

ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Youth Debates In Early Modern Japan



1. Introduction

This paper offers an alternative historical account of debate practices in Japan during the Meiji and Taisho eras (1868-1926). Most previous studies on the modern history of debate in Japan have focused on Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835-1901) or political advocacy by voluntary associations (*minken kessha*) in the Freedom and People's Rights Movement (1871-1890). Contrary to the prevailing view that debate had largely dissipated by 1890 due to the Meiji government's strict regulations and crackdowns, we demonstrate that debate continued to be an important activity of youth clubs across the nation. Emerging around the late 1880s, youth clubs regularly held intra-group debates on various topics in order to advance knowledge in academic and practical matters.

This paper also questions the popular belief that debate was primarily a means of fighting for democracy and people's rights in early modern Japan. On the contrary, debate in youth clubs was instrumental in preparing the members to be respectable citizens who would contribute to their communities and country. Not surprisingly, the central government and local authorities encouraged debating in youth clubs, along with participating in athletic meets, playing football and music, and practicing *karate* and *judo*. At the same time, youths were strongly discouraged from becoming "too ambitious orators" who would dare to meddle in political affairs. The youth in farming villages, for instance, were dissuaded from debating political topics on the grounds that they were neither fitting nor well suited to their social status. We conclude by suggesting that far from suppressing debates altogether, political authorities tolerated, and even promoted, certain forms of debate they deemed fit for producing active yet subservient citizens.

2. Literature Review

Historical studies on debate theory and practice in early modern Japan are few and far between and have mostly focused on two themes. First, many of the previous studies are concerned with Yukichi Fukuzawa and his associates at the Keio Gijuku (now Keio University) (e.g. Matsuzawa, 1991; Murakami, 1993; Hirai,

1996; Matsuzaki, 2005). Fukuzawa was one of the most influential intellectuals and eminent educators of his time and played an important role in the modernization of Japan in the late 19th century.

Recognizing, above all, the value of public discourse and deliberation in modern society, he “undoubtedly was a pioneer in systematically introducing and popularizing the persuasive and argumentative art of public speechmaking to Meiji Japan” (Kim, 2008, p. 229). Fukuzawa authored several treatises on Western-style rhetoric and took the initiative to found the Mita Oratorical Society (*Mita Enzetsu Kai*) and the Kojunsha Club in which the members learned and practiced speech making, debating, and holding conferences. He went so far as to invest a large portion of his personal fortune in building the Mita Speech Hall (*Mita Enzetsukan*) in 1875. For this reason, Fukuzawa has drawn so much scholarly attention that he is often credited as “a promulgator of Western rhetoric” (Okabe, 1973, p. 186), “the ancestor of public speaking” (*enzetsu no soshisha*), and “the father of Western speech and debate in Japan” (Okabe, 2002, p. 281).

Most other studies in this area explore the roles speech and debate played in the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement (Ohata, 2002; Arai, 2004; Inada, 2009). The Freedom and People’s Rights Movement refers to a wide range of activities that lasted roughly between 1871 and 1890 (Kim, 2008, p. 3). Among others, People’s Rights activists advocated such political changes as the establishment of a national assembly, the installation of a more representative system of government, and the reduction of the land tax (*chiso keigen*). To achieve these goals, people from different strata of society, including ex-samurai (*shizoku*), urban intellectuals, local notables, and wealthy farmers (*gono*), formed voluntary associations called *kessha* and conducted speeches and debates as a regular part of their activities.

It is clear that the existing research on debate in modern Japan has been heavily concentrated on the mid-1870s and late 1880s, the period Tomasi (2004) calls “the golden age of oratory” (pp. 45-64). Consequently, it is commonly believed that debate and speech were introduced to Japan by Fukuzawa and his colleagues at the beginning of the Meiji era, reached their heyday in the rise of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement, and began to lose their popularity around 1890. Underlying this account is the view that despite relentless efforts made by Fukuzawa’s group, as well as fierce political struggles for freedom of speech by

People's Rights activists, debate failed to take root in modern Japan.

However, this historical narrative is problematic on three counts. First, it has reinforced the assumption that the tradition of debate did not exist in Japan prior to the Meiji period (Tomasi, 2004). As several studies have already been conducted to dispel this myth (Branham, 1994; Okabe, 2002; Tomasi, 2004), this paper does not delve into this point. Second, it has been taken for granted that the practice of debate had largely dissipated by 1890 due to strengthened government regulations, the promulgation of the Imperial Constitution (1889), and the opening of the national Diet (1890). For instance, Okabe (2002) contends that "the popularity of Western speech and debate declined all of a sudden at the turn of the century" (p. 288). In his view (which is widely held among historians and communication scholars alike), the decline in the Freedom and People's Rights Movement coincided with, if not caused, the decline in speech and debate. Last but not least, the rise and fall of debate have been attributed to Fukuzawa and a handful of other intellectuals in the dominant historical account.

Let us address this last point first. There is no doubt that Fukuzawa was among the most important figures in the history of debate in Japan. At the same time, we should resist the tendency to elevate him to "founding father" status in the absence of historical evidence. For instance, contrary to popular belief, no documents show that Fukuzawa translated the English word "debate" as *toron*. Although Fukuzawa himself reminisced about having translated debate as *toron* in *Kaigiben (How to Hold a Meeting, circa 1884)*, the term is nowhere used in the book (Matsuzawa, 1991, p. 479). We surmise that the term might have been used earlier by Sadamasu Oshima in *Kaigi Bempo (1884)*, supposedly a Japanese rendering of Luther Cushing's *Rules of Proceeding and Debate in Legislative Assemblies* (also known as *Cushing's Manual*).

Moreover, Fukuzawa held a rather restrictive, even reductive view of debate. That is, unlike People's Rights activists who conceived debate as a tool for spreading their political views to the masses, he regarded it as a means of exchanging ideas and cultivating knowledge among educated citizens. After all, the Mita Oratorical Society and the Kojunsha club were both academic associations *cum* social clubs rather than political organizations. Indeed, Fukuzawa maintained a critical distance from the Freedom and People's Rights Movement and even denigrated many leaders of the Movement as irresponsible radicals. This indicates that by the late 1870s speech and debate became more ubiquitous and was attended by more

“ordinary” people than he had expected (Kim, 2008, p. 235). It also means that by restricting the role of debate and speech to a method of learning among “men of substance,” Fukuzawa failed to appreciate their potential as “the catalysts for the people to assemble, organize, and transform themselves into the politically conscious ‘public’” (Kim, 2008, p. 253). His contribution to popularizing debate in Japan must be re-assessed in this larger historical context.

Second, mainstream scholarship on the Liberation and People’s Rights Movements focuses its analysis on speech meetings (*enzetsukai*) or speech and debate meetings (*enzetsu toron kai*) and assigns only a secondary role to debate. For instance, Kinichi Matsuzaki (2005), former deputy director of the Fukuzawa Memorial Center for Modern Japanese Studies, views debate as nothing more than another form of speech (p. 58). Likewise, communication scholar Mitsuhiro Hashimoto makes little to no mention of debate in his study of public communication during the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement (Hashimoto, 2000; Hashimoto, 2008). Yet it should be noted that debate and speech performed different functions in the nascent stage of many *kessha* groups. As Tokujiro Obata, one of Fukuzawa’s longtime associates, recalled, the Mita Oratorical Society originally started as an informal gathering modeled after a European debating society (Matsuzaki, 1991, p. 78). Accordingly, the members initially spent the most time on debate activities. As the Society began to expand its membership and make its activities open to the public, it gradually shifted its focus from debate to speech. It stopped holding a debate session altogether shortly after the opening of the Mita Speech Hall and literally became an oratorical society. As with the Mita Oratorical Society, many *kessha* associations were originally founded as study and debate groups. As Murakami (1993) observes, the rise of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movements spurred Fukuzawa and many People’s Rights activists to take speech more seriously than debate (p. 158). Although intra-group *academic* debates played an important role in cultivating knowledge and forging group solidarity among the *kessha* members, they have been neglected in the existing literature on the Movement.

In addition, Kim points out the class-bound, elitist nature of mainstream scholarship on the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement. That is, the vast majority of the present studies have been concerned with prominent figures – such as Emori Ueki and Chomin Nakae – and metropolitan intellectual associations. Accordingly, speech and debate meetings organized by local

notables in the countryside have received little attention with the exception of a few *minshushi* (the People's History) historians, notably Daikichi Irokawa's group (see, for example, Irokawa, Ei, and Arai, 1970). This is regrettable because "local lecture meetings [*enztezukai*] turned more and more fiercely anti-government in rhetoric, surpassing those of the metropolitan intellectuals" (Kim, 2008, p. 241).

The existing research on the Freedom and People's Rights Movement also largely ignores female orators and women's public speaking societies despite the fact that the Movement led to a rapid increase in speech, if not debate, meetings by women (Tomasi, 2004, p. 55). Several speech textbooks for women such as *Speech Instructions for Women (Fujin Enzetsu Shinan)* (1888) were published around this time. More importantly, such renowned female orators as Toshiko Kishida embarked on a national speech tour, delivering political speeches at local meetings throughout the country, which in turn inspired many women to organize public speaking societies (Tomasi, 2004, p. 55). Many of them held speech and debate meetings; at least one of them, the Okayama-based *Joko gakusha*, incorporated debate into its curriculum (Tomasi, 2004, p. 56). Yet few, if any, studies have examined speech and debate activities by women and their significance and implications for the Liberation and People's Rights movement.

Largely owing to the aforementioned reasons, it is now taken for granted that debate had virtually died away by 1890. However, while it is true that the number of political speech and debate meetings (*seidan enzetsu toron kai*) had sharply dropped after the Public Assembly Ordinance (*Shukai Jorei*) was strengthened by an amendment in 1882, it does not follow that all forms of debate and speech had ceased to be practiced. Lack of research into debate occurring between the mid-Meiji and Taisho eras should not lead to the conclusion that there was a decline in the debate tradition during this period. The next section will demonstrate that debate continued to be practiced across the nation after the opening of the national Diet.

3. Analysis

3.1 Drastic Increase of Youth Clubs in Early Modern Japan

Partly as a replacement/reorganization of the older youth associations such as *wakarenchu* and *wakamonogumi*, youth clubs started to emerge in the Meiji 10s (1877-1886) in farming villages across the nation (Monbusho, 1972, p. 417). With their goals to "acquire knowledge, improve moral order and reform agricultural affairs," the clubs evolved to be active enough to draw the attention of the

government (Monbusho, 1972, p. 417). The Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905) provided the momentum for the government to officially start to encourage the clubs and their activities, because the government saw that the clubs were useful to increase home front support for the war (Monbusho, 1972, p. 417; Kumagaya, 1942/1989, p. 90).

The governmental support resulted in a drastic increase in the number of youth clubs nationwide. In Meiji 29 (1896), Yamamoto conducted what is presumably the first national survey of youth clubs and recorded that 699 clubs had become active by the same year (Kumagaya, 1942/1989, pp. 83-84). After the Russo-Japanese War, the number of youth clubs drastically increased; there were 5,920 in Taisho 4 (1915) (Murakami & Sakata, 1981, p. 327), 9,965 in Taisho 9 (1920), 11,476 in Taisho 14 (1925) and 13,688 in Showa 5 (1930) (Murakami & Sakata, 1981, p. 329). About ten thousand new youth clubs were established in the fourteen years from Meiji 40 (1907) to Taisho 10 (1921), constituting 75 percent of the entire number of youth clubs recorded until Showa 5 (1930) (Murakami & Sakata, 1981, p. 329).

3.2 Governmental Support for Youth Clubs

The drastic increase in the number of youth clubs during this time was triggered by the increased governmental support after the Russo-Japanese War. The government's first official recognition of the youth clubs was seen in a note issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs in Meiji 38 (1905) (cited in Kumagaya, 1942/1989, p. 197) followed by another note from the Ministry of Education three months later (cited in Kumagaya, 1942/1989, pp. 197-198). Oikawa (2001) argues that due to these notes youth clubs that were forming as voluntary activities in local regions were integrated into national politics (p. 25).

The government expected the youth clubs to be instrumental in preparing their members to be respectable citizens who would contribute to their communities and country. Some salient motives of the government are clearly revealed in the governmental order regarding youth clubs co-issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Education in Taisho 4 (1915). The order starts with a claim that "one of the most exigent tasks under the current domestic and international situation" is "to direct the youth clubs to develop themselves completely." In response to this exigency, the order demands that the youths "improve themselves" to be "healthy and good citizens" by upholding "loyalty and moral character," "developing physical strength," and "growing intelligence

suitable for pragmatic need,” so that they can “help the nation to advance” (cited in Kumagaya, 1942/1989, p. 199).

The government believed that youth clubs would offer some distinctive education that the regular schooling system could not match. The term *shuyo* or “improve oneself” used in the order is an important concept in characterizing the youth clubs. Practicing *shuyo* made youth clubs places to improve oneself by learning from others. Makiyama (1918), a high official in the Ministry of Education, clarifies in his publication that *shuyo* is “self-disciplinary” (p. 80). Also, Yamamoto (1918) notes that unlike school, youth clubs have no teacher, which is why group unity and autonomous control are important issues (pp. 111-112). A Ministry of Home Affairs official, Itsuki (1916) also emphasizes autonomous self-development within youth clubs when he states that “for the youth club to grow, self improvement within the group is desired, as well as external stimulus” (qtd. in Inenaga, 2005, p. 164). This kind of autonomous learning was highly valued as Tago (1918), an official from the Ministry of Home Affairs, states that the education “developed through friendly competition” is “civil training” and “can not be achieved in school” (p. 49).

Another important term worth scrutinizing in this governmental order is “intelligence.” The order supports the growth of intelligence of young people. However, the intelligence the order upholds is only for the purpose of “pragmatic need.” Endorsement of such intelligence needed in agriculture, or in other occupations, is consistently found in other documents.

3.3 Debate Practiced in Youth Clubs

Under governmental guidance, many youth clubs adopted debate as one of their regular activities along with other popular activities such as participating in athletic meets, playing football and music, and practicing *karate* and *judo* (Maeshiro, 1993; Iwata, 1996; Ishise, 2008). These activities were often stipulated in the bylaws of youth clubs as something the clubs should regularly do. For example, in 1907 a youth club in Nagano Prefecture put speech, conversation, debate and cross-examination regarding education, knowledge and health on top of its list of activities, which included athletic meets, travel, excursions and climbing (Hirayama, 1988, p. 137). Similarly, a governmental report in 1912 shows that a youth club in Gifu Prefecture had a bylaw stipulating that “...[we] hold monthly regular meetings to pursue knowledge and martial arts, to do physical exercise and games, to invite some distinguished people to give speeches

or to debate among the members” (cited in Kamiya, 1986, p. 519).

As the government encouraged the youth clubs, several books on how to run the clubs were published at the end of the Meiji era (e.g. Yamamoto, 1909; Okazaki, 1910; Kawasaki, 1910). One of them written by Okazaki (1910) has a list of some 50 recommended activities for youth clubs. Okazaki (1910) notes that the most suitable activities may be different for each youth club, hence each club should carefully choose ones from the list of all activities (p. 200). Okazaki claims that he listed “all activities,” so we could probably presume that those activities were generally accepted or at least considered to be typical in those days. Debate is listed under the category of “compensatory education” “independent from the schooling system” (Okazaki, 1910, p. 200).

Another book published by a government-affiliated publisher in 1918 included a collection of reports from selected youth clubs from all over Japan. These reports describe how each youth club selects and practices its activities based on its socio-cultural background. One report from a youth club in Ishikawa Prefecture demonstrates why debate is adopted and practiced in this fishery village. Jinbo, the head of the youth club, describes this in the report:

...the main industry of our village is fishing. However we frequently experience rather prolonged periods of poor catch, so the village head and others have encouraged us to have a side job. Now 30-40 percent of the people are engaging in sericulture and increasing their income. That is why, even though it is a small village...with a population of 1,600... our village governance was credited as exemplary by the Minister of Home Affairs in Meiji 42. Therefore, in our youth club we do not bother to encourage early rising or helping with housework at all. We only encourage cultivating the sense of unity, the custom of reading, the service for society and the interest in hobbies such as the pursuit of knowledge.... The activities in our youth club are evening-study, lecture and debate for the purpose of enhancing public awareness, and reading in our youth club library which now stores 450 books and attracts 40 to 50 members a day during the periods of poor catch. (cited in Seinendan Chuobu, 1918, p. 362)

According to Jinbo’s description of the club, the young people in this village were already diligent and hardworking enough, so they did not need to be told to get up early or to help their family. Therefore in this village the youth club put a higher emphasis on pursuing knowledge. One of the ways to achieve knowledge is through debate. However this pursuit of knowledge is not considered to be a

scholarly or intellectual pursuit, rather it is a pursuit of knowledge as hobby or enjoyment.

3.4 Propositions Debated in Youth Clubs

Here we would like to examine debate propositions that were actually used in youth clubs and attempt to see what kind of arguments were exchanged and also how those arguments helped educate the club members to be respectable citizens who could contribute to their communities and country. The topics we have discovered are wide-ranging. Some of the topics are closely related to daily life and some of them concern national policy. First, in Fukushima Prefecture, the following topic was debated in Meiji 35 (1902): “Which are more beneficial, cattle or horses?” (Kumagaya, 1942/1989, p. 67). This topic should have been best suited to the beginner of debate in a farming village, for it bears upon their economic life. In the same youth club in Fukushima, a proposition on a national policy was debated in Meiji 34 (1901): “Which of the following should Japan promote, industry or commerce?” (Kumagaya, 1942/1989, p. 67). As it is stated, the topic concerns national policy. However, it should not have been considered too political, because debating for either side on this topic means to seek the best path to strengthen the nation. That was exactly what the government wanted youth club members to ponder so that they would be active in helping the nation to advance.

Another youth club in Kyoto Prefecture also left their debate propositions on record. One of the topics debated in Taisho 1 (1912) is very specific to agriculture: “What would be the benefit of an inflated price of rice?” (Kumagaya, 1942/1989, p. 67). This topic again is undoubtedly relevant to the lives of the youth club members in the village. Also, in the same youth club, topics regarding “the youth” were debated. That is, these topics asked debaters to find “ideal youths.” For example, they debated the following proposition: “Which is more appropriate for physical education for the youth, swordsmanship or sumo-wrestling?” (Kumagaya, 1942/1989, p. 67). A topic like this would have reinforced the idea of “self-discipline” among the members because the topic forced the debaters to seek a better way to run their youth club. Also, at the same time, it made them visualize the ideal youth that they should become. Another proposition debated in the same year states: “The youth should practice riding a bicycle” (Kumagaya, 1942/1989, p. 67). On first glance, riding a bicycle seems harmless, however, to the youth in those days the topic was controversial because bicycle

riding was considered to have a significant negative effect on the youth. According to Iwata (1996), some of the young men in those days had a very active nightlife, visiting girls in neighboring villages (p. 131). Some of them, Iwata (1996) describes, “expanded their field of activities by riding bicycles, but their tires were occasionally deflated by somebody who envied them” (p. 132). Since there were concerns about affronts to sexual morality, and ways to reduce the problem were called for in those days (Nakajima, 1918, p. 223; Iwata, 1996, p. 87), debating the problems associated with riding bicycles was probably intended to help form such morality among the participants.

3.5 Form and Procedure of Debate in Youth Clubs

In his first book, Takinosuke Yamamoto, who has been considered to be the founder of youth clubs in Japan (Kimura, 1998, p. 146), proposes a procedure for making debate fit into the series of activities in a youth club. Yamamoto (1896) notes:

...[We should] review current affairs based on newspapers and magazines.... [Next, we should] put together a miscellany of members’ writing and circularize it in the club so that we can compete with each other in writing. [Next, we should] elaborate on thoughts and bring in two or three issues to every meeting and debate on them. [Next, we should] divide the members into two and sumo-wrestle [or compete] our encyclopedic knowledge by way of questioning.... (pp. 53-54)

Yamamoto’s proposal is somewhat similar to our current procedure of debate; starting with research and strategy followed by debate and cross-examination. His proposal may not be the best evidence to demonstrate how debate was actually conducted in youth clubs, however, given his leadership and attempts to vitalize youth clubs in Japan, we argue that his idea was probably reflected in the actual practice of debate in the youth clubs.

Another book gives us a clue to understanding how young people argued in the early 20th century. In his “speech training” book, Yokoyama (1901) listed things to keep in mind in making arguments. In debate, Yokoyama points out, you should “listen to opponent’s arguments with special attention” so that you can “prepare your refutations” and “argue fully” to the end (p. 84). Ad hominem is forbidden as Yokoyama (1901) clearly expresses his view by suggesting that debaters must not retaliate, even against “insulting remarks” from the opponents, by giving back similar or even worse remarks. He also points out that debaters must not see their opponents as “pathologic” (p. 85). Arguments should be “based upon their

reasons” not upon “arguer’s social standing” (Yokoyama, 1901, p. 85). Yokoyama supports arguments based on reason and discourages any attacks on opponents’ character, which is more or less in accordance with today’s debate pedagogy. However, the last part of Yokoyama’s list does an about-face from his endorsement for active engagement in argumentation. He states that “you must always remember that compliance with public opinion is the obligation of the Japanese people” (Yokoyama, 1901, pp. 85-86). Here Yokoyama argues that people should argue fully to the end, however they should stop arguing once public opinion is set.

3.6 More Written Accounts of the Youth Clubs Debates

We have found two more written accounts of debate in youth clubs in early modern Japan. Kumagaya (1929/1984), who was another important contributor to the development of youth clubs, wrote an anecdote of his workshop camp with leaders from youth clubs in Tokyo, in which one of the leaders proposed to debate about “defending one’s chastity” (p. 17). A youth named “T” started the debate with the following argument:

I argue that women must defend their chastity, but men do not have to. The fact that the nation is allowing state-regulated prostitution is the basis for my claim. A friend of mine who is a sailor on a vessel on a foreign route told me that since there are so many private brothels in foreign countries, men’s chastity is not well defended. Moreover, let me ask you this. How many of us are still defending chastity? Isn’t it easy for us to figure out the answer to this question, given the current situation in our society? Gentlemen, I believe that women must defend their chastity but men don’t have to. What do you say?” (Kumagaya, 1929/1984, p. 18)

Since this argument was advanced with “full confidence,” Kumagaya (1929/1984) explains, it overwhelmed the opponent’s arguments (p.18). Even though the opponents responded with arguments such as “equality between the sexes,” “morality” and “monogamy,” it turned out in the end that the participants were closer to unanimous agreement with the denial of the necessity of men’s chastity (p.18). Kumagaya (1929/1984) laments that this passionate “argument based only on fervor” prevailed in the debate and explains that the youth who are not familiar with logic are easily bewildered and unable to find a fallacy in rather weak arguments (p.18).

Kumagaya (1929/1984) was then asked by the youth club members to give some

comments on the debate. In his comments, he admonishes the youths for presenting extremely “unfair” views on the topic and calls their argument an “egotistical tyranny by males” (p. 18). Kumagaya (1929/1984) moves on to argue that “the fact that only women are compelled to chastity under the status quo” does not mean that it is “the norm of our life” (p. 18). In this new era, Kumayaga (1929/1984) continues, “our ideal will never endorse unfair attitudes” (p. 18). Kumagaya (1929/1984) then closes his comment with the following call:

Gentlemen, we, who are the creators of an upcoming new era, must never corrupt ourselves under the status quo. Let us be ashamed of being conservatives devoid of soul-searching. With our fresh eyes, let us seek for the truth and work on to complete our duty as the creators of a new era. (p. 19)

After listening to Kumagaya’s comments, the youth members fully understood what he meant so “their faces looked so bright” (Kumagaya, 1929/1984, p. 19). In the end, Kumagaya (1929/1984) praises their debate because they debated very seriously on the topic, which could be considered to be obscene or could easily allow the members to make obscene remarks if it were debated fifteen years ago (p. 19).

We have shown that Kumagaya endorsed active argumentation in youth club debate. However there were also attempts to set some limitations on how argumentative the youths could be. For example, Amano (1913) recognizes the value of debating in youth clubs as “it raises their spirits,” however he discouraged the youth from becoming “ambitious orators” who would dare to meddle in political affairs (p. 163). As he notes, there are some people who are debating on national policies these days, however they should know that it is better to “choose familiar topics that are more suitable for people in farming villages” (p. 163). Amano (1913) also advises not to debate too frequently, because “arguing like fire on grease paper is not something youths in farming village should be proud of,” or because people would criticize the youths for becoming a “real stickler for logic” (p. 163).

From the reading of records and written accounts on debate in the youth clubs, we can discern certain forms of debate that the government deemed fit for producing active yet subservient citizens. Active debating was generally encouraged in youth clubs, however, there certainly were voices against the youth becoming too political, too argumentative, or too logical.

3.7 Dissent from the Depoliticization of Debates

Even so, not all youth clubs practiced their debate as the government wished. In his paper, Matsuzaki (2002) introduces an episode from a youth club in the Meiji 20s (1887-1896), which describes that the club hanged out their paper lanterns from windows when they had speech or debate, so that they could, even provocatively, draw the attention of outsiders including the police. Matsuzaki (2002) argues that this rather inflammatory act that “creates a tense atmosphere” was the representation of the youths’ consciousness that “practicing speech and/or debate” were the moments to “face the government” (pp. 39-40). Also, in the late Meiji, newspapers started to run articles that gave a spur and encouragement to the youths. For example, in Meiji 44 (1911), Toyokichi Hasegawa editorialized that unlike in the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement when “the pursuit of sound argument was encouraged,” these days “the government intervenes in the youth clubs everywhere and encourages their blind deference to the government” (Suehiro, 1994, np). As such, we would argue that some youth clubs must have debated more politically than others. At the very least, the arguments to oppose the government’s depoliticization of debate were allowed to appear in the public discourse in those days.

3.8 Other Forms of Debate outside the Youth Clubs

In the days when debate was promoted as an activity for youth clubs across the country, there were still other debates conducted in different forms with different purposes. Debaters in youth clubs were advised not to become too political, however some other groups seemed to debate enthusiastically with clear political agendas. One particular example we should discuss here is the debate by a labor union that took place on July 8, 1919. The debates here were undoubtedly more politically oriented, as we can see by looking at some of the topics debated on that day:

(1) Should labor movements be limited within the field of economy or extended to the field of politics? (2) Should labor insurance be issued by the labor union or by the government? (3) Should the labor hours be eight? (4) Should Japan make Labor Union Laws?.... (Kono, 1919, np)

Over these propositions, as newspaper articles report, active debates were conducted (Sau, 1919; Teikoku, 1919). The excitement and enthusiasm of the participants were represented in the chair’s opening address: “The convention we have today is by no means a moot diet [or mock parliament]. The debate we have

today is not an imitation of the Imperial Diet. On the contrary, our national diet could imitate this debate we will have today” (Teikoku, 1919, np).

Another example we would like to discuss is the debate at a convention of youth clubs in Kanagawa Prefecture. The convention took place in 1922 and 200 representatives from local youth clubs in Kanagawa Prefecture were assembled (Takemoto, 1926, p. 21). Ishikawa youth club from Yokohama proposed a topic that stated, “the house tax should be imposed on public buildings” (Takemoto, 1926, p. 21). The debate was “heated with arguments and questions” and finally it reached a decision that “public buildings should be exempted from the house tax” (Takemoto, 1926, p. 21). After the debate, the chair declared that the decision would be forwarded for “negotiations with the revenue department” (Takemoto, 1926, p. 21). With the limited evidence we have at this moment, we cannot conclude this debate was a kind of moot diet or a substantial part of political decision-making. However, in either case, active arguments were exchanged on a policy-making topic that could be considered too political for typical youth clubs.

4. Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that debate was actively practiced in Japan even after 1890 - the year that debate had largely dissipated according to the prevailing historical accounts that we have examined. The political motive to strengthen the country after the Russo-Japanese War gave a good reason to the government to support youth clubs in order to produce “healthy and good citizens” who would contribute to the community and the country. Our analysis of historical documents demonstrated that at least some of the youth clubs actively and regularly practiced debate and, generally, political topics were avoided in order to conform to governmental guidance. Policy topics, if they were used in a youth club, were written in such a way that arguing for either side in the debate would still allow the debaters to support the prevailing government policy. The topic analyzed earlier regarding the choice between either “industry” or “commerce” for national policy is a good example of this.

Also, our analysis revealed that a monolithic view of debate in the era should be abandoned as we have laid out some evidence to show that different organizations practiced different forms of debate and utilized different kinds of topics. In addition, two prominent leaders of youth clubs in the era, Kumagaya and Amano, had clearly different positions regarding how an ideal debate should be done. Kumagaya advocated that debaters should take nothing for granted and seek for

the truth, whereas Amano discouraged the youths from becoming real sticklers for logic. As more historical documents become available in digital archives, such as the Japanese National Diet Library Digital Archive, we should make steady efforts to conduct more specific research on each form of debate practice in different socio-political situations, rather than having a univocal and overly linear view of debate in our historical context.

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