

Field Survey on the Current State of Residents' Living Environment and Local Community at a Depopulated Settlement in Hilly-Mountainous Area

-The Case of Ofuki Area, Saijo City, Ehime Prefecture-

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*Key Words : Hilly-mountainous area, Depopulation, Living environment, Local community,
Aging people, Settlement maintenance, Field survey*

1. Background and purpose of the study

Today in Japan, lots of settlements in hilly-mountainous areas are going to be extinct because of the failure of recovering their depopulated states generated by the economic growth in 1950s. The government has pointed out the importance of maintaining these settlements for land planning or environment conservation, and has come out with “repopulation policy (recommend people to settle down in rural area)”. In the process many studies concerning those issues have been reported, most of which are either vitalization or closure of settlements.

It is said that hilly-mountainous areas have a disadvantage with residents' living condition because of their land features. What I found through the field surveys in Ofuki area located in one such area, however, were happy and peaceful lives of residents, who mentioned their lives had no problem and never want to abandon their place.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how people are maintaining their own living environment through the field surveys in Ofuki area so as to gain some ideas for settlement maintenance.

2. Findings through the field surveys (3 findings)

A) Busy and fulfilling lives of the residents

Most of all residents mentioned that there is no severe problem enough to abandon their places. They spend their lives almost independently with some supports of their blood relatives. And some concerns such as beast attacks or emergencies (fire, sudden illness, etc.) are extracted as future tasks of Ofuki area.

B) Supply-demand mismatch of empty houses in mountain

There are some empty houses whose owners live in city area. But people who are out of their blood relatives (such as outsiders) are difficult to use them.

C) Big supports of ex-residents and outsiders

Residents there are enjoying the local activities plenty held in main facilities. Ex-residents and outsiders work at such facilities establish “sleep in city, work in mountain” lifestyle.

3. Conclusion

It has been said that depopulated settlements need new residents (repopulation) for their maintenance. Through the surveys in Ofuki area, however, an establishment of “sleep in city, work in mountain” lifestyle comes to a new idea for settlement maintenance.