which would be to protect the prince from contamination. Toyotamahime’s wish not to be seen is explained in the *Kojiki* version. Her comment on “returning to the original form” can be read in many ways, but considering that the words come from a woman about to go through the arduous labor of child delivery, and gauging from her later reaction to having been visually violated, her words in the original text likely expressed her desire for privacy in the hours of contraction and pain. Giving birth is an occasion that transforms a woman to a bodily condition that divests her of the physical qualities typically described as enticing to men. Interpreted from the birthing woman’s body-centered perspective, Toyotamahime’s request to secure what we would call privacy seems reasonable and sensible. Did she not want an undisturbed place to concentrate on her own bodily process and manage the pain, an act that is graphically expressed in terms of “crawling and slithering”? Did she not want to secure a place that keeps an outsider’s gaze away from bodily discharge and her exposed body parts—vagina and surrounding areas—that in other circumstances are the focus of male-directed sexual desire?

Perhaps a princess of the sea such as Toyotamahime is constructed differently from a human woman. Even so, instead of pollution, the *ubuya* in the myth accommodates the symbolic expressions of the practical and pragmatic needs of a woman facing moments of labor and delivery. Toyotamahime’s apprehension that her laboring form would frighten or repel the prince was indeed proven correct, as it astonished him so much so that he ran away.

The meaning attributed to the story by the dictionary’s reference misconstrues the broad implication of the source narrative. In the story, it is Toyotamahime who gives the *ubuya* its functional significance. The entire childbirth episode, from the building of the *ubuya* to the naming of the newborn, rests on her knowledge and authority. The story endows her with the authority to navigate the birth, create a baby who would carry the prince’s patrilineal line, and delimits the boundary of that rule by drawing the line between the worlds of the sea and the earth. The prince defers to Toyotamahime in the naming of the newborn, which reflects the ancient practice in which mothers named children, and magnifies the idea of a female-centered perspective that underlies the story.<sup>29</sup> More prescriptive than descriptive, the twentieth-century dictionary reshapes the meaning of the story to fit the modern discursive agenda; it



transforms Toyotamhime's *ubuya* from a place of protection to the architectural proof that the *ubuya* isolated the birthing woman in order to protect others from her *kegare*.<sup>30</sup>

The *ubuya* trope, then, asserts some or all of the following circular logic: parturition was *kegare*; therefore the *ubuya* was built in order to contain it by isolating the source of *kegare* (woman); because the *ubuya* was built, parturition and the human agency that was sequestered in it must have been polluting; and because the *ubuya* was built in the time of Japan's mythical antiquity and also can be seen in modern Japan, it must have been there continuously throughout. Finally, the trope strongly infers that one example of *ubuya* can be generalized for all times and all regions because women's physiological essence and their birth-giving functions are the same and unchanging.

The trope is easily found, both in English- and Japanese-language material. In a note to his translation of the *Nihon shoki*, published in 1896, W. G. Aston (1841–1911) associates *ubuya* with timelessness, although without specific reference to pollution: “it was the custom in ancient Japan for women to retire for their confinement to a temporary hut constructed for the purpose. [Ernest] Satow (1843–1929) and [Frederick Victor] Dickins (1838–1915) found this practice *still* in vogue in the Island of Hachijō 八丈島 when they visited it in 1878”<sup>31</sup> (italics added). Nakamura Yoshio 中村義男 (1925–1993), a *kokubungaku* 国文学 (national literature) specialist, also gives examples of *ubuya* in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* and then, exceeding the limits of his source texts, explains that this custom of building *ubuya* “comes from the ancient people's taboo concept that held parturition to be *kegare*. The abundant existence of *ubuya* among the undeveloped peoples have been pointed out, and in this country as well, the legacy of this practice in many parts of Japan is reported.”<sup>32</sup>

### Unpacking the *Ubuya* Trope

The *ubuya* trope, although dominant, is not the only discourse that explicates the meaning of the *ubuya*. Some theories are merely speculative and perhaps as groundless as the *ubuya* trope itself, while others demonstrate certain historical sensitivity. For example, after clarifying that “seclusion of birthing women in an *ubuya* and a storage room (*nando* 納戸) was not because birthing was polluting but precisely for the act of confining oneself,” Makita Shigeru 牧田茂 declares that “people of old believed that, like the soul of rice that confines itself inside the husk, the soul of a child is confined inside the womb of the mother who in turn confines herself inside an *ubuya* to store up the baby's power to expel itself and grow.” For Tanigawa Ken'ichi 谷川健一, who believes that birth signifies a transfer from the realm of the dead to that of the living, the *ubuya* is a place where regeneration following the transfer occurs. Takatori Masao 高取正男 (1926–1981) considers the historical progressions by explaining that the *ubuya* initially was a place where a woman acting as a priestess stayed to pray for the descent of heavenly spirit. As the concept of blood pollution strengthened, the *ubuya* came to be viewed as a place to isolate pollution.<sup>33</sup>

Colorful and insightful as they may be, these depictions fall short of providing a realistic understanding of *ubuya* in its concrete setting and representations. A critical assessment of historical *ubuya* that transcends presumptive or romantic generalizations calls for an investigation that considers not only the meanings of *ubuya* in all its manifest forms but also its absence in birth-giving practices. We begin our historical inquiry by examining *Vocabulario*

*da lingoa de Iapam*, a Japanese-Portuguese dictionary, compiled in 1603 by de Iapam da companhia de Iesvs (the Japan Society of Jesus), which has more than 30,000 entries. Among the term “*vbu*” and its compounds, we find “*vbuya*.” The definition states simply: *Casa do nacimiento, ou que se faz peranella nacer alguem* (House for birth, or that which is made for a person to be born within). There is no implication that the structure is built to contain pollution. It is unlikely that the Jesuits viewed birth to be polluting in the early seventeenth century. It is possible that they were unaware of the complicated concept of *kegare*; the term *qegare* (*kegare*) in the dictionary refers only to the sense of external dirtiness.<sup>34</sup> This also may bespeak of the absence of the visible signs and operation of *kegare* in what the Jesuits encountered.

Turning to the modern Japanese references, the definition of “*ubuya*” given in *Kokushi daijiten* 国史大辞典 (Encyclopedia of Japanese History), published by Yoshikawa Kōbunkan 吉川弘文館, states:

Place in which to give birth; or a place to stay during the time of taboo. There are two kinds of childbirth. One occurs at home and the other in a place that is specially constructed for this purpose. In the *Nihon shoki* is a story about building a special *ubu-shitsu* 産室 (birthing room) for Toyotamahime. The significance of this story is [to show] the construction of a space in preparation for birth that is different from the ordinary living space.<sup>35</sup>

This entry, signed by Kamada Hisako 鎌田久子, mentions the custom of building a temporary structure and putting up sacred paper, the purpose of which is “avoidance of evil spirits.” It specifically emphasizes that “Today, it is explained that this custom reflects the belief that birthing was pollution, but instead it probably shows that birthing originally was sacred.” After noting that “there are places that regard birthing as pollution and isolate women for that reason,” *Kokushi daijiten* adds important qualifying information: such practices are “mostly [found on] the islands of Izu and the Seto inland sea, and the eastern region of Aichi prefecture.”<sup>36</sup>

Unlike Segawa who has sought a unitary meaning from her examples, Namihira Emiko 波平恵美子, an anthropologist, has analyzed and interpreted separately each of her sources and pieces of evidence. Like others, she begins with the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon shoki* and finds that the notion of pollution presented in these texts has to do with death, not birth. Childbirth is linked to a commandment against viewing a woman in delivery, but the idea of birth-related pollution is absent. Namihira’s understanding is reconfirmed in more recent works, such as that of Osada Aiko 長田愛子. Osada has painstakingly examined terms and circumstances in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* that might possibly relate to the categories of “childbirth *kegare*”—and she found none.<sup>37</sup>

For more recent centuries, instead of a wide distribution of *ubuya*, Namihira sees an uneven distribution across Japan, with a particular concentration on islands and in the mountains. She analytically disentangles the structure of the *ubuya* from the notion of pollution and notes that the absence of the architectural structure of an *ubuya* per se does not mean the absence of the idea of female-specific pollution. Some regions, without the *ubuya*, prohibited the sharing of the cooking fire with birthing women who were considered polluted. For her, “the distribution of menstrual and childbirth huts is one yardstick for measuring the strength of the concept of pollution in particular areas.”<sup>38</sup>

Namihira's understanding is based partly on her examination of *ubuya* on Hachijōjima. This is a case that strongly argues for the connection between *ubuya* and pollution, but not necessarily misery. The birthing house on this island was called *taya* 他屋 (the other house), as documented in the *Hachijōjima nendaiki* 八丈島年代記 (Hachijōjima Chronicle, 1335–1652) as early as 1514.<sup>39</sup> Apparently, the organization and function of the *taya* underwent some transformation over the three and one-half centuries of its existence. Initially, for menstruation and birth two separate structures were used, but eventually these were merged into one building. Early structures were located a long distance from homes, but were later built near them and eventually were moved into a residential compound. Then there was another structure called a “third day house (*mikkaya* 三日屋),” where women whose menstrual period had ended stayed for three days prior to going home, but this house was abolished later. During the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), bakufu administrators prohibited the custom of *taya* and ordered its destruction, but apparently local usage prevailed. In the Meiji period (1868–1912), the new government also issued prohibitions on several occasions. After its final removal in early Meiji, the islanders quickly rebuilt it when a typhoon damaged many homes, a result, they believed, of the destruction of the previous *taya*. The *taya* finally disappeared from the island in the 1880s.<sup>40</sup> In the islanders' view, there was a manifest connection between the architectural reality of *taya*, the containment of *kegare*, and the divine maintenance of natural balance.

Based on this information, Namihira considers reasons for the bakufu's prohibition and the islanders' desire to keep the structure. The first possible reason for the bakufu's prohibition is the payment of taxes, part of which was made in the form of cloth woven by women. If women were sequestered, there would be fewer labor hours to weave. This reasoning does not hold because the evidence also shows that women took the loom into the *taya*. Additionally, there is no evidence that the bakufu disdained cloth that had been woven by the “polluted women.” There clearly were other factors. In exploring other possibilities, Namihira reverses the widely held belief that it was men who wanted to keep the *taya* and instead postulates that it was indeed the women, who tenaciously held on to it. This way of thinking also can challenge the view that women “suffered” from the *ubuya* custom. Acknowledging that islanders recognized birthing and menstruation to be *kegare*, Namihira nonetheless asserts that *kegare* on this island did not negatively affect women's status. Compared to women on the homeland, the island women enjoyed far more favorable marriage and inheritance practices. Dickins and Satow, too, remarked that although their stay was too short to ascertain it themselves, “it has been said that owing to the fact that the tax or tribute paid to the Government is the product of their industry, they [women] occupy a much more important position in the family than elsewhere in Japan.”<sup>41</sup>

In fact, instead of experiencing misery in the *taya*, women of this island used it for functions other than the containment of *kegare*. The length of stay for menstruating women was often as long as fifteen days and, “women were at their own homes for very few days out of a year.” Moreover, “even though men would not even speak to menstruating women upon encountering them on roads, they made nightly visits to women in *taya*.” This is a point also observed by Dickins and Satow. Kondō advances that “women, too, sought to meet up with men who visited them secretly, and extended their stay there beyond their time.”<sup>42</sup> Namihira wonders if the *taya* served as a space for birth control.<sup>43</sup> Inasmuch as women's most fertile

time came just about the fifteenth day after the beginning of menstruation, it seems likely that the *taya* served as a place for engaging in sex, with the hope of avoiding pregnancy. The sexual intercourse that likely resulted from young men's visits would have been made secure from unwanted pregnancy if it took place during menstruation and shortly after its stoppage. Perhaps the *taya* conveniently accommodated women's needs to both control fertility and to experience sex at different moments in their reproductive and menstrual cycles as well as their sexual life regardless of marital status. Of course, while undocumented, the chance of women becoming a target of sexual aggression by men, a phenomenon recorded in many villages, also may have been a reality.<sup>44</sup> "Sexual misconduct," mentioned in a record introduced by Segawa earlier, adds substance to the likelihood that the *ubuya* (or *taya* or *koya*) was a convenient location for rendezvous.<sup>45</sup> Finally, the record on the *taya* of Hachijōjima contains information about girls aged two, three, and six or seven years old entering and remaining in the *taya* for as long as thirty and fifty days. Because the records also disclose how impoverished the island was, Namihira wonders if these pre-pubescent girls, who obviously had no physiological reason to visit the *taya*, may have been seeking to escape from agents who sought girls for sale.<sup>46</sup>

That *ubuya* was used sometimes for purposes other than giving birth or containing menstrual pollution is demonstrated in a document dated 1798 from Mimasaka 美作国 (Okayama prefecture). Submitted by villagers, it reveals that, due to poverty, they regularly committed infanticide in *ubuya*, "thinning" either a male or a female depending on the sex ratio of the existing family.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to this example, on the island of Oki 隠岐 in Shimane prefecture, only the well-to-do used the *ubuya*, which was built within the family's residential compound, while the others simply used their houses for birthing.<sup>48</sup> These variations in use and users force us to reevaluate the NDK's simplistic and normative definition. The inconsistent symbolic meanings that underlay the *ubuya* institution and the multiple roles that it played complicate our assumptions not only about the *ubuya* per se, but also about the power, authority, and vulnerability that women's physiological reality embodied.

### Codification of *Kegare* Concepts

Historical studies of *ubuya* typically belong to the larger discussion of taboos and pollution related not only to female blood but also death and other phenomena. Exemplified by the works of Okada Shigekiyo 岡田重精, Yasuda Yukiko 安田夕希子, and Narikiyo Hirokazu 成清弘和, this ambitious research traces the changing concepts of *kegare* in legal, documentary, and literary evidence.<sup>49</sup> According to these authors, the legal codification of the idea of *kegare* took place in the early Heian period.<sup>50</sup>

The Japanese imperial institution and the bureaucracy which arose through the coordinated efforts of aristocratic families distinguished the imperial line as "the first among equals" by its putative sacerdotal superiority. The stories in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, the earliest "myth-history" that helped to explain the imperial origins and legitimize the new centralized polity, illustrate the concepts of purity and impurity but not in the context of female blood. The so-called *Six National Histories* (Rikkokushi 六国史), compiled in the eighth and ninth centuries to furnish an up-to-date history of the imperial court,<sup>51</sup> record and discuss events and questions that are relevant to the maintenance of purity, for example a command to clean and purify shrines and other divine spaces issued in 725.<sup>52</sup> According to Yasuda, it is in

the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 日本三代実録 (*Veritable Records of Three Reigns of Japan*; comp. 901; covers 858–887), the last of the *Six National Histories*, that what she calls “the *kegare* consciousness” blossoms, as expressed by the increased number of *kegare*-generating situations and categories.<sup>53</sup> It mentions, for example, that in 878 *kegare* was removed preceding the ceremony at the Kamo Shrine 賀茂社, and in 882 a debate took place concerning the required length of abstinence after encountering pollution.<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that these instances are relevant only to the narrowly constructed sacred space of the gods and the imperial institution; *kegare* was a phenomenon that violated this sacred space, and purification did the opposite by restoring the space to order. The object of avoidance or abstinence was precisely this sacred space.<sup>55</sup>

By comparing the country’s first comprehensive legal codes, the *ritsuryō* 律令, issued in the eighth century, with compendia of legal interpretations that supplemented or refined them in the ninth century, we can see how the definition of *kegare* changed over the centuries. The original “Codes Pertaining to Kami Affairs” (*jingiryō* 神祇令), issued in 718, adopted most of its wording from Chinese laws and stipulated that one is not to participate in mourning, visit the sick, eat meat, adjudicate crimes, or play music, AND “not to engage in defiled (*kegare*) and evil matters” during the time of purification or ceremony. The phrase does not spell out what constituted defilement.<sup>56</sup> Highly relevant to this discussion is another passage in the *Ryō no shūge* 令集解, a set of legal commentaries completed around 860, which cites from the *Koki* 古記, a still earlier legal commentary (no longer extant) most likely completed in 738. The *Koki* asks “What does *kegare* mean?” and notes that *kegare* is signified by an act of “not seeing women give birth” (*umeru fujo o mizaru no tagui* 生産婦女不見之類).<sup>57</sup> Not the act of birth but SEEING the act of birth was considered *kegare* in the early eighth century, a point that is directly relevant to the problem of the prince’s gaze in the story of Toyotamahime. Another group of supplementary ritual procedural codes, the *Kōninshiki* 弘仁式, dated 820–840, includes wording that specifies seven days of abstinence for birth and thirty days for death. It also addresses the defilement of “injury of the fetus in its third month or later,” that is, miscarriage. Miscarriage signified the death of an imperfect body form.<sup>58</sup> A record kept by the Ise Shrine 伊勢神宮, the country’s most sacred, *Daijingu shozōjiki* 太神宮諸雜事記 (*Miscellaneous Record of Ise Shrine*), contains an actual case of birth-related defilement in the entry dated 813.9.16. A wife of a shrine official delivered a child under the shrine’s gate while attending a festival, gathered up the baby in the sleeves and left the premises. Afterward, both the wife and husband received purification, followed by the issuance of a new shrine rule: “From now on, a pregnant woman must not enter within the torii 鳥居 gate.”<sup>59</sup>

Nearly three decades after emperor Daigo 醍醐 (r. 897–930) ordered the compilation of a body of procedures, the *Engishiki* 延喜式 (*Engi Detailed Supplementary Civil Code*) was submitted to the throne in 927 and promulgated in 967 following additional revision. It represented a further specification or clarification of ideas embodied in earlier works.<sup>60</sup> The most relevant section for our discussion is the Third Book, “Provisional (or Extraordinary) Festivals,” which includes the following:

At all times, in coming into contact with defilement or evil, avoidance is practiced: thirty days for the death of a person (count from the day of burial), seven days for birth, five days for death of a domestic animal, three days for birth of one (avoid-

ance does not apply to chickens); eating of meat requires avoidance for three days (the shrine officials regularly avoid it, but at the time of a festival the rest of the officials all avoid it).

The code further restricts a person's approach to sacred spaces after encountering certain circumstances, such as the sick, reburial of the dead, abortion, or miscarriage in the fourth month or more of the term of pregnancy. In these cases, the person is required to abstain for thirty days. If the abortion or miscarriage occurred in the third month or earlier, only seven days of avoidance is required. If ladies-in-waiting at the palace become pregnant, they must withdraw from the palace before the days of partial abstinence; when they have their menses, they must withdraw before the day of a festival to their hearths and homes and may not enter the palace until the condition is over. The code also details how pollution may spread: "If place A becomes defiled, person B who enters the place (that is, to take a seat; the same thereafter) and all persons in that place become defiled. If C enters B's premises, C's body alone becomes defiled, not those of people on his own premises. If D enters C's premises, D does not become defiled."<sup>61</sup>

Thus, in establishing the boundaries to protect the purity of the imperial space, two specifically female functions, pregnancy and menstruation, came to be regulated along with other sources of defilement, such as encountering death, the most potent source of pollution. At this juncture, these restrictions specifically pertained to participation in ceremonies and to serving in the palace.

The concept of *kegare* was continuously rethought and articulated in these legal texts, becoming more prevalent in discourse, complex in meaning, and both concrete and expansive in application. The discourse increasingly emphasized the harmful impact that *kegare* would bring to sacred space. The purity of the *kami* (gods) was synonymous with the purity of rulers, and *kegare* became a meta-code that violated this purity.<sup>62</sup> As Mitsuhashi Tadashi 三橋正 suggests, provisions in the *Engishiki* were fundamentally different from earlier formulations of *kegare* as they appeared in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*, for example. In the earlier writings, *kegare* pertained to a beholder's acts, such as seeing birth in process, and was instantly erasable through purification. But in the *Engishiki*, the object (for example, the birthing woman) that earlier generated impurity in those who engaged with it (for example, seeing it) was itself polluted. Mitsuhashi states that such objects "were not of a nature that could be easily purified by ceremonies." The new definition of *kegare* emerged sometime in the mid-ninth century and was firmly established in the *Engishiki*.<sup>63</sup>

### ***Ubuya* in the Vocabulary of the Heian Aristocracy**

What impact did these provisions have on birth-giving practices? The richness of historical sources produced by women and men of the aristocratic class in the Nara and Heian periods allows an in-depth analysis of activities related to childbirth. The term "*ubuya*" rarely appears, and when it does, it means something quite different from the meaning assigned to our "*ubuya* trope." The "*on-ubuya*," with the honorific "*on* 御," mentioned in *Genji monogatari* (源氏物語 *The Tale of Genji*) illustrates this point. Royall Tyler translates it as "the rites attending the birth." "*On-ubuya*" were "done with great pomp and splendor. At the birth celebrations offered by his ladies, the usual trays, double trays, and tall stands showed how



keenly each vied with the others.”<sup>64</sup> Another example comes from *Makura no sōshi* (枕草子 *The Pillowbook of Sei Shōnagon*), in which Sei Shōnagon 清少納言 (b. ca. 967) lists “*ubuya* in which a newborn has died” and “not having the commotion of *ubuya* four or five years after taking in a groom” (*mukotori* 婿取り) among the items in the category “Dreadful and Discordant Things.” Also in this classification are “dogs that bark at midday,” “wickerwork for catching fish that is set up in the spring,” “*kōbai* 紅梅 (scarlet on the outside and purple inside) layering of gown in the third and fourth month,” and “brazier that would not light,” to name a few. In Sei’s view, a baby should be alive at birth, childbirth should follow soon after taking a husband, dogs should bark at night, wickerwork should be set up in the winter, *kōbai* is proper in the eleventh through second months, and braziers should light.<sup>65</sup> To Sei, *ubuya* signifies both a room in which childbirth takes place and the act of child delivery itself.<sup>66</sup> She makes no reference to *kegare*, and her usage does not tell us if the *ubuya* was in a detached building. But Murasaki Shikibu’s 紫式部 (b. 978?) lengthy and detailed description of the childbirth experience of Shōshi 彰子 (988–1074), the primary wife (*chūgū* 中宮) of emperor Ichijō 一條天皇 (r. 986–1011) and the author’s patron, in the *Murasaki Shikibu nikki* 紫式部日記 (*Diary of Murasaki Shikibu*, ca. 1008) is quite informative in answering the question of where and how aristocratic childbirth took place.<sup>67</sup>

The diary opens with a description of the magnificent Tsuchimikado 土御門 mansion to which Shōshi has returned from the palace on the sixteenth day of the seventh month (in 1008), about a month prior to the expected delivery date.<sup>68</sup> The mansion where the child was to be born belonged to Fujiwara Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1027), Shōshi’s father, then the most powerful minister who wielded great influence over the imperial family and government.<sup>69</sup> Murasaki’s empathetic description reveals the ways in which childbirth was organized as a celebrated event. After all, it was an occasion that could produce a crown prince and, significantly, make Michinaga the maternal grandfather of a sovereign.<sup>70</sup> On the ninth day of the ninth month around midnight, people began shouting, and the following morning Shōshi was transferred to the white (or unpainted) dais in a different room. More than forty priests of all stripes, yin-yang experts, ladies-in-waiting who came from the palace, shamanic mediums, and exorcists, not to mention millions of gods whom Michinaga summoned for this occasion, filled the chambers and galleries, some chanting loudly until their voices were hoarse. The opposite of isolation, the place was so crowded that the late arriving ladies-in-waiting could hardly edge themselves in—so much so that some were in tears.

At dawn on the eleventh day, the sliding doors on the north side were removed and Shōshi was moved again. There, because it was impossible to hang up bamboo blinds, a number of screens were set up in layers. The place continued to be so crowded that ladies-in-waiting were losing “the hems of their trains and their sleeves in the crush,”<sup>71</sup> and Michinaga ordered everyone except a few to move out to areas to the south and east of where Shōshi was lying. In Murasaki’s text, the birthing room at this point becomes a space for women only—Shōshi, her stepsister, and the wet nurse of Michinaga’s fifth son. But the two high-ranking priests and Michinaga are standing just outside the room.<sup>72</sup>

From this description, we can conclude that for this imperial birth, the delivery took place within the mansion of the woman’s natal family where a certain space was marked off for the occasion. Doubtless, the room had a special meaning. Screens demarcated the birthing space from the rest of the mansion, and it was, as Murasaki notes, transformed into a scene

filled with whiteness. The borders of *tatami* mats, as well as clothes and hair ribbons of all female attendants, cabinets, and the outfits of priests were all white. It was a situation that inspired Murasaki Shikibu to comment: “I was reminded of those beautiful line drawings where everyone’s long black hair literally seems to grow from the paper.”<sup>73</sup>

Some scholars consider that the white color signifies birth’s association with death, which is expressed by white. Death often accompanies childbirth. Birthing women, including Shōshi, often prepared for the possibility of death by taking a mini-tonsure, which involved shaving a small section of the head.<sup>74</sup> The white coloring of the birthing room also may have accentuated sanitary conditions that only the elites could afford, and intensified the caregiver’s focus on the birthing body’s process by helping to highlight the discharge of amniotic fluid, blood, and other matters as well as expulsion of the infant and placenta. No separate building was built nor was there isolation of the woman.

Was Shōshi’s birthing act considered polluted or polluting? From the perspective of the *Engishiki* and the imperial sacred space, the birthing event unquestionably was taboo. For one thing, Shōshi’s pregnant body was definitively removed from the imperial palace, as prescribed by the code. Shōshi’s example was not unique. Other imperial wives moved out of the palace and usually returned to their natal family’s home for delivery, staying for several months before resuming their palace duties. Shōshi returned to the palace on 1008.11.17, about two months after giving birth on 9.11. Emperor Sanjō’s 三條 (r. 1011–1016) wife, Kenshi 賢子 (994–1027), gave birth on 1013.7.6 and returned on 1014.1.19, eight months later.<sup>75</sup> Some scholars have interpreted the transfer of pregnant imperial wives to their natal homes as a “legacy of *ubuya*.”<sup>76</sup> This interpretation is problematic, inasmuch as the “legacy of *ubuya*” is yet to be established at this historical juncture.

How do we interpret the act of enclosing the birthing area with the layered screens surrounding the dais to which Shōshi was moved? Obviously, the screens protected Shōshi’s privacy from the throng milling around outside the room. The screen also may have protected the others from the contagion of *kegare* associated with childbirth itself or even the *kegare* associated with the viewing of childbirth, something that came to be included in the code a century after the writing of the *Kojiki*. It seems that both interpretations are correct. For the sacred imperial space, the laws regarding the defilement of birth had to be observed. Murasaki Shikibu was clearly aware of this, for she specifically mentions First Secretary Yorisada 頼定, who was dispatched by the palace to the mansion soon after the birth of the prince. He arrived with the ceremonial sword and in turn received from Michinaga the news of the birth. According to Murasaki, “Yorisada did not enter the premises, and Michinaga requested that the news of a safe birth be conveyed to the emperor standing up.” The reason given by Murasaki was that “today is the day that the Imperial messenger is dispatched to Ise.”<sup>77</sup> Murasaki is mindful of the *Engishiki* rules on contagion of defilement through contact, from A to B to C, and so on, but only in a sitting position. It is worth remarking that Murasaki makes a special note of this incident that concerns the most sacred space, Ise Shrine.<sup>78</sup>

Various pieces of direct and indirect evidence support the notion that childbirth of imperial wives and perhaps other associated aristocrats was considered to be *kegare* at least legally and in relationship to the imperial institution. How then did *kegare* constrain those involved? If, for example, we interpret the white color of the enclosed room as a manifestation of *kegare*, Murasaki Shikibu’s overt appreciation of its aesthetic quality seems at odds with

what we would expect from “*kegare* in operation.” From the perspective of the woman, the “forced” return to her natal house allowed her to be with her own family, especially her own female companions and other supporters who served her kin. Outside the imperial family, the daughter most likely would have been at home to begin with, because the patrilocal marriage practice had not taken root; marriage with an emperor was an exception that required patrilocal marriage. The ideology of *kegare*, in this context, assured the ambitious father, Michinaga, the return of the daughter home, away from her husband-the-emperor who personally had little direct authority over the maternity leave. The date of departure, relevant appointments, and other tasks related to the maternity leave were managed by the Office of Imperial Wives (Chūgūshiki 中宮職), over which Michinaga held influence.<sup>79</sup> Not only did Michinaga take charge of assigning specific women to the official tasks of nurturing the infant, but he also gave gifts and favors to targeted courtiers to strengthen their association as they participated in the series of rituals and ceremonies. The child would be raised in Michinaga’s home, with him as the authoritative grandfather and the patriarch of his lineage. Shōshi’s husband, emperor Ichijō, did not meet his own son until the sixteenth day of the tenth month, more than a month after the birth, although the court did sponsor, from a distance, the Seventh Day Ceremony that took place at Michinaga’s house, along with all other ceremonies. After elaborate preparations, Michinaga welcomed emperor Ichijō’s arrival, and he himself handed the newborn son to the emperor to hold for a short while, upon which “the baby cried a little.”<sup>80</sup> *Kegare* “performed” in this instance more to frame the authority of the imperial institution than to constrain the birthing woman. Indeed, entries in men’s and women’s writings of the Heian period strongly suggest that it was the imperial institution that, at this juncture in the evolution of the *kegare* concept, would be most inconvenienced; as their journals abundantly demonstrate, male aristocrats frequently excused themselves from attending the palace duties due to having encountered or suffering from *kegare* of one kind or another. Palace women too took time off using their biological rhythm as a reason or excuse.<sup>81</sup>

### The Requirements of the Warrior Class in the Kamakura and Muromachi Periods

The military institution that arose at the end of the twelfth century was built on a network of human relations that differed from that which organized the aristocrats. The baby-making enterprise for the warriors had little to do with obtaining political advantages from the pinnacle of symbolic authority, the imperial institution. Instead, apart from its obvious purpose of producing a child, childbirth was a means through which to demonstrate the vertical order of power and to further lord-vassal ties. The shogun’s babies were born at a vassal’s home that was designated as a “*sanjo* or *ubudokoro* 産所,” literally “a place to give birth,” but with the added meaning of “office.” Officials with such titles as *osanjo bugyō* 御産所奉行 (Birthing office administrator) managed matters related to childbirth and *osanjo yūbitsu* 御産所祐筆 served as special record-keepers (secretaries) for the occasion.<sup>82</sup> For the Kamakura period (ca. 1185–1333), information about *sanjo* sporadically appears in the bakufu’s chronicle, the *Azuma kagami* 吾妻鏡 (Eastern Mirror 1180–1266), and in journals kept by aristocrats. For the Muromachi period (ca. 1336–1572), the *Osanjo nikki* 御産所日記 (Journal of the Honorable Birthing Place), possibly written by the bakufu’s medical specialists, the Aki 安藝, offers organized data for the twenty-eight cases of births by various wives to shoguns Yoshinori 義教 (1394–1441, r.1429–41), Yoshimasa 義政 (1435–90, r. 1449–73), and Yoshiharu 義

晴 (1511–50, r. 1521–46).<sup>83</sup> According to Suzuki Rika 鈴木理香, writing in 1993, “*sanjo*” as a historical topic has received little scholarly attention.<sup>84</sup> “*Sanjo*” hardly fits the *ubuya* trope, and a few examples will suffice to prove this point.

Hōjō Masako 北条政子 (1156–1225), the wife of Minamoto Yoritomo 源頼朝 (1147–1199), the first Kamakura shogun, was moved to the residence of Hiki Yoshikazu 比企能員 (d. 1203) in a palanquin when she felt the “sense of delivery” (*osan no ki* お産の気), according to an entry dated 1182.7.12 in *Azuma kagami*. The warrior government was still in its infancy then; the *shogun* title had yet to be conferred on Yoritomo. Kajiwara Kagetoki 梶原景時 (d. 1200), a vassal, was commissioned to handle miscellaneous necessities during the “period of birth.” On the eleventh day of the eighth month, Masako went into labor. The chronicle notes that vassals (*gokenin* 御家人) from various provinces arrived. They were dispatched to shrines all around to give offerings for prayers, and the following day, a boy (Yoriie 頼家, 1182–1204) was born. Mother and son remained in the residence for two months before returning to “the headquarters.”<sup>85</sup>

The connection between Hiki Yoshikazu, the proprietor of the *osanjo* (with the honorific “*o*”), and Yoritomo is important as it illustrates the kind of human ties that shaped lord-vassal relations. Hiki Yoshikazu was an adopted son of “the Hiki nun” (比企尼), who had served as one of Yoritomo’s wet nurses. The same entry in *Azuma kagami* applauds the service of the Hiki nun who, out of loyalty to Yoritomo, had had her husband serve Yoritomo from the time of the latter’s exile in Izu 伊豆 in 1160. These personal connections secured Yoshikazu a position of trust and thus the responsibility to provide the *sanjo*. Yoshikazu’s wife was appointed to be the wet nurse for the newborn, Yoriie. Yoshikazu’s own career also flourished, as he later received two *shugo* 守護 posts. His daughter, Wakasa no Tsubone 若狭の局, became a wife of Yoriie, and gave birth to Ichiman 一萬. Clearly, offering a residence as *sanjo* was an honor and a path to future success. (But Yoshikazu’s rising power led to a conflict with Hōjō Tokimasa 北条時政, Masako’s father, and caused the demise of the entire Hiki family, along with Yoriie and Ichiman, in 1203–1205.)<sup>86</sup> In this formulation, *osanjo* at any rate hardly matches the image of an isolated *ubuya*.

For Masako’s second childbirth (of Sanetomo 実朝) in 1192, the *sanjo* was at the Hōjō headquarters at Nagoe 名越 in east Kamakura, often called “Hama-gosho” 濱御所 (beach-palace). Ironically, this was the location where Hiki Yoshikazu would be murdered in 1203 by Hōjō Tokimasa. Masako’s use of this location foreshadows the future course that the Kamakura regime would take—domination by the Hōjō. Two days after the birth, Yoritomo was named shogun by the imperial court. The chronicle records the names of vassals and female attendants, as well as the ceremonies that followed the birth far more elaborately than before.<sup>87</sup> The Hōjō men, brothers of Masako, also had their wives give birth at locations designated as *sanjo* (without the honorific “*o*”).<sup>88</sup> The *osanjo* continued to be the birthing location for the wives of the later Kamakura shoguns, who were courtiers and imperial princes, such as Kujō Yoritsune 九条頼経 (1218–1256), the fourth shogun, and Prince Munechika 宗親, the sixth shogun. For them, the *osanjo* was normally the home of one of the Hōjōs.<sup>89</sup>

In the years following the fall of the Kamakura bakufu, *sanjo* or *osanjo* continued to be the location in which elite warriors’ wives gave birth. *Sanjo* were set up at the houses of close vassals, such as Hosokawa 細川, Akamatsu 赤松, Hatakeyama 畠山, Yamana 山名, Isshiki 一色, and Toki 土岐, who were mostly holders of important bakufu offices and titles.<sup>90</sup> For

them, the *sanjo* assignment was an official job that enhanced a close, informal connection with the shogun.<sup>91</sup> According to Suzuki, births unrecorded in the *Osanjo nikki* also utilized the *sanjo*. For example, the wife of the second Muromachi shogun, Ashikaga Yoshiakira 足利義詮 (1330–1367, r. 1358–1367), was to give birth at a house designated as the *sanjo*, which belonged to Sasaki Ujijori 佐々木氏頼, a *shugo* of Ōmi province, who had a close relationship with the Ashikaga. But the delivery occurred too soon, before she was able to move to the *sanjo*. Nakahara Moromori 中原師守 reports this incident in his journal, *Moromori ki* 師守記 (1339–1374), in an entry dated 1365.4.10, and calls it “outrageous” (*motte no hoka* 以外).<sup>92</sup>

The medieval warriors left few documentary traces concerning birth-related taboos, but they were aware of the rules that aristocrats observed. Hōjō Tokiyori 北条時頼 (1227–1263), for example, begs a priest to enter the *sanjo* in order to pray for his wife, “although the *kegare* associated with birth has not ended.”<sup>93</sup> Tōin Kintaka 洞院公賢 (1291–1360), an aristocrat, wrote in his journal on 1347.6.13 that “I understand that warriors also hold birth taboo for seven days.”<sup>94</sup> Although these remarks indicate that the warriors observed birth pollution, it is unclear what “*kegare*” meant in practice, either for the woman or men of the warrior class. It is difficult to tell what they would abstain from for seven days. Did the taboo require them to avoid certain work? Their work did not involve participating in rites and ceremonies at the imperial palace, but instead required them to be poised to deal with death, blood, and bodily injuries as a matter of profession. The fact that the bakufu did not issue formal rules governing *kegare* suggests that it had other more pressing or practical issues to regulate.

### Intensification of Birth-related *Kegare*

Despite the relative laxity in the bakufu’s attitude, the practices surrounding the idea of *kegare* made great advances in the medieval period, although not without differences in opinion. At the beginning of the Kamakura period, the *Engishiki* rule that required seven days of avoidance after coming into contact with childbirth or miscarriage occurring within three months of conception was reaffirmed in the *Hossō shiyōshō* 法曹至要抄, a compendium of interpretations of previous laws.<sup>95</sup> In practice, there were changing opinions, for example, at the imperial center. The retired emperors Shirakawa 白河 (r. 1072–1086) and Toba 鳥羽 (r. 1107–1123) observed the seven-day rule, but the retired emperor Goshirakawa 後白河 (r. 1155–1158) observed a taboo period of thirty days instead of seven.<sup>96</sup> Disputes continued, as evidenced from an entry in *Gyokuyō* 玉葉 (1164–1200), Kujō Kanezane’s 九条兼実 journal, dated 1189.8.7, in which the diarist (1149–1207) declares that there is no court law that prescribes thirty days abstinence for birth pollution, regardless of the recent recommendation by Fujiwara Chikamasa 藤原親雅 pertaining to shrines and temples, and that there is no need to change the law.<sup>97</sup> The retired emperor Gotoba 後鳥羽 (r. 1184–1198), however, seemed to have enforced the thirty-day avoidance rule, according to *Meigetsuki* 明月記 (ca. 1180–1235), the diary of Fujiwara Sadaie 定家 (1162–1241).<sup>98</sup> The defilement of childbirth in practice became progressively heavier, if judged from the required period of abstention, which now changed from seven to thirty days.<sup>99</sup>

These practices doubtless reflected the new formulations being introduced by the established shrines. Popular Buddhist teachings also added fuel to this trend, but in a significantly

different way. The increasing systematization of what we call “Shinto” naturally emphasized guarding purity within the shrine’s space. Major shrines issued *bukkiryō* 服忌令, or mourning and taboo rules, which, however, varied greatly in content from one shrine to another. *Shosha kinki* 諸社禁忌, a compendium of rules dating from the Kamakura period, lists taboo periods relative to death and birth set by each of the twenty-one major shrines in the Kinai region. For the *kegare* associated with death, the abstinence periods ranged from thirty to seventy days, with one exception set for one year. For the *kegare* associated with birth, with the exception of Kamo Shrine, which adhered to the *Engishiki*’s seven day rule, all the other shrines, including the Ise Shrine, upheld the abstinence period of thirty days or longer. Among them, Hie Shrine 日吉社 and Hirota Shrine 廣田社 demanded the most severe avoidance: seventy or eighty days for Hie Shrine and seventy days for Hirota Shrine, except the birthing woman herself who needed to abstain for one hundred days.<sup>100</sup>

Comparing this with another compendium, *Bunpōki* 文保記, issued by the Ise Shrine probably in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, we can see some inconsistency: *Bunpōki* prescribes seven days of taboo for birth-related *kegare*, in contradistinction to the thirty days stated in *Shosha kinki*. It also rules thirty days for miscarriage, and a one hundred day absence before the birthing woman could attend the shrine. Lengthy and detailed, *Bunpōki* raises and answers numerous questions, such as the precise point—before or after the expulsion of placenta—at which the “*kegare* of birth” begins; what to do if a dog eats the placenta of a newborn; when the newborn may attend the shrine; whether or not the husband who did not stay with the birthing woman or share the fire (of cooked food) has *kegare*, and whether or not the clothes women wore against the skin during menstruation are still defiled after washing, and so on. Of interest to us is that it uses the term “*ubuya*” to refer to a birthing place. Also to be noted is that it explicitly equates death pollution with birth pollution through this logic: “The [polluted] condition of a matter (*mono* 物) that has *kegare* of death results from the fact that it has *kegare* of birth.”<sup>101</sup>

Aristocrats often alluded to the linkage of death to birth, as Murasaki did in describing Shōshi’s childbirth, for example, or through the literary device that introduces ghostly *mononoke* 物の怪 spirits as a linked code to birth and death.<sup>102</sup> However, this pronouncement in shrine law, as Narikiyo propounds it, sets a new stage in the development of women-specific *kegare* ideals. The country’s highest shrine officially raised the level of birth-related *kegare* to that of death, which hitherto had been the most dangerous and thus requiring the longest period of abstinence.<sup>103</sup>

A story in *Shasekishū* 沙石集 (comp. 1283), a collection of Buddhist stories by Mujū Ichien 無住一円 (1227–1312), also promotes the idea that birth and death are joined through *kegare*:

The tabus observed at Ise differ somewhat from those of other shrines. Childbirth (*ubuya*) is spoken of as ‘bearing spirit’ [*shōki* 生氣], and those involved are under a fifty-day pollution; likewise, death is spoken of as ‘death-spirit’ [*shiki* 死氣], and also creates a fifty-day pollution. Death proceeds from life, and life is the beginning of death. The shrine official informed me that this was handed down as the reason for birth and death to be both tabu.<sup>104</sup>



In this logic that connects life and death, both parturition and death are marked by a *kegare* requiring the same degree of abstinence. Although the actual number of days prescribed for birth pollution is different from that in other writings, this entry in *Shasekishū* confirms that the pollution of death was beginning to be deemphasized in proportion to the weight of pollution caused by birth. The Hie Shrine rules, that set forth seventy or eighty (instead of seven) days of avoidance for *kegare* from birth, only require fifty (instead of thirty) days for *kegare* from death. The country's spiritual leaders, in the context of intensifying competition among shrines and the rising warrior power that politically legitimated violence and bloodshed, were beginning to intensify the weight of birth pollution relative to the weight of death pollution.<sup>105</sup>

Women's consciousness about their own condition of *kegare* also seems to have been evolving in the medieval period. According to Kanezane's journal entry for 1172, menstruating women themselves were taking proactive measures to remove themselves from public premises. Kanezane makes a small notation that his wife, for instance, moved to a *betsuya* 別屋 ("separate quarter"), and ladies-in-waiting at the court moved to a *taya* 他屋 ("the other quarter") for menstruation. Kanezane's understanding, confirmed in his conversation with the official from Ise Shrine, was that a menstruating woman observed taboo for seven days after the first day of menses, and thereafter took a purifying bath before attending the Ise shrine. If menstruation continued, the woman waited for three more days before attending the shrine.<sup>106</sup> The case of Kanezane's wife is important in signifying an instance in which menstrual taboo is observed in a space disconnected from the imperial institution or shrine affairs. We must be cautious, however, in making assumptions about the ways in which these women may have regarded their menstrual condition. Did they internalize *kegare* as part of their essentialized being or treat menstruation simply as an external physiological condition that was an uncontrollable nuisance regardless of taboo rules?<sup>107</sup> Considering the material condition in which women had to manage their hygiene, the concept and practice of *kegare* probably embodied meanings that differed across genders.

One indication of the development of a *kegare* concept internalized by women in the late medieval and early modern periods was the powerful formulation of the *Ketsubonkyō* 血盆經, the "Blood Pond Sutra" (Ch. *Xuepanjing*). A heretical text transmitted from China sometime in the late medieval period, this "sutra" gained notoriety and popularity for its promise to save women from the ultimate destination of hells specifically designed for those who polluted the ground and water with parturition and menstrual blood. Women themselves or perhaps their sons copied the sutra on a wooden tablet to be thrown into a pond or river in order to save themselves or their female kin. For women who were sterile or whose infant had died, there was yet another hell in which the fallen ceaselessly dug bamboo roots with a limp lamp wick. The vivid images of these hells were depicted broadly in the late medieval and Tokugawa periods by what Barbara Ruch calls "media evangelizers," the self-proclaimed "Buddhist nuns of Kumano." They instilled or reinforced fear but also provided promises of salvation through empathetic preaching, while some collected additional offerings to give one more description of potential hells that awaited the avid listeners. In this way, "knowledge" and warnings about female-specific pollution proliferated in readily accessible cultural forms.<sup>108</sup>

Yasuda Yukiko argues, however, that long before the spread of the Blood Pond Sutra, Buddhist notions of *kegare* were having an impact on Japanese society. From late ancient through medieval times, a salvation technique that depended on easy-to-accomplish prayers (*nenbutsu* 念仏) became popularized. This method was premised on the understanding that the world of sins and *kegare* existed. Through the process of *nenbutsu* recitation, then, the idea of *kegare* from which one was to be rescued was reconstituted and internalized. Buddhist notions of *kegare* that resided in the human spiritual realm began to merge with Shinto notions of *kegare* (such as those spelled out in the *Engishiki*), that were temporary and external to one's spirituality.<sup>109</sup> The Blood Pond Sutra landed on this fertile soil and helped to accentuate the notion of a female-specific *kegare* with concretely imaginable negative outcomes—descent to hells—eventually leaving an indelible mark on people's perceptions of women's body, life, blood, and death.

### The Populace in the Late Muromachi and Tokugawa Periods

We know little about the birthing practices of non-elites prior to the Tokugawa period. The literate elite was rarely motivated to write specifically about how or where commoner women had babies. Their childbirth involved few ceremonies, and the physiological process of birthing, absent some unusual irregularities that alerted the court diarists, was apparently outside the interest of the educated mind (with the exception of a few medical scholars).<sup>110</sup> Mothers and babies do appear in popular tales, such as those in the *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集, but the stories are not about the process of parturition and, for our purposes, not about the *ubuya*. But popular tales direct our attention to their frequent engagement with the concept of *kegare*. One often-quoted story, for example, appears in the section “shrine and Buddhist affairs” of the thirteenth-century collection of edifying tales *Zoku kojidan* 續古事談. In it, Fujiwara Tomosada 藤原知定 suffers a bloody nose upon participating in a religious ceremony twenty some days after embracing a pregnant woman. A messenger of Hachiman appears to reprimand him. Tomosada asks the messenger how many days of abstinence needed to be observed for birth-related pollution. The answer was thirty days.<sup>111</sup>

In the Tokugawa period, especially from the late eighteenth century on, medical texts on childbirth and illustrated guides for women's activities flooded the urban space among the multitude of other publications. But these texts fail to inform us of the existence of *ubuya*. Childbirth scenes in popular illustrated texts typically show a room in a house, not an isolated *ubuya*. One text includes “A guideline for *ubuya*” 産家, but “*ya*” is written with the graph for “*ie*” 家, the corporate household, instead of the “*ya*” 屋 that means “structure” or “roof” and is used for the *ubuya* 産屋 of our focus. The guides show how to care for the inside of the mouth of the newborn and the naval after the cord drops off, for example.<sup>112</sup> The term “*sanjo*” is used in some texts to refer simply to where the birth is taking place and in the context of practical recommendations, such as that the people in the *sanjo* should speak in a low voice so as not to disturb the woman's mental balance.<sup>113</sup> One mid-eighteenth-century text explains the word “*taya*,” the term introduced earlier, that was used in a document kept at Shino Island, a property belonging to the Ise shrine, to refer to an isolated menstrual hut. The Tokugawa text reveals that “*taya*” means menstrual period itself and provides the etymology: “Women of the region where various major shrines such as Ise, Yawata, and Kasuga are located and women serving in the imperial palace segregate themselves for seven days in a

different house during their menstrual period. This [structure and practice] is called ‘*tai no ya*’ 待の屋 (wait-structure). It is said that this in turn became abbreviated, turned into the customarily used word ‘*taya*.’”<sup>114</sup> It seems that to the text’s readers, the prescriptive language in the *Engishiki* and other rules would have been unfamiliar and peculiar.

Without mentioning the issue of *kegare*, these texts give instructions on the details of prenatal, obstetric, and postpartum practices, such as how to prepare one’s own food, what to see, how to feel, and how to stand or walk.<sup>115</sup> Men, too, were urged to participate. One text that enjoyed four printings between 1755 and 1772 exhorts “men to frequently visit the woman while she is in labor. This encourages women. It is often said that ‘Men should not be in [the room],’ but this is a huge error.”<sup>116</sup> It apparently was not only in Edo that men were engaged in birthing tasks. Sawayama Mikako 沢山美香子 notes the actual involvement in the birthing processes by the father, husband, and other male relatives in northeastern Japan.<sup>117</sup>

That women gave birth at home, at least in cities, is suggested both by the absence of any mention of a separate structure and by the many drawings of “home birth” scenes. The intimate interaction among family members recorded in a journal of Watanabe Katsunosuke 渡邊勝之助 (1802–1864), an early nineteenth-century low-ranking samurai, also allows us to imagine a home birth. When his wife was in labor with their second child, Katsunosuke writes, he tried to keep their first child, a four-year-old boy, from bothering his mother by entering the birthing room. He describes his son sleeping with the grandmother, then reports that the boy awoke to ask, “What’s that?” upon hearing the newborn’s first cry. “When I told him that that is the cry of the baby, he said, ‘Yes, it is, isn’t it?’ in a well behaved way.” The childbirth was taking place within the hearing of the rest of the family, and Katsunosuke was pleased at his son’s “unexpected” good behavior.<sup>118</sup>

In contrast to these popular discourses, however, religious and political authorities articulated *kegare* in their “new and improved” rules for governing their sacred spaces. The original *Engishiki* version, with later and more recent modifications, continued to have practical significance for the now vastly shrunken imperial institution. More energetic were the country’s important shrines, which reshaped rules with a new emphasis on details.<sup>119</sup> One text, *Jingidō bukkiryō hishō* 神祇道服紀令秘抄, set forth in 1645 by the Urabe 卜部, a lineage of Shinto priests and theorists, was based on an earlier *Shokue mondō* 觸穢問答, or “Questions and Answers on Contracting *Kegare*,” and discusses 136 categories including menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth, a category placed at the end, numbers 129 through 136.<sup>120</sup> The document begins with rules on encountering death and the issue of third-party contagion (from A to B to C), which required thirty days of avoidance. Rules address the situations that the members of the samurai class may encounter in specific detail: only one day’s abstinence was required for cutting down someone with a sword outside (*kirizute* キリズテ) and for participating in guard duty but not touching the dead body. Indoor killing was a worse offense and required thirty days’ avoidance. The sword that cut off the head was polluted for thirty days.<sup>121</sup>

The *kegare* associated with childbirth, which demanded thirty days of abstinence, the same as the medieval rules for most shrines, was an offense thirty times graver than *kegare* associated with cutting down someone outdoors! But the third-party contagion from birth was in effect only for the first seven days. A pregnant woman was required to observe avoidance

after putting on the maternity sash in the fifth month. A birthing woman was permitted to attend the shrine after one hundred days. The clothes she wore during birthing must not be worn to the shrine even after washing. For menstruation that lasted seven days, the eighth day was cleared for sitting and sharing fire with shrine personnel. The woman herself was free to attend shrine on the eleventh day. In the past, the husband of a pregnant wife observed abstinence starting in the fifth month of her pregnancy, but the new rule required abstinence only in the last month.<sup>122</sup>

Under the fifth shogun, Tsunayoshi 綱吉 (1646–1709, r. 1680–1709), the bakufu came to issue its own rules on mourning and abstinence in 1684.<sup>123</sup> According to Takigawa Seijirō 瀧川政次郎 (1897–1992), of all the laws Tsunayoshi issued during his reign, these *bukkiryō* had the greatest and most lasting impact. The 1684 version underwent several revisions, first, two years later and also in 1692 and 1736.<sup>124</sup> These rules addressed two areas of concern. The first was the avoidance and mourning periods for the death of family members and relatives. Minute rules were set for family members, such as different kinds of “mothers” identified according to patrilineal principles.<sup>125</sup> The second concern was the governance of *kegare* in general, including that pertaining to female physiological functions. For the *kegare* of childbirth, the father abstained for seven days and the mother, thirty-five days. For miscarriage, the father abstained for three days and the mother, seven days if the gestation period had been less than four months and thirty days if more than four months. These rules regarding birth-related *kegare* were less restrictive than the shrines’ provisions set forth in the medieval period. But compared to the defilement caused by a non-relative’s death, which now required only purification, the penalties were much heavier. Narikiyo also noticed the order in which various *kegare* types came to be listed: birth-related defilement before the death-related defilement.<sup>126</sup>

How do we reconcile the contrasting images of childbirth in the pragmatic and popular literature on the one hand and the formalistic laws and regulations issued by the government and major shrines on the other? Moreover, if *ubuya* as a custom indeed proliferated in the Tokugawa period, as advanced by folk ethnologists, why do we not see the evidence more widely in these sources? Is it because the sources we have examined come mostly from urban regions, especially Edo? Apparently, rural areas produced little written evidence of *ubuya*, prompting Okada to lament the scarcity of “historical sources from rural areas that can intersect with the material that folk ethnologists have used.”<sup>127</sup> Okada does, however, introduce one document dated 1825 that nearly supports the existence of *ubuya*. The document comes from the island of Miyajima 宮島 in Aki, where the ancient and prestigious shrine of Itsukushima 厳島 stands in the shallows of the sea. “A lone island in the sea, this land where deities of renown reside, is not only exquisite in landscape but also has customs that are extraordinary,” the document begins. It lists ten “customs that are different from other places and will omit those that are the same.” To paraphrase, the island originally was the land of the gods, and therefore people revered purity. Every morning, every household purified the inside of the house using the newly scooped up sea water from the shoals in front of the *torii* gate facing the Itsukushima shrine, while everyone purified him/herself with hot water and prayed at the shrine. Rules for maintaining the purity of the fire were very strict. If a guest came to have tea and encountered defilement later, the previous sharing of the fire would be marked as contagion. Depending on the gravity of *kegare* the guest encountered later, the tea container

would be thrown in the water or pots discarded in the sea.

In this deity-fearing, *kegare*-conscious island, childbirth naturally was a target of regulation. “As soon as a child is born, both the child and mother are placed on a boat to be sailed out to the inlet. They return to the island after one hundred days. This is because the defilement of the blood is extreme. However, from ancient times, nobody has suffered from the sea wind and waves, nor has anyone from the island ever had difficult labor or childbirth.” For menstrual periods, there was a separate place for containing the *kegare*. “Above East and West Town there was a mountain called ‘Ase yama.’ Atop this mountain were several thatched structures. ‘Ase’ あせ [which means perspiration] stands [euphemistically] for ‘blood’ and is a taboo word used by the Ise shrine. Therefore, ‘Ase yama’ あせ山 means ‘Blood mountain.’ It is said that in the past, when island women had menses, they left their home and stayed in these places.” But, apparently, this structure was not just for women. Men and women who were defiled for other reasons such as handling the dead or even caskets also used this structure for a certain duration.<sup>128</sup>

The Itsukushima case adds to the list of island-based locations where women were segregated for their childbirth and menstrual functions. That this was less than common is evident in the introductory section’s claim to the community’s own uniqueness. This claim, combined with the difficulty of locating a similar custom in urban literature, leads us to conclude that the *ubuya* and similar structures were far from uniform or prevalent at the end of the Tokugawa period.

## Conclusion

We have questioned the widely accepted assertion, articulated in ethnographic and folklore studies, that the *ubuya* was an ageless instrument built to sequester birthing women, with the explicit purpose of containing the pollution emanating from childbirth. Our examination of the Toyotamahime legend, which contains the supposed prototype of the modern *ubuya*, revealed no ontological connection between the *ubuya* of Japan’s ancient myth and that of modern ethnographers’ description. Our investigation of ancient, medieval, and early modern sources have illuminated more the scarcity of records related to *ubuya* than its stable, continuing, and pervasive existence.

In probing the historicity of the *ubuya*, we looked for its signs in a *kegare*-related epistemology. In the Toyotamahime legend, the containment of defilement was not the meaning attributed to the *ubuya* that Toyotamahime herself asked her husband to construct. By the tenth century, the country’s ritual authority officially classified menstruation and childbirth as *kegare*. Women’s bodily conditions now came to formally offend the putative purity of the gods and their earthly manifestations, including the imperial sphere. But the limited cases of the word *ubuya* that appeared in aristocratic writing simply referred to a “birthing room” in a mansion or “a series of ceremonies” held for the newborn.

In the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, the major shrines upgraded the significance of female-specific pollution by establishing ever more elaborate and lengthy rules of abstinence, in some cases reversing the order of gravity between the defilement of death and of birth. But these changes had little to do with the epistemology of *ubuya*. In the new context emerging from the inauguration of warrior rule, the shogun and other notable warriors’ chil-

dren were born at the *sanjo*, a birthing space and an office with political implications set up at the home of important vassals or Hōjō regents.

After the country moved from war to peace in 1600, the Tokugawa bakufu issued rules for dealing with *kegare*, the first time for a warrior government, just as the imperial government and shrines had for some time. For this military government, killing people outdoors was an act that was far less polluting than giving birth to a baby. Meanwhile, among the populace, Buddhist notions of female-specific *kegare*, whether heretical or orthodox, spread and helped to transform the defilement into a spiritual quality of womanhood itself, not an externally definable and temporary condition. Even with new laws and the spread of new ideas, and despite our expectation of encountering many records of *ubuya*, the evidence turns out to be the opposite, both in literature and local records. Given this paucity of evidence, it is no wonder that the historical discipline, to which evidence is *sine qua non*, has been slow to develop a study of *ubuya*. Ethnographic writings often compensate for this lacuna, as is evident from their inclusion in collections of historical essays.<sup>129</sup>

Our approach, which connected *ubuya* with the development of ideas of *kegare*, has created its own problems. In our investigation, we subordinated *ubuya* to the very trope we were seeking to challenge—the presumed interactive relationship between the architectural presence of the *ubuya* and the abstract notion of *kegare*. Underlying this presumed connection was the general assumption that the pollution belief, and therefore the *ubuya*, oppressed women. In reality, the two elements had only tenuous connections to each other, if they had any connection at all. The official prescription on all types of *kegare* was marked by its defensive posture: to keep polluting elements, regardless of their gender, away from the prescribing institution and related spaces of purity. This was an act semantically expressed as “abstinence” and said nothing about quarantining the source (woman) from the rest of the environment, or promoting the construction of a detached quarter for all birthing women. By looking for the *ubuya* in the vocabulary of pollution, we have recreated a framework within which birthing structures could escape notice if they existed independently of the epistemological world of purity and impurity.

An entry in the *Koji ruien* 古事類苑, an encyclopedic dictionary published in the early twentieth century that introduces historical sources, distinguishes the three perspectives pertaining to childbirth and helps to clarify the uneven power relations pertaining to childbirth that existed in a society built on patrilineal principles. The dictionary separates the three verbs associated with childbirth: “*umu*” 産む, which means to give birth, “*umasu*” 産ます which means to make someone give birth, and “*umaru*” 産まる, which means to be born. The three verbs pertain to the mother, father, and child, respectively. The verb “*umu*” takes an object, the child, while the verb “*umasu*” takes two objects, the mother and the child. The verb “*umaru*,” belonging to the newborn, is entirely passive, with no object.<sup>130</sup> To study parturition from the perspective of the “*umu*” sex means to unravel the power relations that are deeply embedded in most historical sources. The shrine’s and the governments’ writings were created from the perspective of the “*umasu*” sex, represented by those who were incapable of giving birth but typically deeply invested in the birth’s outcome.

By focusing on the birthing women, instead of the ideology about parturition, we can begin to appreciate a variety of meanings that a structure such as the *ubuya* could have embodied, though admittedly, we found little evidence of their nationwide dispersion in our



sources. In her classic work, Michelle Rosaldo (d. 1981) states that “pollution beliefs can provide grounds for solidarity among women” and “the very symbolic and social conceptions that appear to set women apart and to circumscribe their activities may be used by women as a basis for female solidarity and worth.”<sup>131</sup> As the description of the Ōbara *ubuya* shows, a detached space could offer the birthing woman the privacy, autonomy, and gender-specific solidarity. Protected by the Ōbara shrine, the *ubuya* was a place of physical rest and spiritual comfort, reserved for the community’s birth-givers, who were women. In other regions, such as Hachijōjima, we saw that the communal structure fostered a variety of activities, including sexual, that were considered immoral by the government. Records also remain from 1798 of *ubuya* in Mimasaka which served women well for exercising “reproductive choice,” away from the watchful eyes of the government that prohibited abortion and infanticide.<sup>132</sup>

We have come full circle to speculate on the role of *ubuya* and *kegare*, but this time as ideas that women might have appropriated. The ways in which the use of the *ubuya* of Hachijōjima and Ōbara were described suggest the female “ownership” of the *kegare*’s symbolic potential based on the mutuality of women-specific physiological rhythms and requirements. It is said that, after the language of “birth pollution” was legally revoked by the Meiji government in 1872, the *ubuya* survived until the 1910s.<sup>133</sup> We wonder whom the continuing presence of the *ubuya* benefited. Now that the *ubuya* trope has been unraveled, this field of inquiry remains wide open for a new history of childbirth that will rescue women’s own views of their pregnancies from the rhetoric of normative rules and regulations.

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*Zoku kojidan* 續古事談. In GR 27 no. 487, 1931, pp. 628–702.

## NOTES

1 [http://www.kyoto-kankou.or.jp/ssd\\_kyoto/f0/english/2004\\_05.html](http://www.kyoto-kankou.or.jp/ssd_kyoto/f0/english/2004_05.html), accessed 23 May 2005. An earlier version of this study was presented at the Donald Keene Center of Japanese Culture at Columbia University in 2005, and at the Gender and History Workshop, the University of Michigan, in 2004. Insightful comments of the participants of those seminars have helped to refine each subsequent version of the paper. I wish to thank Melissa McCormick, Henry D. Smith II, and Shinobu Ikeda for sending me useful follow-up materials, Mayumi Oka and Yuki Johnson for their linguists' vision, Yuki Terazawa and Fabian Drixler for clarifying the early modern parturition practices, Anne Walthall for her wisdom, Christian de Pee for comparative references, anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions, and finally James Baxter and Joshua Fogel for their outstanding editorial enhancement. The Center for Japanese Studies and the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Michigan assisted my research activity with their generous grants.

2 Built in a different county and moved to this location either in 825 or 1279. Shrine records show visits by bakufu officials in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Miwa-chō Kyōdo Shiryōkan 2000, pp. 5–6. The shrine is dedicated to Izanami no mikoto 伊邪那美尊, Amaterasu ōmikami 天照大神 and Tsukuyomi no mikoto 月読尊. Izanami is the first female god whose vaginal birth to a fire god condemned her to the dark land of Yomi 黄泉. Amaterasu, today considered to be the highest deity who, though female, had no vaginal reproductive function. Tsukuyomi no mikoto and Amaterasu both emerged from Izanagi no mikoto 伊邪那岐尊, the brother deity of Izanami. According to the above website, the “fantastic limestone cave” refers to the Shizushi Limestone Cave Park 質志鐘乳洞公園, which was discovered in 1927 and is located in Mizuho-chō 瑞穂町 (renamed Kyōtanba-chō 京丹波町 in 2005), in the center of Kyoto Prefecture.

3 Yagi 1998, reprinted as a reference material in *Shinpojiumu ubuya tōku* 2000, p. 26.

4 [http://www.kyoto-kankou.or.jp/ssd\\_kyoto/f0/english/2004\\_05.html](http://www.kyoto-kankou.or.jp/ssd_kyoto/f0/english/2004_05.html) in English, quoted here without emendation.

5 See Note 1.

6 Bunkachō 1969–1988. The project goal appears in volume 1 (1969), p. 5.

7 See the discussion of Bunkachō 1969–1988, esp. vol. 5 (*Shussan* 出産, *ikuji* 育児), as it relates to the concept of pollution in Narikiyo 2003, pp. 19–36.

8 Ōtō 1999, pp. 332–37. According to Ōtō, another disciple, it was Segawa who proposed for Yanagita's female disciples to take the initiative in this research direction. At an informal session held on the tail of “The First Japan Folk-Ethnology Lecture Women's Discussion Group Meeting” on March 23, 1938, at which Yanagita first lectured on “women's role in labor and spirituality,” themes such as women's *kō* 講 (religious associations), the history of *yūjo* 遊女 (female entertainers), beliefs in fishing villages, and the downfall of priestesses were raised. This type of discussion led to the formation of a “Women's Group” (*Onna no kai* 女の会), that regularly met at Yanagita's home, and that came to publish *Josei to keiken* 女性と経験 (Women and Experiences). See “Josei minzokugaku kenkyūkai shōshi 女性民俗学研究会小史 (Short history of women's folklore studies research group),” appendix, pp. 1–19 from back, that traces this development.

9 Segawa 1980, pp. 13–14. The community, called Furikusa-mura 振草村 when Segawa studied it, is in Shitara-chō 設楽町, Aichi prefecture, today. Segawa states that she did the survey together with a niece of Yanagita.

10 Segawa 1948. “Ubuya ni tsuite” was republished, with revisions, in Segawa 1980, pp. 64–90.

11 Segawa 1948, p. 54.

12 Ibid.

13 Segawa 1948, pp. 54–57. In Segawa 1980, she states “until the Meiji period” instead of “recently.”

14 Another case mentioned is Kuro Island 黒島 in Kagoshima Prefecture, where the *ubuya* was located in the mountain away from houses and accommodated, like the others, both menstruating and birthing

women. The latter stayed there for twenty-one days. On the day of the birth, everyone in the village abstained from any agricultural activities because of the taboo. Family members of the birthing woman refrained from going outdoors for seven days because of *kegare*, covered the entrance to the house with *hoki* 蒲葵 leaves, and the community supplied food to the family members, as it did in the case of death. Segawa 1948, pp. 55–56.

15 Segawa 1980, pp. 15–16.

16 See her “*Rekishhi no nagare no naka de*” 歴史の流れの中で (In the flow of history), in Segawa 1980, p. 172.

17 Ibid.

18 Writings of other folk ethnologists studying under Yanagita share a similar understanding of *ubuya*. Ōtō Yuki, for example, devotes several sections on childbirth in Ōtō 1999. She mentions Ōbara *ubuya* as an example that used sand on the floor and comments that the parturition taboo was particularly severe at Ōbara shrine. Ōtō 1999, p. 177.

19 On Yanagita Kunio’s Japanism, see Hashimoto 1998, and on the meaning of his representation, see Harootunian 1998.

20 Vlastos 1998, p. 2.

21 NKD, p. 8: “*Shussan o kegare to imi habakatta tame ni mōkerareta*” 出産をけがれと忌みはばかったために設けられた。In my English translation, I have italicized the phrase “in order to” for emphasis.

22 Ibid.

23 Akiyama and Watanabe 2000, p. 202.

24 NKD, pp. 1–5.

25 The oldest extant text, the *Kojiki* 古事記, contains nearly identical stories that are also frequently cited to give credence to the meaning of *ubuya*. The *ubuya* associated with Toyotamahime is written “birth palace” (*sanden* 産殿) in the *Kojiki*; and in the *Nihon shoki*, it is *ubuya* 産屋.

26 Sakamoto 1994, pp. 178–80. The appointed positions mentioned in the story resemble the later bureaucratic offices in the inner palace. In another *Nihon shoki* variant, Toyotamahime becomes a dragon (*ryū* 竜) instead of a crocodile and abandons the child on shore, but sends for her sister to take care of it. See all *Nihon shoki* variations in Sakamoto 1994, pp. 166–67, 171–72, 184.

27 *Kojiki* 1993 (first published 1958), pp. 143–47; Philippi 1968, pp. 156–57.

28 See note 21 above.

29 See note 9 in Sakamoto 1994, p. 179. There are other passages in the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki* that demonstrate the mother’s authority to name children. Scholars have interpreted this as evidence of matrilineal descent that was changing to patrilineal descent, as seen in this story.

30 Some scholars interpret this story as an indication of “an ancient taboo against witnessing a delivery.” See, for example, Philippi 1968, p. 157, note 6. Though different, this interpretation also considers the significance of the story from an external male gaze. “Seeing” later becomes one of the official taboos.

31 Aston 1972 (first pub. 1896), p. 72, note 1. Dickins and Satow describe “customs of *tabi* and *ubuya*” in their article, “Notes of a visit to Hachijō in 1878.” Initially, they are careful to point to specificity: “we are speaking of the Hachijō practice.” When they refer to “earlier times,” they mean “within the present century.” However, they later fall to dangerous generalization: “According to the ancient religious belief of the Japanese, child-birth was another cause of uncleanness, and the woman in labour had to occupy a separate hut built for the occasion.” See Dickins and Satow 1878, pp. 454–55. I thank Peter Shapinsky for introducing the article to me.

32 Nakamura 2003 (first pub. 1962), p. 23. According to anthropologists Buckley and Gottlieb, “accounts of such seclusion have been inflected by the pride of missionaries and other colonialists in putting an end to what *they* perceived as an evil, rather than by the lived experiences of women in ‘menstrual huts.’” Buckley and Gottlieb 1988, p. 12.

- 33 The views of Makita, Tanigawa, and Takatori are introduced in Iijima 1985, pp. 221–320, especially p. 251.
- 34 *Vocabulario* 1603, pp. 538 and 378. I thank Sueann Caulfield and John Monteiro for their assistance in rendering the Portuguese and the translation, and an anonymous reviewer for reminding me to include this dictionary's entry.
- 35 *Kokushi daijiten* 1980, p. 149, entry for “ubuya.”
- 36 This entry, however, is followed by another, “*ubuya aki*” 産屋明, signed by Segawa Kiyoko, who incorporates the aforementioned description of *ubuya* that appeared in her book, including its origin in the Toyotamahime legend, its function to keep female pollution, and its static presence through the early modern period. Literary, “*ubuya aki*” means the end of one's stay in *ubuya*. Ibid.
- 37 Osada 2005, pp. 39–61.
- 38 Namihira 1987, pp. S65–74. The quote appears on p. S68. In Japanese, see Namihira 1985, especially chapter 2.
- 39 The content of *The Chronicle* and many other historical sources about Hachijōjima are incorporated in *Hachijō jikki* 八丈實記, a record of Hachijōjima, covering the years from 1828 to 1882, which was kept by Kondō Tomizō 近藤富蔵 (1805–1887), a son of a bakufu official exiled to the island. For descriptions of *taya*, see Kondō 1964, esp., pp. 305–307. The *ubuya* on Hachijōjima is mentioned by W. G. Aston 1972, and Dickins and Satow. See note 31 above. Namihira reinterprets the findings made by Ōmachi Tokuzō 大間知篤三(1900–70) in Ōmachi 1951. See Namihira 1985, pp. 112–14 and p. 135, note 17.
- 40 Interestingly, this was only a few years after the visit made by Dickins and Satow.
- 41 Dickins and Satow, p. 449; Namihira 1985, pp. 113–14; Kondō 1964, p. 308.
- 42 Kondō, 1964, p. 316. Dickins and Satow state: “The monthly banishment was often taken advantage of for holding clandestine meetings with a lover, and the women used sometimes to prolong their absence from home more than was necessary.” Dickins and Satow, p. 455.
- 43 Namihira, p. 115.
- 44 For example, see Mega 1993, pp. 37–60; Nagano 1990, pp. 60–67.
- 45 See note 13.
- 46 Namihira, pp. 115–116.
- 47 Takahashi 1941, vol. 1, pp. 482ff. Fabian Drixler kindly pointed me to this document.
- 48 Namihira 1985, pp. 115–16, 111–12.
- 49 Okada 1989; Yasuda 2000; Narikiyo 2003.
- 50 The material for this section relies heavily on Okada 1989, Yasuda 2000, and Narikiyo 2003; and Mitsuhashi 1989, pp. 40–75.
- 51 Maintaining historical writing was one aspect of the Chinese institution that Japan adopted. Brownlee 1991, p. 34. The *Six National Histories* include the *Nihon shoki*. The English-language translations of the titles are Brownlee's.
- 52 *Shoku Nihongi* (Chronicle of Japan Continued, 797) 1956, entries dated 725.7.17 and 749.11.24, pp. 103 and 206.
- 53 Yasuda 2000, p. 51. See *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 1952.
- 54 Entries in *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* 1952, dated 878.4.20 and 882.9.13, pp. 426 and 526. The debate concerned pollution emanating from dogs giving birth. Cited in *ibid*.
- 55 Yasuda 2000, p. 51.
- 56 *Ryō no gige* 1955, p. 79. It states abstractly that the defiled are matters that are impure (*fujō*) and displeasing to gods. Yasuda 2000, p. 49; Okada 1989, p. 24.
- 57 *Ryō no shūge* 1953, p. 200. Narikiyo, pp. 66–67.
- 58 Most of the Kōninshiki rules are not extant and are found in later compendia, such as *Saikyūki* 西



宮記. For this provision, see *Saikyūki* 1931, vol 2, kan 7, p. 25. Miscarriage required thirty days abstinence. Narikiyo, p. 65.

59 The record is compiled by officials of Ise's Inner Shrine and covers Ise shrine affairs from mythical times, 4 B.C.E., to C.E. 1069. *Daijingu shozōjiki* 1929, p. 84. Cited in Okada 1989, p. 71.

60 Bock 1970, 1972. See her introduction to *Engishiki* in Bock, 1970, pp. 11–12. Also see corrections of some items in the translation by the same author, in Bock 1990, pp. 307–37.

61 *Engishiki* 1, pp. 68–69. The translation has been slightly altered from Bock 1970, 1972, books I–IV, pp. 116–17. Narikiyo 2003, p. 65.

62 Mitsuhashi 1989, pp. 41–45. Yasuda 2000, pp. 50–51.

63 Mitsuhashi 1989, p. 47.

64 “Kashiwagi” chapter in Tyler 2001, *The Tale of Genji*, p. 678; *Genji* 1996, p. 12. Tyler explains these rites in a footnote as “the cutting of the umbilical cord, the ritual bathing, the first suckling, and so on.” Tyler’s “birth celebration” is a translation of “*on ubuyashinai*,” a series of ceremonies that follows the birth of a child and that is sometimes also called “*ubuya*” according to NKD, as mentioned earlier.

65 *Makura no sōshi* 1984, 1, chapter 22, pp. 40, 44. Sei also includes in the list “not giving a little gift to messengers as they depart on the occasion of the ‘*ubu yashinai*’ ceremony,” p. 43. Even considering the possibility of later alterations, inasmuch as the original manuscript has not been found and numerous variants have circulated, it seems clear that the emphasis in the meaning of “*ubuya*” is that it is a place to give birth and has no apparent implications for pollution or isolation.

66 The meanings given here come close to the second and third definitions for “*ubuya*” given in NKD.

67 Murasaki 1989. One excellent translation of this work is by Richard Bowring (Bowring 1982), pp. 42–155. Other examples of works that employ the term “*ubuya*” include: *Utsubo monogatari* 宇津保物語, *Eiga monogatari* 榮華物語, *Ise monogatari* 伊勢物語, *Kagerō nikki* 蜻蛉日記. See Nishiyama 1990, pp. 207–208. These are all usages that simply mean a place for delivery or post-partum ceremonies for the infant. Nishiyama erroneously assumes, without providing any concrete historical evidence, that the “norm” for the institution of *ubuya* was one that was constructed temporarily and quickly at the time of delivery, and notes that these examples from the late ninth century diverge from that pattern (p. 207).

68 Murasaki 1989, p. 253, note 26.

69 According to Itō Hiroshi, the mansion may have belonged to Minamoto Rinshi 源倫子, Michinaga's wife. Murasaki 1989, p. 253, note 2. For descriptions of this birth in journals written by men, see Bowring 1982, Appendix 3, “Additional Sources,” pp. 183–98.

70 Murasaki 1989, p. 257. This was the future emperor Goichijō 後一條 (r. 1016–1036).

71 Murasaki 1989, pp. 257–59. Bowring 1982, pp. 51–53; Citation on pp. 51 ff.

72 On the other side of the curtain behind Murasaki, three wet nurses serving Michinaga's second, third, and fourth daughters pushed their way up to crowd into the small space behind the dais. Men, who were on the other side of the curtain, often peeked in, and to their gaze women had to expose their swollen eyes, wrinkled clothes, and purifying rice that clung all over. Murasaki notes how she, even a recent arrival in Shōshi's court, empathized with those ladies-in-waiting of many years who understandably exhibited some anxiety. Murasaki 1989, pp. 259–60.

73 Bowring 1982, p. 61.

74 Murasaki 1989, p. 260.

75 Nakamura 2003, pp. 23 and 204, note 26.

76 Nakamura 2003, p. 41.

77 Murasaki 1989, p. 263. Hiramata 1990, p. 4.

78 Mitsuhashi 1989, p. 41.

79 See Hirama 1990, p. 3. Surprisingly, according to Hirama, when women took a leave from the palace, they were not forbidden to come and go during that leave.

80 Murasaki 1989, p. 277. By mentioning the baby's cry, Murasaki may be suggesting the lack of paternal authority on the part of the emperor.

81 Lady Nijō 二条, the author of *Towazugatari* とはずがたり, who served the retired emperor Gofukakusa 後深草 in the late thirteenth century, frequently took leaves for biological "inconveniences," though the real reason was often otherwise. On one of her four birthing events, she was physically assisted by her lover, Saionji Sanekane 西園寺実兼, a high ranking aristocrat who even cut the umbilical cord. But Nijō mentions nothing of the possibility of birth-related *kegare*. *Towazugatari* 1994, esp., pp. 49–50; Brazell 1973, pp. 49–50. The question of subjectivity on the part of menstruating and birthing women is an important issue that cannot be dealt with here. Suffice it to say that our assessment of the ways in which women understood the notion of *kegare*, or the degree to which they may have internalized the formalized prescription, must consider, first of all, the physiological condition of cleanliness that would have made various activities particularly difficult in days without advanced forms of toiletries and technology.

82 The term was by no means new or specific to warriors, however. The NKD lists "osanjo" as "a place for the imperial, shogunal, and such families to give birth" and lists an entry dated 1129.7.9 from *Chūyūki* 中右記 (1087–1138), diary by Fujiwara Munetada 宗忠, an aristocrat, that mentions the use of a house belonging to the Kyōgoku 京極 as *osanjo* and another dated 1485 from *Sanetaka-kō ki* 実隆公記 (1474–1536) that mentions renovation of a hot water room for use as *sanjo*. NKD 2, p. 560.

83 *Osanjo nikki* 1930. The text organizes the births into three chronological periods, each identified by the paternal shogun's name except the last which, instead of identifying the time by Yoshiharu, the father, it calls the section "Yoshiteru's time," by the name of his son, Yoshiteru. This last section also mentions no other births by Yoshiharu. See p. 316.

84 Suzuki 1993, pp. 121–74.

85 ZAK 1976–79, vol. 1, pp. 129–30, 133. Entries that follow the notice about Masako's return to headquarters concern Masako's fury over Yoritomo's affair. In this well known episode, Masako directed a vassal to destroy the house in which the mistress was being kept. The destroyer was in turn summoned by Yoritomo who then cut off his topknot despite his dirt-biting apology. The man whose house was destroyed was soon exiled at Masako's direction. The mistress was transferred to another house and Yoritomo, despite fearing Masako's anger, loved her all the more. pp. 134–36.

86 ZAK 1976–79, vol. 1, p. 133; Suzuki 1993, p. 146. Yorie and Ichiman also were killed.

87 ZAK 1976–79, vol. 2, pp. 249–54. Hōjō Tomotoki 北条朝時 (1194–1245), a son of Masako's brother, Yoshitoki 義時 (1163–1224), would reside at Nagoe and take the name Nagoe (Hōjō) Tomotoki (1194–1245).

88 Suzuki 1993, p. 147.

89 An entry for 1263.12.24. ZAK 1976–79, vol. 5, pp. 513–14. The assignment of *osanjo* was not always simple. In the case of Prince Munechika's wife, for example, complicated deliberations among the bakufu officials ensued following the destruction by fire of the originally assigned place. The issues included, for example, avoiding directional taboos, which called for yin-yang diviners' opinions, and choosing an auspicious day for moving the mother.

90 Such as *hōkōshū* 奉公衆, *shugo* 守護, and *hyōjōshū* 評定衆. Suzuki 1993, p. 130. *Osanjo nikki*, pp. 303–21. The *nikki* records a full list of ceremonial activities, attendees, and especially gifts received and granted, but with different degrees of elaboration from one birth to another.

91 Narikiyo 2003, p. 160.

92 The journal entry for the following day states that the newborn has died. *Moromori ki* 8, pp. 166–67. Cited in Suzuki 1993, p. 153. Suzuki believes it is Moromori's unique style not to add the honorific "o"

to “*sanjo*” although this is the birth of a shogun’s child.

93 ZAK 1976–79, vol. 5, p. 114, entry for 1251.5.29.

94 *Entairyaku* 2, p. 191. Cited in Narikiyo 2003, p. 128. Death pollution was of course observed. We do not have a clear understanding of how, at this juncture, the warriors, compared to aristocrats, approached the issues of menstrual taboo.

95 *Hossō shiyōshō*, p. 133. It dates from the late Heian (twelfth century) or early Kamakura (late twelfth–early thirteenth century) period.

96 Narikiyo 2003, p. 119. Goshirakawa was apparently serious about abstinence. In one episode, he avoided participating in a ceremony at a Buddhist temple, Hosshōji 法勝寺, because Buddhist priests there had been at a birth ceremony at a minister’s resident. Goshirakawa feared contagion due to birth pollution from the Buddhist priests who still “wore” it. Theoretically, the emperor should have been the very embodiment of “purity” itself and thus could not risk contamination. This incident with the priests raises an interesting question of the role of priests in childbirth scenes. They are almost always present inside the room, in direct contact with the source of contamination. Nishiguchi Junko 西口順子 has observed that Buddhist residences (*bō* 房) were often offered as a place for childbirth and gives an example from Chōji 長治2 (1105).8.27 in which a wife of Fujiwara Munesuke 藤原宗輔 gave birth in one. She moved there a month prior to the date of delivery. Of course, priests were also present at scenes of death. Nishiguchi therefore wonders if priests ignored the notion of *kegare* or if other forces served to overwrite it. Even Enryakuji 延暦寺 priests provided techniques for conception and safe birth. Nishiguchi 1987, pp. 57–63.

97 *Gyokuyō* 1917, vol. 2, p. 551. A decade and a half earlier, in an entry dated 1172.9.16, Kujō Kanezane 九条兼実 gives greater specificity to the seven-day rule which he claimed reflects his conversation with an official of the Ise Shrine regarding women who served the Shrine: A woman is **polluting** for seven days after childbirth; as for herself, after childbirth, a woman is **polluted** and should not attend the shrine for thirty days (Kanezane makes a special note that this is a recent prescription); and a pregnant woman does not need to be avoided upon her sash-wearing ceremony. In contrast to Kanezane, Nakahara Motohiro 中原基広, a legal scholar, considered a pregnant woman polluting once she put on the maternity sash. Motohiro’s comment was submitted in the sixth month of 1175. *Gyokuyō* 1917, vol. 1, pp. 221–23. Narikiyo 2003, pp. 116–20.

98 Mentioned in an entry for 1200.7.11. Teika stresses “this time,” thirty days were observed. *Meiget-suki* 1, p. 322. Narikiyo 2003, pp. 120–21.

99 Narikiyo 2003, pp. 116–18.

100 *Shosha kinki*, pp. 706–707. Okada 1989, pp. 243–44; Narikiyo 2003, pp. 134–39.

101 *Bunpōki*, especially pp. 500–506 on birth and pp. 506–510 on menstruation. Quote on p. 500. On the disposition of placenta, a topic of great prominence in sources, see Yokoi 1988 and Nakamura 1999, and for data on methods and customs in more recent times, see Onshi Zaidan Boshi A’ikukai 1975.

102 Professor Haruo Shirane has kindly reminded me of the pattern of *mononoke* appearances in aristocratic literature. During Shōshi’s childbirth, exorcists and priests worked hard to dispel evil spirits, which apparently were persistent. Bowring 1982, pp. 55–57. See also Hattori Toshirō’s interesting discussion of *mononoke* in Hattori 1975, pp. 33–54.

103 Narikiyo 2003, pp. 133–34.

104 *Shasekishū*, p. 61. Translation is in Morrell 1985, pp. 74–75. Narikiyo 2003, p. 122. “*Ubuya*” used here does not refer to a structure but the act of giving birth, similar to the usage by Sei Shōnagon. But compiler, Watanabe Tsunaya 渡邊綱也, of this published Japanese version offers in note 30, p. 61, this explanation for the term *ubuya*: It was an ancient custom to consider parturition as a taboo and therefore to build a birthing room detached from the residence. Even today, the legacy of this custom exists in many places.

- 105 Narikiyo 2003, pp. 134–39.
- 106 Entries for 1172.9.16 in *Gyokuyō* 1917, vol. 1, 221–223. Cited in Narikiyo 2003, pp. 117–21.
- 107 In ancient myths, menstruation, like childbirth, was not considered *kegare*, namely something to be avoided. In the *Kojiki*, Prince Yamato Takeru 倭建御子 has sex with Princess Miyazuhime 美夜受比賣 who is in the midst of her menstrual period. See *Kojiki*, pp.217–219. Philippi 1968, pp. 244–45.
- 108 On the evangelizers, see Ruch 2002, pp. 537–80, esp., 566–74; on Blood Pond, Kawamura 1996, pp. 39–45; Makino and Kōdate 1996, pp. 81–115. For the place of Blood Bowl Sutra in evolving gender relations of the fourteenth century, see Tonomura 1997. Recent works on Buddhist propaganda and Blood Pond Sutra are Moerman 2005 and Kaminishi 2006.
- 109 Yasuda 2000, esp. chapter 2.
- 110 On the history of medical discourse, which has little relationship to the concern for *kegare*, see Shinmura 1996.
- 111 *Zoku kojidan* 1931, pt 4, jinja butsuji 神社佛寺 section, pp. 664–65. Another version of the same story states thirty-three days of abstinence is needed. See Kawabata and Araki 2005, pp. 724ff. The messenger of the Hachiman Deity was in the form of his ten-year old daughter who, as a child, is pure.
- 112 Emori 1994A, p. 203. The passage is from “Hyakunin isshu, Jokyōkun jokyō taizen hime bunko” 百人一首女教訓女教大全文庫, published 1827. The full title and the dates and titles of reprints are in Emori 1994B, p. 144.
- 113 “Hyakunin isshu, Onna yūshoku mibae bunko” 百人一首女有職 琴文庫 (first published 1793), in Emori 1994A, p. 209, Emori 1994B, p. 129. According to Suzuki, unlike in the Kamakura and Muromachi periods, “osanjo,” as it relates to the warrior houses’ birthing locations, rarely appears in any document during the late Sengoku period. Suzuki 1993, p. 159. In the Tokugawa period, births of the shogun took place inside the women’s quarter, the Ōoku 大奥, in a highly regulated manner.
- 114 “Hinazuru hyakunin isshu hana monzen” 雛鶴百人一首花文選 (published 1756), in Emori 1994A, p. 251; Emori 1994B, p. 158.
- 115 Many such texts and illustration have been found. See Emori 1994A.
- 116 “Chōhō taisei, Jokun yōbun miyako nishiki” 重室大成女訓用文都錦, *ibid.*, p. 259; Emori 1994B, p. 89.
- 117 Sawayama 2004, p. 50.
- 118 “Kuwana nikki, Kashiwazaki nikki” 桑名日記、柏崎日記, in Tanigawa 1971, pp. 504–505. Mashita Michiko analyzes these journals in Mashita 1990, pp. 143–69.
- 119 Okada 1989, p. 272.
- 120 *Jingidō bukkiryō hishō* 1932; on birth, pp. 756–57; *Shokue mondō* pp. 727–28; Okada 1989, pp. 272–73; Narikiyo 2003, p. 158. It is unclear if the *Shokue mondō* was written in the fifteenth century, as Narikiyo states, or the late sixteenth to early seventeenth century, as Okada proposes.
- 121 *Jingidō bukkiryō hishō* 1932, nos. 67, 68, 69, p. 750.
- 122 *Jingidō bukkiryō hishō* 1932, nos. 129, 131, 132, 134, pp. 756–57.
- 123 *Ofuregaki* 1934, doc. no. 949, pp. 497–500.
- 124 Okada 1989, pp. 294–95; p. 348, note 3, for citation of Takigawa’s comment. *Ofuregaki* 1934, doc. nos. 952, 958, 968, pp. 500–502, 509–13, 517–21.
- 125 Okada, 1989, pp. 294–97; Narikiyo 2003, pp. 158–59. Hayashi 1994, pp. 159–60. The examples of 1684 rules include the following. The death of one’s parents required fifty days of abstinence and thirteen months of mourning. For the parents of a woman’s husband, it set only thirty days of avoidance and 150 days of mourning, which suggests the relatively light significance of the in-laws for a married woman. For the biological mother, thirty days of abstinence and 150 days’ mourning was required, while for the death of the primary wife of the father (*chakubo* 嫡母), it was thirty and ninety days, respectively.
- 126 Narikiyo 2003, p. 159.

127 Okada 1989, p. 272.

128 Ibid., p. 282; Rai 1965 (originally pub 1910), p. 227. At the island of Miyakejima 三宅島 also, those in abstinence for death, childbirth, and menstruation all stayed in one structure called a *kadoya* カドヤ. Namihira 1985, p. 124.

129 For example, Bouchy (1985), in *Bosei o tou: rekishiteki henshen* (Probing Motherhood: Historical Transformation), p. 228. Her chapter, titled “Power of Motherhood: Folklore and taboo of the *ubuya*” (母のちから : 産屋の民俗と禁忌), opens with: “Until the Meiji period, it was common to see a scene in which [the woman] would run inside the *ubuya* when her labor began, and would confine herself there with the newborn.” Arguing against Segawa’s position, Bouchy points to ancient Japan, which, she states, venerated motherhood, and advances that veneration (power) and taboo were two aspects of *ubuya* throughout Japanese history.

130 *Koji ruien* 1926, p. 319.

131 Rosaldo 1974, pp. 38–39.

132 Fabian Drixler introduced me to this appeal, signed by 137 villagers, to retain the current official. In it, they admit to their bad past custom of committing infanticide in *ubuya*. Takahashi 1941, vol. 1, pp. 428ff, Sawayama 2004, especially pp. 99–218, also observes infanticide in her research area, north-east Japan and her point is that these government measures restricted female autonomy.

133 Narikiyo 2003, p. 206.

## 要旨

### 「産屋」再考—その定説と出産の歴史の交錯—

ヒトミ・トノムラ

出産とほぼ同義語と見なされてきた「産屋」は、『古事記』と『日本書紀』に見られる豊玉姫を起源として、明治初期まで一貫して広く全国に分布され、産穢汚染防止の為に隔離される悲惨な産婦の経験を象徴する物質的証拠であり、揺るぎない日本の習慣として把握されてきた。最近の先学の成果を踏まえ、この論文は、上記の「産屋説」の問題点を指摘する傍ら、「産屋」の有無、在り方、意味、用途を古代から近世において探る。「産屋説」の起源とされる豊玉姫伝に産穢の概念は無く、穢れの概念が忌みの期間として整備化される9–10世紀、中世後期における神社などでの忌み期間の延長と穢れ発生の場の複雑化、そして近世において、神社朝廷に加えて幕府も武家初の服忌令を施し、産穢重視傾向に至っても、産婦を隔離する「産屋」が日本中に設立される訳ではない。少数の具体例では、惨めな産婦像もみられるが、その反面、産屋が産婦の自主的な性行為、間引きなどを可能にする私的な空間となる場合もあり、かえって幕府の反対を募っている。「産屋」には終始一貫する歴史的意味は乏しく、従来の固定した「産屋説」を修正する作業によって、産の歴史を女の体の観点から女の経験として解明する糸口が得られると思われる。

