The 1909 Akita Tour and the Formation of a Positive Modern Identity[1)]

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I. Introduction

In 1909 three newspapers based in Japan's far northern Akita prefecture invited a group of nationally active journalists and writers to join a tour of Akita's major cities, economic centers, and places of national beauty. Their aim was to provide the visitors with an opportunity to see first hand, and then communicate to their readers, Akita's progress and accomplishments, especially in the spheres of economy and culture. In the words of Nitobe Inazō, one of the more famous invitees, the hosts aimed ultimately to "introduce the riches and ambience [of Akita] to the entire nation."[2)]

Most of the 18 or so journalists who accepted the invitation left Ueno Station on July 22, 1909, in a specially chartered train and arrived at the town of Yokote in southern Akita on the afternoon of the 23rd. They spent the next nine days following a carefully orchestrated tour to places of note across the length and breadth of the prefecture. High-ranking representatives from government and the business community accompanied them throughout. Wherever they traveled, they were greeted with elaborate and enthusiastic hospitality and they heard explanations about the characteristics and specific enterprises of the area. During and after the trip, at least 15 members of the group kept their promise to record and report on what they had seen. Their gratified hosts assembled and republished the reports in book form later that same year. The title of the book, *Shiraretaru Akita*, was chosen to reflect the optimistic conclusion that, as a result of the tour, Akita had changed from being an "unknown" (*shirarezaru*) to a "known" (*shiraretaru*) place, both to the invited journalists and to their readers nationwide.

Why did prominent people in Akita prefecture go to such trouble to prepare what was, even by the standards of city people, a luxury tour for outside opinion makers? And why did some of those guests feel able to include advice or criticism as part of their travel stories? The answer to these questions lies in the specific historical and economic circumstances of Akita and its northeastern neighbors at the turn of the twentieth century. As Japan embarked on its modern transformation in the second half of the nineteenth century, the six prefectures of far northern Honshu that came to be known as the Tōhoku region were relatively little known and little appreciated by residents of Tokyo and the areas to the south and west. One problem was distance: although land and sea routes developed in the preceding Edo era (1600–1867) extended to the very northernmost part of Honshu, Akita, separated by mountainous terrain and more than five hundred kilometers from Tokyo, was not easily accessed by outsiders. More complex were issues of comparative development. While all regions of Japan had experienced economic growth and rising living standards since the Edo period, the pace of change was significantly slower and the results less perceptible in the northeast than in the areas that lay to the south and west. In the opening years of the Meiji era (1868–1912), economic handicap was compounded by historical accident. In the brief, but bitterly fought, Boshin civil war that followed the Meiji Restoration of 1868, most of the daimyo domains in northeastern Japan joined an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to support the Tokugawa Bakufu against the proponents of imperial restoration. They embarked on military resistance and lost, entering the Meiji era as the defeated opponents of the new regime.

In the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth, as the Tokyo government worked to spur modern economic transformation across the nation, growth in the Tōhoku region remained sluggish. Although Akita in particular had made significant economic progress through its mining and timber industries, it was identified as part of a region "known" for its poverty, for its dependence on outside assistance, and for its inability to sustain a trajectory of development. It was little wonder that, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, discussions of development in the Tōhoku region—the so-called "Tōhoku problem"—persisted. Well-intentioned outsiders looked for ways of encouraging Tōhoku participation in the national project of economic growth; others doubted the wisdom of trying to impose a national project on a region that was climatically and culturally different from the regions of central and southwestern Japan. Across the Tōhoku region, political leaders and the educated elite struggled to shed the "backward" image by finding a model of development that would bring autonomy, pride, and a measure of prosperity.

The reality, however, was that much of the Tōhoku region lagged economically. Food shortages were chronic. In the opening years of the twentieth century, the Tōhoku region was hit with extremely poor harvests, especially in Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima and conditions were publicized throughout Japan and overseas.[3] That even foreigners would feel the need to offer assistance confirmed the status of the Tōhoku as a backward, impoverished region, not only in the eyes of government leaders and people in other areas of Japan but also in the eyes of Tōhoku people themselves.

This article locates the 1909 Akita tour within an ongoing national discourse on the Tōhoku region in the late Meiji era. It argues that the tour was an attempt to replace outsiders' "negative knowledge" of Akita as part of a problem region with "positive knowledge" of Akita as a place of progress, culture, and beauty. At the same time, the eagerness with which Akita leaders showed off their achievements while at the same time inviting outside critiques suggests that, having absorbed some of the negative perceptions of the Tohoku region, they, too, were struggling to shed them.

II. The Tōhoku Problem in the Meiji Era

The use of Tōhoku as a regional name emerged out of the centralizing, nation-building policies of the Meiji government soon after its formation in 1868.[4] While the word "Tōhoku" had referred in the Edo period to an imprecise area located generally to the northeast, from the early years of the Meiji era the central government used it more specifically to refer to the areas northeast of Tokyo that had resisted the imperial forces during the so-called Boshin (or 1868) War.[5] In 1871 it established a Tōhoku Garrison (*Tōhoku chindai*) at Sendai, one of four garrisons in a national defense network.[6] Through these and other usages, "Tōhoku" was transformed from a general direction into a specific region. With the consolidation of the prefectural system in the 1880s, the Tōhoku region came to refer to the six prefectures of Fukushima, Miyagi, Yamagata, Iwate, Akita, and Aomori. (Occasionally, Niigata was also included.)

From the outset, however, the word "Tōhoku" carried negative associations, combining the region's recent history of military opposition in the Boshin war with its longer historical experience of impoverishment, famine, and distance from the more economically advanced western provinces. One Meiji government official reported in 1871 that the "foolish people (*gumin*)" of the Iwate area did not even know about the imperial restoration.[7] Returning from a tour of the "various Tōhoku prefectures," another reported in 1874 that the people of the region were not hardworking, not well educated, and not likely to put effort into the national project of industrialization. By contrast, when Kido Takayoshi accompanied the Meiji Emperor on his first official trip north in 1876, he was astonished to discover that the towns and cities of Fukushima and Miyagi were flourishing and that children across the region were getting a satisfactory education. Kido's surprise reflected the preconception, already established in Tokyo, that the Tōhoku was a backward region that needed to be coaxed and led into modernity.

Indeed, considerable national resources were applied to Tōhoku regional development in the opening years of the Meiji era, focusing on the modernization of agriculture, fisheries, animal husbandry, and mining.[8] Accompanying Kido on the imperial tour of 1876, Ōkubo Toshimichi, head of the newly created Home Ministry, used the opportunity to put together his ideas on the development of the northeast. Ōkubo aimed to harness Tōhoku's considerable resources—land, water, timber, minerals—to national industrial development by rebuilding harbors and waterways, expanding the acreage of agricultural land, and modernizing mining.[9] At his urging, the government approved a national bond issue in 1878 to obtain funds for development. Of the 12.5 million yen raised, 31% was earmarked for harbors, roads, waterways, and mines in the Tōhoku region.[10]

Government funds were subsequently applied to large-scale agricultural projects as well to new banking and telegraph services. In 1881, the Nippon Railway Company (Nippon Tetsudō Kaisha) was founded with funds invested by former daimyo. A rail connection that linked Ueno with Aomori via Shiogama on the Pacific coast was finished in 1891.[11] The Ōu line that linked Fukushima with Aomori by a western route was completed in 1905. All of these projects reflected the concern of the Meiji government to apply Western-style "scientific" technology to the development of primary industries in the Tōhoku region. Because of its military uses and the urgent need to mint currency, mining had already been identified as a national priority. In order to introduce foreign technology, improve management, and increase production, the Meiji government took direct ownership of key mines in the 1870s, managing them from the Bureau of Mines in the Ministry of Industry (Kōbushō).[12] Of the 10 gold, copper, and iron mines nationalized, six were located in the Tōhoku region.

Although the notion of a Tōhoku region was thus advanced as part of the central government's development policies, it also gained currency within some northeastern prefectures, especially on the Pacific side, as an expression of regional identity.[13] The word "Tōhoku" was added to the titles of regional newspapers, beginning with the daily *Tōhoku shinbun* (founded in Sendai in 1874) and magazines, such as the bimonthly *Tōhoku kyōiku shinbun* (founded in Morioka in 1880). It was also included in the titles of political associations as way of promoting a positive regional identity. Moreover, the transformation of living conditions, though largely resulting from policies adopted outside the region, could nevertheless inspire in the residents of northeastern Japan a sense of pride that was attached to the notion of "Tōhoku." The word had become sufficiently natural that, from the mid-1880s, when Christian missionaries focused their attention on the prefectures of northern Kanto, they named their work the "Tohoku Mission." In a book published in 1918 under the intriguing title *Tohoku, the Scotland of Japan*, representatives of the Tohoku Mission explained to American readers that the name "Tohoku" was used "by the Japanese themselves" and that the "hardy and industrious people" of the region had their own particular characteristics, reminiscent of Scotland, that made them "considerably different from the Japanese of the Southwest."[14]

In the closing decades of the Meiji era, however, questions were raised about the direction of development in the northeast and the negative associations of the word "Tōhoku" resurfaced. After the introduction of Finance Minister Matsukata Masayoshi's regime of fiscal austerity in the 1880s, funds for large-scale public works declined. At the same time, the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, newly established in 1881, shifted policy interest away from Western-style "scientific" agriculture and toward rice production.[15] After Japan became a net importer of rice in 1897, pressure to secure food for a growing population of urban industrial workers intensified. Although efforts were made to improve rice growing in the Tōhoku region, productivity and real profits were lower than in western Japan, prompting discussions about the suitability of rice production as the economic mainstay of the region.[16] The famine that assailed Miyagi, Iwate, and Fukushima prefectures in 1905 served only to underscore the problem.

In 1906, Hangai Seiju (1858–1932), entrepreneur, politician, and agricultural reform activist from Fukushima prefecture, published a book called *Shōrai no Tōhoku* (Tōhoku of the Future).[17] Hangai argued that the development of the Tōhoku region was being hindered by the protective—but also restrictive—policies of the central government. He complained that the agriculture currently practiced in the northeastern prefectures represented nothing less than an invasion of crops imported from warmer regions of Japan and, as such, brought maximum disadvantage, including the constant threat of famine. Instead of trying to produce rice in the manner of the warmer regions, the Tōhoku region should develop its own economic policies, including direct trade with Manchuria, Korea, and Siberia. At the same time, transportation and communications should be expanded to increase solidarity within the region. In short, in order to be strong, the Tōhoku region needed to develop from within.

Hangai's book was widely read. Its success was helped by the inclusion of a preface written by Nitobe Inazō, native of Iwate, nationally recognized scholar of agricultural development, and newly appointed head of the prestigious Number One High School in Tokyo. In his *Nōgyō honron* (The Basic Principles of Agriculture), published in 1898, Nitobe had emphasized both the importance of agriculture as the basis of an industrial society and the hardships experienced by rural communities.[18) He pointed out that, across the industrializing world, people, food, and minerals from rural areas were being sucked into cities for industrial development. Moreover, within rural areas, the development of railways in particular was causing development along a thin railway line (*sen*) rather than across a broad area (*men*). Although Nitobe did not refer specifically to the Tōhoku region in his own book, in the preface to *Shōrai no Tōhoku* he wrote that, while studying agriculture in Germany, he had reached the conclusion that rice could not be grown in optimal conditions above a line that stretched west-east from the Noto Peninsula in the west to the Izu peninsula in the east.[19) Nitobe thus threw his scholarly weight behind Hangai's suggestion that rice agriculture was not necessarily suited to the Tōhoku region.

Although Hangai's appeal was for developing Tōhoku from within, his book ironically attracted interest among politicians and business leaders active outside the region, including Masuda Takashi, chairman of the Mitsui zaibatsu, and the Home Minister, Hara Takashi, a native of Iwate prefecture.[20) Masuda wrote a series of newspaper articles about the need to come up with the best and most suitable plan of development for the Tōhoku region. It was through the cooperation of Masuda, Hara, and the entrepreneur Shibusawa Eiichi that in 1913 a new organization, the Tōhoku Shinkōkai, (Association for the Advancement of the Tōhoku Region), was established in Tokyo for the purpose of identifying and promoting development opportunities.[21) However, the association immediately gained fame for its efforts in offering assistance to Tōhoku residents following a harvest failure in 1913, assuring that the "advancement" of the Tōhoku region" would actually mean "giving relief to" the Tōhoku region. Well intentioned though it was, as Asano Gengo, native of Iwate prefecture and trustee of the Association, wrote, Tōhoku Shinkōkai simply made people feel embarrassed.

III. Modern Economic Development in Akita

Although terms such as "Tōhoku region" and "Tōhoku problem" emphasized the shared characteristics of the six northeastern prefectures in the late Meiji era, they masked significant differences in geography, economy, politics, and culture. Akita, for example, was distinctive. Looking out on the Japan Sea to the west and the Ōu mountains to the east and with the Dewa Mountains running roughly north-south through the center, Akita prefecture, which corresponds roughly to the ancient province of Dewa, was shaped by the particular industries it developed in the Edo period, by the circumstances of its transition into the Meiji era, and by the content of its economic growth in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

During the Edo era Dewa had been divided into several daimyo domains, of which Akita domain, governed by the outside (*tozama*) Satake daimyo, was the largest. Under stable political conditions, Akita domain experienced economic growth based on rice agriculture, a strong regional sake industry, horse breeding, timber, and the mining of silver, gold and copper, raising its economic level relative to other domains on the Pacific side of the Tōhoku region.[22] Mining came into particular prominence from the eighteenth century, when the Bakufu focused its attention on copper deposits at Ani and Osarizawa.[23] By the 1730s, Akita domain was the largest producer of copper in Japan, and Ani was Akita's richest copper source. Although output later declined, Ani entered the modern era as Japan's most productive copper mine. The Innai silver mine, which, like Ani and Osarizawa, had been in operation since the 1590s, became Japan's most productive silver mine in the 1830s.

Mining had a stimulating effect on the regional economy. Lead needed for refining had to be bought and delivered to mines; iron for tools was brought from Morioka, and later Tazawa; forests were exploited—around Ani, excessively—to supply wood for mine construction and for fuel.[24] Silver and copper were shipped more than a thousand kilometers to Nagasaki: silver was carried out from Ani by packhorse; copper from Ani was shipped along the Yoneshiro River. In addition, mining communities, which in good times numbered from several hundred to a thousand people, were centers of consumption for daily life goods such as rice, oil, sake, and soy sauce. In this way, copper and silver mining diversified the economy of the areas that were to become Akita prefecture, distinguishing them from other districts of the northeast.

Akita's transition to the modern era also separated it from some of its northeastern neighbors. In the opening weeks of 1868, the forces supporting the establishment of a new imperial regime defeated defenders of the Tokugawa Bakufu in an important military victory at Toba-Fushimi near Kyoto.[25] Following up on this victory, the imperial supporters embarked on a campaign to punish their remaining opponents in the northeast, including the powerful Tokugawa-related Matsudaira daimyo of Aizu domain and the Sakai daimyo of Tsuruoka (Shōnai) domain. In response, the various daimyo of the northeast formed a coalition to support Aizu and Shōnai in resisting the new regime: this was the beginning of the so-called Boshin (or 1868) War. The Satake daimyo of Akita joined some 23 other northeastern daimyo in sending representatives to the first meeting of the coalition held at Shiraishi in Sendai (Date) domain in the spring of 1868. By summer, however, it had broken away from the coalition and took orders from the imperial side, subjecting itself to attacks from its enraged neighbors.

Although it has been said that the Meiji government treated Akita no more favorably than other northeastern prefectures despite its support during the Boshin War,[26] when Akita prefecture was established in 1871, it consisted of six districts drawn from Akita domain as well as two drawn from surrounding districts. Of the two additional districts, Yuri, formed from several small domains in the south, included rich agricultural land, and Kazuno, originally part of Morioka domain, included good forests and the newly developed Kosaka silver mine. The addition of these two districts—particularly Kazuno—significantly increased Akita's economic capacity in the modern era.

Development in Akita prefecture followed the national policy of economic and social transformation established by the Meiji government. As part of the effort to promote new industries, it built a silk textile factory in the town of Akita, offering work to some 150 daughters of former samurai; several privately owned textile companies also began business. To modernize agriculture on Western principles, the prefecture established experimental stations, founded associations for exchanging seeds and plants, and put considerable energy into educating farmers. Akita forests supplied cedar and other timber varieties as the basis of a modern lumber industry.

But Akita's biggest industrial development was in mining. In the opening years of the Meiji era, the central government sent representatives to scour the northeast for potentially productive mines.[27] Four of the six Tōhoku mines it chose to nationalize were located in Akita: Innai and Ani, which had been major producers of silver and copper, respectively, in the Edo era; Ōkuzo, a small gold mine; and Kosaka, which had been developed by Morioka domain as a silver mine from 1866 until it became part of Akita prefecture. All four were developed as model enterprises, with foreign mine experts in residence during parts of the 1870s and early 1880s. The Kosaka mine proved most successful.[28] It was rebuilt with new furnaces and up-to-date European refining technology under the guidance of Curt Netto, a 26-year-old university-trained engineer, who arrived at Kosaka in 1873 from Freiburg and remained until 1877. Netto redesigned the mines and rebuilt the furnaces in order to introduce the latest European technology, including the Ziervogel process for extracting silver from silver sulfate. The new methods increased significantly the percentage of silver and copper that could be extracted from the ore.

When the Meiji government sold off its businesses to private companies in the 1880s, Kosaka mine was bought in 1884 by the Fujita-gumi Company, established in Osaka just three years earlier. In 1885, Furukawa Ichibei (1832–1903), owner of Ashio mine, bought the Ani and Innai mines. Osarizawa mine, which had remained in private hands, became part of Mitsubishi in 1887. The sales brought to Akita prefecture some of Japan's most aggressive entrepreneurs, together with competent managers and engineers, who competed to increase mine output and profitability. In 1889, for the first time in about half a century, Innai regained the top position among Japan's silver mines and kept it until 1905. However, after Japan adopted the gold standard in 1897, the price of silver fell dramatically and the silver industry moved into a long-term decline.

Kosaka—later a highlight of the 1909 tour—survived the downturn in silver prices in a surprising way. In 1900, a team of Fujita-gumi engineers, including Takeda Kyōsaku (1867–1945), succeeded in using the pyritic ore surrounding the deeper layers of kuroko to access the copper it contained. That technological breakthrough, achieved for the first time in Japan, revolutionized mining operations at Kosaka and transformed it from a primarily silver to a primarily copper mine.[29] In 1907, Kosaka surpassed the dominant Ashio mine and other competitors to become Japan's most productive copper mine and its most valuable in total output. Figures reported by Akita representatives to the visiting journalists in 1909 showed that, by value, Kosaka produced 12.6% of Japan's copper, 37.8% of its silver, and 24.5% of its copper.[30] Asada Kōson of *Taiyō* magazine reported that, while Ashio led in worker numbers and in electrical power capacity, the yen value of Kosaka's total output was more than double that of Ashio.[31] The reason, he concluded, was the level of Kosaka's technology, "which has no peer in Japan."

The remarkable achievements of Akita's mining industry did not raise living standards uniformly across the prefecture. From the 1880s, there was chronic poverty in rural areas: an 1885 survey found that in one village, as many as 18% of households reported difficulty in getting three meals a day.[32] In the 1890s a general recession depressed wage labor across the board. Even in mining communities, such as Kosaka, where economic conditions were significantly better, workers complained of low wages and residents launched protests about the excessive concentrations of sulfur that polluted the atmosphere and destroyed vegetation. Some of the protesters complained that, rather than reflecting the desires of Akita people, the Kosaka mining industry was dominated by outside companies who invested outside capital and made outside profits. In this respect, Akita residents also experienced aspects of the "Tōhoku problem" to which Hangai Seiju and others had drawn attention.

But mining brought economic, social, and cultural transformations to Akita prefecture that distinguished it in crucial respects from its Tōhoku neighbors and offered reasons for pride.[33] For example, the infrastructure necessary for a modern mining industry brought electric power, water supply, transportation, and communications that brought modern conveniences to the surrounding communities. Moreover, mining communities were characterized by relatively high-paying jobs, a strong service economy, and a high level of cultural achievement.[34] In Kosaka, new housing, schools, library, hospitals, and entertainment facilities indicated an increasingly modern town.[35]

The economic importance of its mining industry also raised Akita's profile nationally and internationally. The record of Kosaka and Innai mines during the Meiji era confirmed Akita's place at the top of Japan's mining industry. Moreover, since mining was a global industry and copper ranked fourth in Japan's exports at the end of the Meiji era, the successes of Ani and Kosaka were also recognized internationally. Such achievements belied notions of backwardness or dependence that underlay the discussion of the "Tōhoku problem." It was no surprise that the modern achievements of Akita prefecture—and in particular those of Kosaka—featured prominently in the tour planned for Tokyo journalists in the summer of 1909.

IV. The 1909 Tour

The idea of inviting Tokyo-based journalists to Akita prefecture came from three of the prefecture's leading news publications: the *Akita sakigake shinpōsha* and *Akita jiji* newspapers and the *Tōhoku kōron* magazine. Of these, the *Akita sakigake shinpōsha*, founded in 1874 as one of Japan's earliest newspapers, had national recognition; the *Tōhoku kōron* had started just two years earlier as a forum for public discussion. The simple reason for the invitation was stated repeatedly in the prefaces contributed to *Shiraretaru Akita*, the published record of the trip. Although Akita had places of great natural beauty and economic importance, it was barely known to people outside the region. The news companies wanted, therefore, to show Tokyo journalists first hand what the prefecture had to offer so that they could inform their readers throughout Japan.

At least 18 journalists accepted the invitation. As promised, they recorded their observations as they traveled, and even mailed in articles to their own news offices. After their return, 15 people offered articles for inclusion in *Shiraretaru Akita*; two sent more than one. *Shiraretaru Akita* offers no hint about how the journalists were chosen or whether, in fact, it had been difficult to get them to accept. Asada Kōsan wrote that his invitation came quite by chance and not long before the trip. The journalists included in the volume represented 11 newspapers, including the *Tōkyō nichinichi shinbun*, *Kokumin shinbun*, *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* and *Hōchi shinbun*, and two magazines, *Taiyō* and *Jitsugyō no Nihon*. From their various, and sometimes contradictory, articles, we can glean something of what they experienced in Akita prefecture.

On the night of July 22, 1909, 16 Tokyo-based journalists, together with representatives of the sponsoring news organizations and Akita's government and business community, left Ueno by chartered train.[36] Journalists from Ibaraki and Yamagata joined later. Loaded with food and comforts, the train traveled north to Fukushima on the Jōban line, then followed the Ōu line through Yonezawa (where there was a stop for breakfast) and on through Yamagata and Shinjō into Akita prefecture. By daylight, the visitors were attracting considerable attention from local people. A brass band welcomed them at one station; at Yonezawa, representatives of the local press joined them on the platform for a photograph, and some rode on the train as far as Yamagata. When the train passed through Innai later in the morning, it was greeted with fireworks. Around one o'clock in the afternoon, it pulled into Yokote, and the guests alighted to receive their first welcome inside Akita prefecture from Governor Mori Masataka and the mayor of Akita City. Three hours later they were back on board, headed for Ōmagari, where they were welcomed again, this time with a splendid banquet on riverboats, and then finally allowed to sleep.

The events of that first day set the pace for the rest of the trip. The visitors traveled by train and boat when they were available; at other times they used jinrikisha or were led on mounted horseback. Figure 1 shows the itinerary. On July 24, they traveled to Akita City, where they visited a horse stud farm, an agricultural research station, an oil wellhead, and a water reservoir, as well as city offices and the library. From Akita, they followed the coast north: by train to Tsuchisaki on the 25th; by train, carriage and ship to Funagawa on the 26th; and as far as Noshiro by the night of the 27th. From Noshiro, the route turned to the far eastern side of the prefecture. The visitors reached the hot spring town of Ōyu by the night of the 28th. On the 29th, they set off for Lake Towada, switching to horseback for the final 24 kilometers. There they rested for two nights, before setting off, again by horseback, to Kosaka. A farewell banquet, equally splendid as their welcome dinner in Ōmagari, was held at the company club of Fujita-gumi Company on the night of July 31. From Kosaka the group headed back through Ōdate and Yokote; they arrived back in Tokyo on the morning of August 4.

The strenuous and carefully planned schedule highlighted two themes that the Akita hosts emphasized often in their speeches and information sessions: their pre-

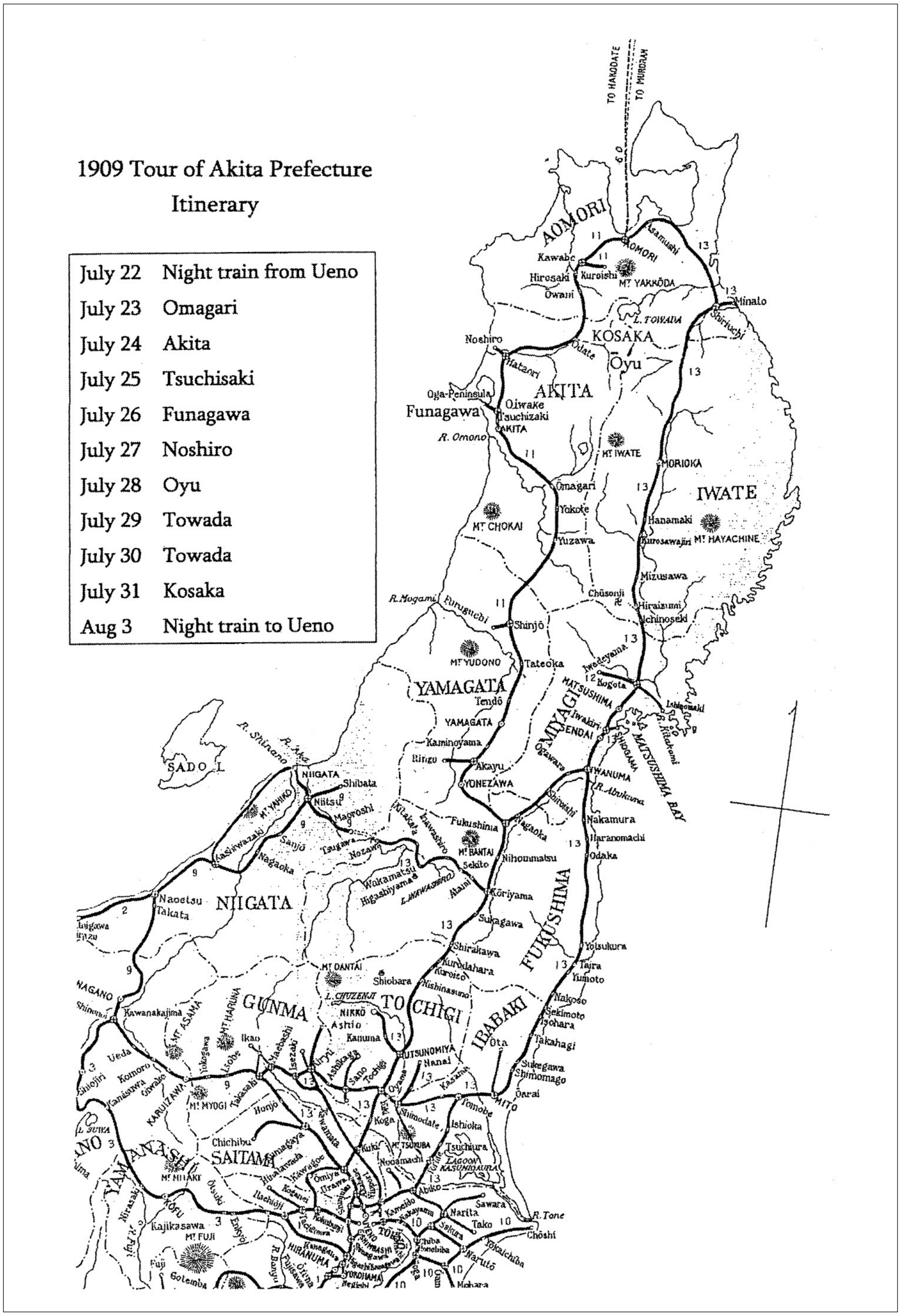

Figure 1: The 1909 Akita Tour
Source: *Japan Imperial Government Railways—Travellers' Handy Guide*, Traffic Department, Imperial Government Railways, Tokyo, 1914

fecture's great natural riches and its modern industrial progress. Usually, the two were woven together. For instance, as the visitors traveled along the coastal route north from Akita, they were shown not only the magnificent views of mountains and ocean but also the reconstructed shipping port of Funagawa, Japan's only asphalt source at nearby Ōkubo, the Akita Timber Company, and newly built electric power stations.[37] As they moved inland from Noshiro, they observed not only the natural splendor of the famed Akita cedar forests but also the work of the Yoneshiro Timber Company. At Lake Towada—so important to the tour that it required elaborate preparations for horseback travel—they saw not only breathtaking beauty but also productive fisheries. And at Kosaka, they saw Akita's copper resources being transformed into valuable export income through the application of Japan's most advanced mining technology.

Everywhere the outsiders were treated to detailed explanations of Akita's progress, particularly in economic development. Much of what they were told appears in the articles that appeared in *Shiraretaru Akita*. The Akita representatives explained that the prefecture's economy was based firmly on primary industries, especially agriculture, animal husbandry, mining, forestry, and fishing. They emphasized the tremendous efforts being made to convert natural riches into modern, scientific, and productive industries. Moreover, although they did not fail to mention problems, such as the pressing need for financial and human capital, the Akita hosts invariably communicated a sense of pride in their achievements and optimism about the future. They also created opportunities for the guests to meet their most successful citizens: men like Wainai Sadayuki, who left an impressive career as engineer at Kosaka mine to establish a flourishing trout fishery at Lake Towada.[38] Moreover, the messages conveyed about Akita were not narrowly economic. Through the elaborate hospitality they offered at every meal in every stay, the Akita representatives invited their guests indirectly to appreciate what Akita had to offer as a destination rich in both tradition and in modernity. Most of the dinners reflected Akita traditions with local fish and meat, good rice and sake, and service by beautiful Akita women. Occasionally, as in the final dinner at Kosaka, they showed their cultural diversity and modernity by serving a Western-style dinner and French champagne.

It is impossible to read *Shiraretaru Akita* without gaining some sense of the mutual anticipation, excitement, and satisfaction that the summer tour had generated. Overall, it can be concluded that the journalists from Tokyo were impressed with what they saw and heard. All expressed gratitude for the hospitality and kindness they received not only from their immediate hosts but also from the ordinary Akita people they met.[39] Many wrote of their satisfaction in having the opportunity to see first-hand the riches and achievements of a far and unfamiliar prefecture. Most marveled at the beauty of the Japan Sea coast, the northern forests, and the mythic Lake Towada. Several took special note of the Kan'ondō, a public relief organization that had provided food to the destitute since its origins in the Edo period.[40] Many expressed the high valuation they placed on Akita's progress. Asada Kōson of *Taiyō* concluded that Akita had the greatest riches among all the prefectures of the Tōhoku region, and perhaps in all of northern Japan.[41] After listening to a discussion conducted between the governor of Akita prefecture and the mayor of Akita

City, a young Nakano Seigō, recently employed at *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun*, expressed his conviction that Akita could be compared with Scotland.[42] Just as Scotland's recent development had surpassed that of England in the south, so it could be expected that Akita's prosperity would soon surpass that of the southwestern prefectures.

Not all of the observations included such ringing endorsements. Many of the city journalists pointed to problems facing Akita and offered sympathetic advice. Arguing that the problem was undeveloped resources, Nagata Shinnojō of the magazine *Jitsugyō no Nihon* recommended the formation of a business organization—he used a variant of the English word "syndicate"—to assemble the capital and manpower necessary to achieve modern development.[43] On the other hand, after visiting Kosaka, focus of enormous capital investment by the Osaka-based Fujita-gumi Company, the journalists expressed a range of opinions, not only about mining operations but also about their impact on the living environment of the town. Asada Kōsan was consistently positive, concluding that Kosaka incorporated the best technology that world's mining civilization could offer.[44] However, Abe Michi'ie of *Kokumin shinbun*, arriving in Kosaka by horse from Lake Towada, was shocked by the sudden jarring view of a modern mining town and by the discordant sounds of dynamite and workingmen.[45]

Okano Hibari of *Tōkyō asahi shinbun* was the most openly critical. Mocking the proud claims of his hosts that Kosaka's mine output, mining equipment, and forests were all "the best in the Far East," he criticized Akita people for letting one valuable resource destroy another: "While taking pride in having the most beautiful forests in the Far East, Akita people consider it unavoidable that the [Kosaka] mine spews out the most poisonous gases in the Far East, causing those beautiful forests to wither and damaging the fertile paddy."[46] Noting that Fujita-gumi had paid little of the compensation demanded by Kosaka residents for the damage to crops and health, Okano wrote that even Akita people themselves seemed unconcerned about the environmental problem: "Of course, [modern] civilization is destruction" said one of his hosts. His final comments on Akita's prospects were also measured. Noting the local refrain of "Akita is a good place," he concluded nevertheless: "The future of Akita prefecture is contained in just two characters: "*do-ryoku* (effort)."[47]

V. Conclusion

Why did some of the journalists invited to observe and report on conditions in Akita prefecture feel able to offer advice or criticism as part of their travel stories? And why, after all, had the Akita representatives taken such trouble, time, and expense to show their prefecture to the outsiders who might be expected to take a critical stance? The answer to both questions lies in the perceptions and public discourse about the Tōhoku region in the late Meiji era that framed both the invitation from Akita residents and the responses of their guests.

Although the tour focused specifically on the prefecture of Akita, it is clear from their frequent uses of words such as "Tōhoku" and "*Tōhoku chihō* (Tōhoku region)" that the journalists saw it as a trip to the Tōhoku region. Nakano Seigō entitled his essay "Tōhoku yūranki (Record of a Trip around the Tōhoku)."[48] Even more tellingly, Nagata Shinnojō's proposal for a syndicate to develop the region appeared under the title, "Tōhoku kigyōdan no soshiki wa konnichi no kyūmu (The Organization of Business Groups in Tōhoku is the Pressing Business of Today)."[49] Referring to the debate—fuelled by books such as Hangai Seiju's *Shōrai no Tōhoku* published three years earlier—on establishing an association to research Tōhoku development, Nagata argued that the region needed not simply an association to gather information but an organization that would actually carry out the important work of development. Drawing on his experiences in Akita prefecture, Nagata related the story of a local businessman whose silk growing business was stifled by high interest rates. He concluded that conditions in Akita were typical of the Tōhoku region and that help had to come from outside—in the form of a business "syndicate."

But it was not only the visitors who looked at Akita through the lens of the Tōhoku region. The prefaces to *Shiraretaru Akita* reveal that the hosts themselves were acutely aware that they were part of the national Tōhoku debate and felt obliged to acknowledge critical comments from outside. Takizawa Takeshi, who compiled the volume, thanked the Tokyo journalists not only for introducing the natural and human beauty of Akita to their audiences but also for the "useful advice" they offered on industrial development and the "appropriate stimulus" they provided in relation to solving the "Tōhoku problem."[50] Ando Wafu, president of *Akita Sakigake Shinpōsha*, was even more direct. In his "Preliminary Words, Bitter Words, Prophetic Words," Ando thanked the visitors for writing warm and detailed explanations and expressed satisfaction that Akita prefecture had become known to a national readership.[51] On the other hand, he warned his Akita countrymen that their task was not done. Only by working hard to develop the riches of Akita and realizing the "so-called advancement of the Tōhoku" could they secure their future in the struggle for existence that lay ahead.

And finally, if those "bitter words" were not enough, the editors included as the first essay of the volume an article by Nitobe Inazō entitled "Tōhoku mondai ni taisuru yoron no kanki (The Public Outcry Regarding the Tōhoku Problem)."[52] A native of Morioka prefecture who held a doctorate in agriculture from Halle University and was nationally recognized as scholar, administrator, and educator, Nitobe could speak authentically to a regional as well as a national audience. He expressed satisfaction that the Tōhoku region was attracting attention among broad sections of public opinion and within the national government. Referring to the debate on the "Tōhoku problem," he stressed the need for an advancement strategy that, by taking proper account of the particular regional characteristics, would benefit not only the nation but also individual citizens in the Tōhoku itself.

The words of the volume editors and Nitobe Inazō confirm that the 1909 tour was much more than a pleasant plan to secure greater national recognition for a far and "unknown" prefecture. In the late Meiji era, Akita prefecture was already firmly identified as part of the Tōhoku region, "known" for its poverty, for its dependence on outside assistance, and for its inability to develop a sustained trajectory of development. In planning the tour, the Akita sponsors were attempting to replace the negative knowledge of Akita as part of a "problem" region by a positive knowledge that Akita prefecture possessed abundant resources and great natural beauty, which it was exploiting to achieve industrial growth. The tour was carefully structured to showcase these twin themes of natural riches and impressive industrial progress.

On the other hand, the eagerness with which government and businesses leaders in Akita cooperated to show off their achievements to the outsiders suggests that Akita people had absorbed some of the negative impressions that had been generated about the Tōhoku region. By using terms such as "Tōhoku problem" and the "advancement of the Tōhoku," they were acknowledging that the characterizations contained some truth. In particular, by focusing directly on the issue of development in their prefaces to *Shiraretaru Akita*, the Akita hosts indicated that, like the visiting journalists and others involved in the public discussion of the "Tōhoku problem," they recognized that development at the prefectural and regional level was indeed the major challenge facing them.

In the twenty-first century, as economic, cultural, and political dominance appears to have shifted irreversibly to urban areas across the globe, the role of regions and rural communities is under scrutiny. Regional communities are less distinctive, less economically viable, and less influential in national affairs than they were one hundred, or fifty years ago, prompting new concerns about their future and new efforts to adjust policies, life experiences, and cultural and historical understandings to a rapidly changing reality. The inhabitants of regional towns and villages—on average poorer, less educated, and older than their urban counterparts—are experiencing doubts about their importance to the wider nation, and even their capacity for survival. Fuelling their concerns, some observers see the shift of regions to the "margins of national life"[53] as evidence of the loss of core values founded on direct social and personal relationships that have sustained human civilization throughout its history.

Underlying these fears for the decline of the regions are the contrasting memories of their proud prominence, even in living memory. The rapid industrial growth of the early modern and modern eras was supported by growth in rural productivity: growth in population, in food production, in agriculture-based industries, and in the exploitation of mineral and water resources. Even as the industrial sector dominated economically, rural areas remained important centers of education, religion, and culture. In Japan, the role of the regions was enhanced from the Meiji era by the emergence of prefectures, which not only had the responsibility for conducting major governing functions but also could be easily be measured for progress or problems against their peers.

However, limiting one's view to relatively recent history can obscure the fact that regional communities, in Japan and elsewhere, are not unchanging physical units. As in Akita, they have varied over time, taking shape, breaking apart, and re-forming in response to changing political and cultural realities. They have experienced periods of growth and redefinition as well as decline. More than a century later, in an era of renewed concern for the "decline of the regions," it is helpful to recall that regional vitality in the modern era was neither natural nor easy but the product of much debate and effort.

Notes

1) This is a revised version of an article that appeared under the title "The 1909 Akita Tour and the

Formation of a Positive Modern Identity" in *The Journal of the Graduate School of Toyo Eiwa University* (7, 2007), 23–42. The revised contents formed the basis of a presentation given at the Asian Studies Conference Japan held at Rikkyo University on June 30–July 1, 2012.

2) Nitobe Inazō, "Tōhoku mondai ni taisuru yoron no kanki," in Takizawa Takeshi (ed.), *Shiraretaru Akita* (Mumyōsha Shuppan, 1985), 2.
3) Nanba Nobuo, "Kindai Nihonshi ni okeru 'Tōhoku' no seiritsu," *Rekishi no naka no Tōhoku: Nihon no Tōhoku, Ajia no Tōhoku* (Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1998), 230–32. For a fuller treatment, see the article by M. William Steele in this issue.
4) For the uses of the word "Tōhoku" in the modern era, see Kawanishi Hidemichi, "Kindai Nihon keiseiki ni okeru 'Tōhokuron' no kisoteki kenkyū," Kenkyū seika hōkokusho, Kagaku kenkyūhi joseikin, 1998–2000.
5) Iwamoto Yoshiteru, *Tōhoku kaihatsu 120 nen* (Tōsui Shobō, 1994), 3–11.
6) Nanba, 215–16.
7) Nanba, 220–21.
8) Chihō Shi Kenkyū Kyōgikai (ed.), *Nihon sangyō taikei 3* (Tokyo Daigaku Shuppankai, 1960), 310–18.
9) Iwamoto Yoshiteru, *Tōhoku kaihatsu 120 nen*, 18–22; Iwamoto Yoshiteru, "Tōhoku kaihatsu o kangaeru: uchi kara no kaihatsu, soto kara no kaihatsu," in *Rekishi no naka no Tōhoku: Nihon no Tōhoku, Ajia no Tōhoku*, 241–44.
10) Iwamoto, *Tōhoku kaihatsu 120 nen*, 22. This calculation includes Niigata prefecture as a seventh Tohoku prefecture. See also Umemura Mataji and Yamamoto Yūzō, "Gaisetsu 1860-85 nen" in *Kaikoku to ishin, Nihon keizaishi 3* (Iwanami Shoten, 1989), 30–32.
11) Iwamoto, "Tōhoku kaihatsu o kangaeru," 244–46.
12) Suzuki Jun, "Kōbushō no jūgonen," in *Kōbushō to sono jidai* (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2000), 3–22. On government mine purchases see: Furushima Toshio, *Sangyōshi III* in *Taikei Nihonshi sōsho* (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1966), vol. 12, 202–09; Takamura Naosuke, "Kan'ei kōzan to kahei genryō," in *Kōbushō to sono jidai*, 177–86; Takamura Naosuke, "Kōzan kan'ei seisaku to oyatoi gaikokujin: Gottofurei-ra no yakuwari" in Takamura, ed., *Meiji zenki no Nihon keizai: Shihonshugi e no michi* (Nihon Keizai Hyoronsha, 2004), 105–19.
13) Nanba, 220–23.
14) Christopher Noss, *Tohoku, the Scotland of Japan* (Board of Foreign Missions Reformed Church in the United States, 1918), 15.
15) Iwamoto, 51–53.
16) Nanba, 225–30.
17) Republished by Monoguramusha (1977). See also Iwamoto, "Tōhoku kaihatsu o kangaeru," 251–52.
18) Nitobe Inazō, *Nōgyō honron*, Meiji Taisho Nōsei Keizai Meichoshū (Nōsan Gyoson Bunka Kyokai, 1976), 263–79; Iwamoto, *Tōhoku kaihatsu 120 nen*, 43–44.
19) *Shōrai no Tohoku*, 1; Iwamoto, *Tōhoku kaihatsu 120 nen*, 60.
20) Iwamoto, "Tōhoku kaihatsu o kangaeru," 251–55.
21) Iwamoto, *Tōhoku kaihatsu 120 nen*, 61–63.
22) Shioya Junji, Togashi Yasutoki, Kumata Ryosuke, Watanabe Hideo, and Furuuchi Natsuo, *Akita ken no rekishi* (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 2001), 234–47.
23) Details of the Ani mine can be found in Ani-chō Shi Hensan Iinkai (ed.), *Ani-chō shi* (Ani-chō, 1992), 663–777.
24) Shioya, 241.
25) Iwamoto, *Tōhoku kaihatsu 120 nen*, 3–14.
26) Shioya, 281.
27) Saitō Sanenori, *Kōzan to kōzanshūraku: Akita-ken no kōzan to shūraku no eiko seisui* (Taimeido, 1980), 102–06.
28) Kosaka-chō Shi Hensan Iinkai, ed., *Kosaka-chō shi* (Kosaka-chō, 1975), 421–22; Wada, 95–99. See also Patricia Sippel, "Regions in History: Kosaka Mining Town in Modern Japan," *Gendaishi kenkyu* (1, 2005), 45–71.

29) *Mining in Japan Past and Present*, 172–78.
30) Asada Kōson, "Nihon ichi no Akita," in *Shiraretaru Akita*, 43–44.
31) Asada, 43–44; *Kosaka-chō shi*, 355–56.
32) Shioya, 294–97.
33) For a detailed discussion see Sippel, "Regions in History," 15–22.
34) Saitō, 20–39, 44–51.
35) *Kosaka-chō shi*, 449–62.
36) Abe Michi'ie, "Akita junyūki," in *Shiraretaru Akita*, 203–14; Wainai Kitoku, "Akita ken junshi ki," in *Shiraretaru Akita*, 248–50.
37) Nakano Seigo, "Tōhoku yūranki," in *Shiraretaru Akita*, 328–30.
38) Nagata Gakuen (Shinnojō), "Kyūhyakumanbi no yōson wo okonau Wainai Sadayuki shi," in *Shiraretaru Akita*, 65–77.
39) For example, Nakano, 346.
40) For example, Nakasato Kaisan, "Akita no Kan'ondō," in *Shiraretaru Akita*, 461–63.
41) *Shiraretaru Akita*, 35.
42) *Shiraretaru Akita*, 316.
43) Nagata Gakuen (Shinnojō), "Tōhoku kigyōdan no soshiki wa konnichi no kyūmu," in *Shiraretaru Akita*, 13.
44) *Shiraretaru Akita*, 38–45.
45) *Shiraretaru Akita*, 245.
46) "On Akita ki," in *Shiraretaru Akita*, 173–76.
47) *Shiraretaru Akita*, 202.
48) *Shiraretaru Akita*, 316–46.
49) *Shiraretaru Akita*, 7–13.
50) Preface, *Shiraretaru Akita*.
51) Preface, *Shiraretaru Akita*.
52) *Shiraretaru Akita*, 1–6.
53) The phrase is used by Richard O. Davies in *Main Street Blues: The Decline of Small-Town America* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1967).