CHAPTER 4

Constructing Tōhoku: 1890s–1900s

1 Youth Taking a Stand

1.1 Eisai Shinshi and Gakuyū Tsūshin

In 1887, three major protest movements, pressing for the revision of unequal treaties, for the reduction of land taxes, and for freedom of speech, galvanized anti-government forces all over the country. In September of that same year, the magazine *Eisai Shinshi* (New Magazine of Young Talent), renowned for its contributions from young people, published “To the people of Tōhoku’s six prefectures,” a piece written by a young man from Akita Prefecture named Nishimura Yoshitomo (September 24, No. 534). Nishimura argued that the reason for Tōhoku’s “lack of a progressive spirit” lay in local separatism: the people of the region stood firm in their belief that “Tōhoku’s geographical position, surrounded by precipitous mountains” made it an “ideal world,” never dreaming that this topography was actually “a massive obstacle standing in the way of Tōhoku’s development.” However, Nishimura points out that there is logic in this line of thought: “Since there is plenty of fertile land for rice cultivation . . . and there is enough rice in the storehouses to last several years, people perceive no need to communicate and trade with other regions.” So in his view it was the region’s economic strength that gave rise to local separatism. Tōhoku was “asleep in a golden storehouse with a full belly.”

In October of the same year, *Eisai Shinshi* published a letter written by a man named Fukuda Sōun, also from Akita Prefecture. In “To the people of Tōhoku’s seven regions,” Fukuda warned the readers against being content with their rich natural resources and history replete with great men. He asserted that it was their duty “to make people realize that there were people from this isolated mountain region who sacrificed their lives when they went to foreign countries in the west and crossed the southern ocean.”

The resolve of Tōhoku’s youth can also be seen in the activities of Tōō Gijuku High School in Hirosaki, Aomori. This mission school was established in November 1872, and it was formerly known as Keikokan, the domain school.

---

2 Ibid.
of the old Hirosaki domain. In 1878, a middle school was established, and special literature and law courses followed in 1882. The school became the center of secondary school education in the Tsugaru region. During the period of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement, it supported the Association of the Community (Kyōdōkai), a political organization also known as the Tōō Gijuku Party. The students used self-published magazines and debates as a forum to discuss political economics, ways to promote Tōhoku, and how to develop the region.3

Their ideas about Tōhoku are laid forth in Gakuyū Tsūshin (Classmates' Correspondence, founded by the Alumni Association in 1888).4 The reason that Aomori Prefecture “is the least advanced prefecture in Japan” is because it “lacks the strength to unify itself” (“The purpose of establishing this association,” April 25, 1888, No. 1). To them, what was needed most was solidarity. After the Meiji Restoration, the “dogmatic, stubborn and unenlightened people of Tōō (Aomori)” had actually started to become “good citizens taking an interest in national affairs.” One day they would displace the people of the Southwest, and the time would come when “one mountain west of Kamogawa (in Chiba Prefecture) is worth only 50 mon,” making the saying “North of Shirakawa, one mountain is worth only one hundred mon,” a thing of the past (“That saying only serves to further encourage Tōō,” May 25, 1888, No. 2).

Underlying these rather forceful ideas about developing Tōhoku was the conviction that Tōhoku would eventually break free of its backward regionalism. This confidence was supported on the international front by the development of a new shipping route linking Vancouver and Hong Kong, and domestically by the railroad line under construction between Ueno and Aomori. These revolutions in transportation would make Aomori a port of call in Japan for ships en route between Vancouver and Hong Kong (“A glimpse of commercial society and a collection of Fuji paintings,” No. 4–No. 6, 1888), and once the railroad between Ueno and Aomori was complete, the eyes of the world would turn to Aomori, “the northernmost point of Tōhoku.” The prejudice toward Aomori as “the dwelling place of the Ezo people” and “a place buried under snow all year round” would be eradicated (“Letter from Tokyo,” September 20, 1891, No. 35).

In March 1891, some graduates of Tōō Gijuku High School who went to stay in Tokyo established the Aomori Young Men’s Association (Aomori seinenkai),

---

4 Held by the Hirosaki Municipal Library.