



FINDING OUR AKITA

Sarah Brand, Shogo Iwata, Kana Sasaki



INNAI

City Information

-Population of 1,674 people.

-Innai Station is one of the oldest JR station, first created in 1904.



Photo from Google Map



https://www.google.co.jp/search?q=innai+%E7%95%B0%E4%BA%BA%E9%A4%A8&hl=ja&biw=1280&bih=929&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=oahUKEwjJwZfy1fLNAhXBmZQKHfyxBboQ_AUIBygC#imgsrc=agy4YSUoMO_GtM%3A

Bird's quotation

"The yadoya at Innai was a remarkably cheerful one, but my room was entirely fusuma and shoji, and people were peeking in the whole time."(p.283)

I chose this quote from Bird in Innai because it shows that foreigners at that time in Innai, (and possibly still now) were seldom seen.

Field Data

One uniqueness of Innai is the amount and the duration of the snow season. Famous for heavy snow, the season lasts from November to mid-April. To live through the severe environment, people in Innai must maintain good relations with others in the community. Although the ties between people are strong, the mass media has recently come in and made the relations weaker compared to the past.

Like in many other regions of Akita, dialects of Akita are being lost. Teachers in the Innai area are not allowed to speak dialect when teaching because it differs from the language used in other areas of Japan. Because of this, the young generation do not speak the Akita dialect nowadays.

Funerals and weddings have also been impacted from the recent mass media. In Innai, there used to be their own way of doing these two events. For example, weddings used to be done using two to three days but now they have been changed because of mass media and convenience.

The food culture in Innai is not as different from other parts of Akita. There is no original food from Innai that are only available in Innai. However, one uniqueness is that all foods in the area use salt. The foods are salty because, like the people, the food also needs to survive the harsh winter.



(Photo by Sara Brand)

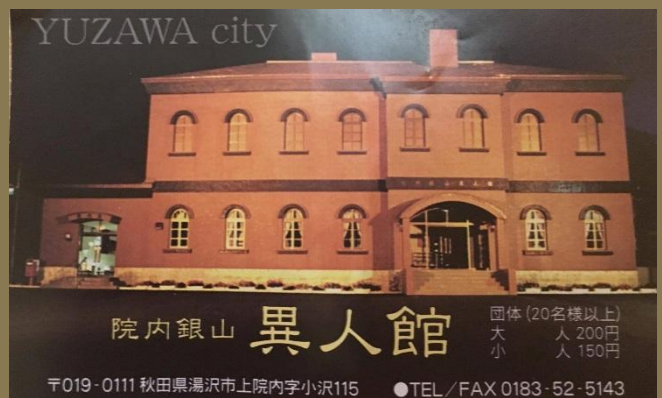


Photo by Shogo Iwata

YOKOTE

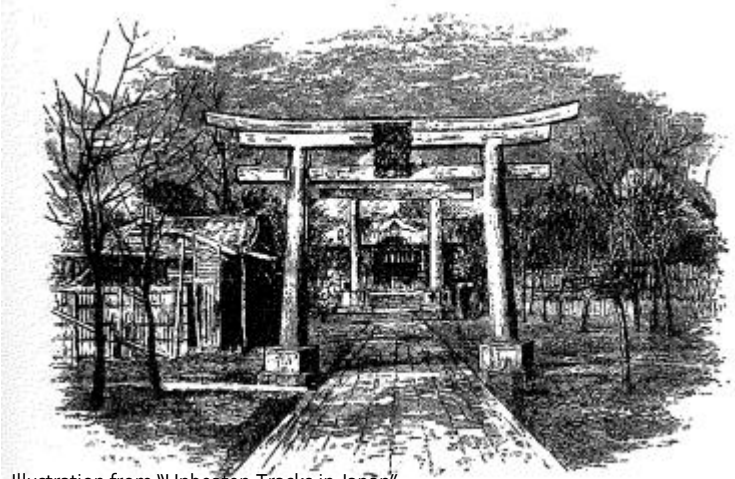


Illustration from "Unbeaten Tracks in Japan"

"As I stood at the entrance several people came up and pulled a much-frayed bell-rope which was hanging in the doorway, and clattered a most inharmonious bell. Then they clapped their hands and muttered a few words, made three genuflections, clapped their hands again, and departed, the whole performance taking about 1 ½ minute" (290).

During her stay in Yokote, Isabella Bird was often surrounded by curious Japanese citizens. In an attempt to escape from the throngs of Japanese onlookers, Bird found escape at a nearby Shinto Shrine, where she observed several people coming to pray.

It is interesting then to see that the shrine today serves as both a place of escape as well as a place to socialize. Similar to Bird's observations about the local shrine she illustrated above, the shrine to the right provides a sacred place to escape from everyday life. However, nowadays this shrine serves as not only a spiritual and religious location, as Bird observed, but also as place for locals to gather and socialize. It is a place to gather and spend time with each other instead of simply being a place of strict religious practice.



Photo by Sarah Brand



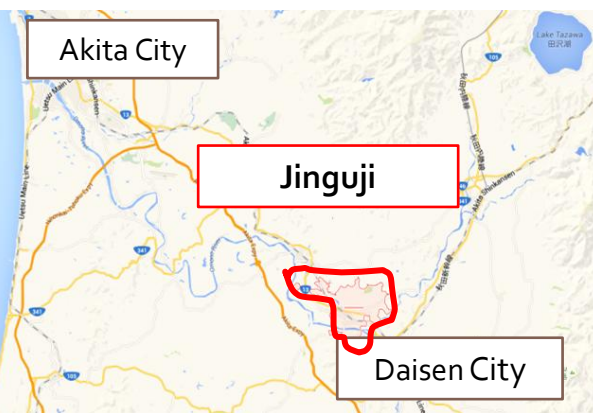
Photo by Sarah Brand

Similar to the Yokote Bird visited during her travels, the Yokote today is still mainly a farming community. Many of the families living in Yokote today grow their own food. They rarely have to go to the market to buy produce, as they grow most of their own (which makes the fact that the temple can also provide a place to socially interact even more significant). Because of this, the community is very close, as they don't have that much interaction with people outside of their own farming community.



Photo by Sarah Brand

JINGUJI



Jinguji, Daisen-city

Population: 4,303 people

Photo; <http://blog.goo.ne.jp/junko2/e/cf98f59177a5c5cb1b53906984a2faa5>



Photo; <https://i.ytimg.com/vi/5yOtBKH82cg/maxresdefault.jpg>

"At five on Sunday morning saw three faces pressed against the outer lattice, and before evening, the *shoji* were riddled with finger-holes, at each of which a dark eye appeared."(p.297)

From this description we can see that local Akita people were very curious with a foreign woman Bird who stayed at a *ryokan*.



Photo; <http://kaizenji.org/sonota/syoujimusi.html>

Jinguji has an impressive history of Shinto and Buddhism. The name of Jinguji (神宮寺) literally means the mixture of Shinto shire and Buddhism temple. Before the Meiji era, generally people seemed to treat religions like Shinto was regarded as the base of life and Buddhism was a role that they relied on mentally. The worship of Shinto and Buddhism had been mixed among most Japanese people as well as Akita people. However, after 1868, the Meiji government officially announced the separation into Shinto and Buddhism. For instance, after the announcement, Gods are supposed to be in Shrine and Buddha is in temple. Therefore, we can still see the remains of some combination.

A shrine itself have some crucial roles for the local community. The Hachiman Shrine (八幡神社) is also important for local people. The shrine is considered as one of the gathering places of town member and the community member can have opportunity to meet each other and hold a annual events with locals. Their seasonal event is that they pray for the rich harvests when planting seeds, and they expressed their gratefulness to the gods after harvesting.

Not only religious matter, there was a big shipping port located at Omono river in Jinguji. At that time, the port was utilized for transporting a large number of stuffs such as rice, tree, clothes, sake and more. We can realize that Jinguji used to be the base of trade and transportation before. Isabella Bird also used the port to visit Kubota.

LOCAL RELATIONS

Due to its isolated location within Japan, Akita can be characterized as a very isolated community. While some may see this as a disadvantage or a negative aspect of Akita, there are many advantages and benefits one can observe as well.



EDUCATION

"Akita Prefecture has a very high education level for elementary, middle, and high school students. Innai also has the same educational level because of the small community"
-高橋さん

Due to the tight-knit community in Akita (or Innai as the quote illustrates above), parents are more available for their children and are able to aid in their education at the home (in contrast to the many parents who have to send their children to day-care in busy cities. This might have influenced the fact that Akita has one of the highest level of education among the younger population.

EXCITEMENT

"people crowded in hundreds to the gate, and those behind being unable to see me, got ladders and climbed on the adjacent roofs, where they remained til one of the roofs gave way with a loud crash, and precipitated about fifty men, women, and children, in the room below, which fortunately was vacant"
(286).

Even though Isabella Bird was often bothered by the countless people watching her throughout her travels, this illustrates Akita's interest and curiosity towards foreigners that is often not experienced or felt in more "popular" places such as Tokyo or Kyoto.