

Title

Unbounded Tōhoku: A Reappraisal of Japanese Regionalism through Modern Mobility

Paper Abstract

The Meiji Revolution (1866-1869) marked the beginning of an era in which political, social, and cartographic transformation prompted an unprecedented movement of peoples and ideas both within and without the conventional borders of Japan. In spite of stereotypes of tradition and attachment to land, mobility emerged as a key aspect of the modernization efforts in Japan, defining its ascent first as a rising nation-state and second as a global empire. This talk will investigate how mobility and migration reconfigured one particular region of Japan, a region typically inscribed as a “backwater” and a bastion of traditional immobility: the territory of northeastern Honshū Island known as the Tōhoku region. Specifically, my research will probe a small section of what I term “inside-out ties” that linked individuals and townships in Tōhoku to locations in the wider nation and across the wider Pacific world to places such as Canada and the southern Philippines. These bonds of family, village, and region transcended the territorial bounds of the cartographic space of “Tōhoku” as mapped by the Meiji government, expanding the concept of the relationship between one’s native place and position within the nation to a portable yet regionally-defined identity that defied geographic containment. I will argue that regionalism, be it ties to locality, prefecture, or territory, became a self-ascribed category during the prewar period and emerges most clearly when viewed from the inside-out by those who ventured beyond Tōhoku’s boundaries. Ultimately, my talk reinterprets the story of domestic Japanese regionalism from an internal story which is tied solely to Japan’s domestic history into a story of global change and transformation.

Short Biography

Anne Giblin received her Ph.D in Japanese History at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in May, 2015. Her research contributes a multi-sited narrative of local history by examining the interrelationship of trans-Pacific migration through the lens of not only the immigrant, but also the emigrant experience. Dr. Giblin’s dissertation, titled “From the Inside Out: Social Networks of Emigration from Tōhoku, Japan, 1872-1937,” explored the implications of out-migration on the internal development of the northeastern, Tōhoku region of Japan. Over the past five years Dr. Giblin has conducted research in Japan, the United States, Canada, and the Philippines.