

# Christopher Noss' *Tohoku* and "Survey of Rural Fukushima": Portraits of Tōhoku a Century Before March 11, 2011

Nathan Hopson

"JOURNEYING by rail over the main route northwards from Tokyo, at a distance of one hundred miles, one crosses a watershed and enters the northland called Tohoku."<sup>1)</sup>

## Introduction

The triple disaster of March 11, 2011 was the first time many people heard of or thought about Japan's Tōhoku region. The earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent nuclear meltdown captured the world's attention with riveting, spectacular images and heartrending stories of loss. More than four years on, the world's attention has mostly shifted to other disasters and crises. And what we did learn about the land and people north of Tokyo was, perhaps unavoidably, circumscribed by the context of "3/11."

A century earlier, and for quite different reasons, Christopher Noss tried to make the Northeast understood to Americans. Noss (1869–1935) was a Christian missionary with the (German) Reformed Church in the United States who spent decades in the Northeast. A graduate of Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, PA (1888), Noss spent most of his career as a missionary to Japan, combining this with several teaching positions—including at his alma mater and at the Lancaster Theological Seminary, where he had completed his theological training. Known as the "Dean of Rural Evangelists," Noss decried missionaries' excessive focus on the cities.<sup>2)</sup> He was particularly active in Sendai and Fukushima; Noss' writings on Tōhoku have special significance now as some of the only English records of the Northeast a century ago.

Noss' descriptions of Tōhoku and its people are noteworthy for at least two reasons. First, his view of Northeasterners contrasts sharply with the consensus of the time that Northeasterners were indolent, backward, stubborn, and even primitive or savage. This was a view shared even by many from Tōhoku—though especially by those who had left the region to pursue careers in politics, academia, business, and other prestigious fields. Second, Noss' unpublished survey of rural Fukushima, which he used as the basis for a book-length study of the Northeast, adds depth to the picture of Tōhoku's rural economy.

Noss began his missionary career in Japan on January 1, 1896. Japan had spectacularly defeated the ailing Chinese empire in a lopsided war the previous year, and was in the midst of a breakneck rush to join the great nations of the industrial-

ized world. A decade later, as Noss himself predicted, Japan stunned the world by taking down Russia, propelling it even further toward the upper echelons of world society.<sup>3)</sup> Yet these changes hardly affected Noss' chosen field of Tōhoku, save to solidify its place as a domestic colony to provide rice, soldiers, and workers for the factories, cafes, and brothels of the cities.<sup>4)</sup>

Since at least Japan's sudden modernization in the late 1800s—and probably for much longer—Tōhoku has been hounded by a sense of its own difference within Japan.<sup>5)</sup> Its climate, language, economy, history, and culture were historically unlike those of the centers of Japanese population, power, and culture to the south and west. The appearance of economic and cultural backwardness, combined with longstanding animosities aggravated during the coup d'état that brought down the Tokugawa *ancien régime* in the 1860s, were major factors in the Meiji oligarchs' decisions to make the Northeast modern Japan's internal colony.<sup>6)</sup> The result of these policies was, as it appeared, to freeze the Northeast in time. As Japan hurtled forward into a Western-defined modernity, the Tōhoku region was a time capsule of “traditional Japan.”

The Northeast was clearly Japan's past, but whether to praise it or to bury it was still the question. Advocates and aficionados of modernization and Westernization saw in Tōhoku the rice-growing village populated by large, poor peasant families unable to fully extricate themselves from the culture of a bygone feudal era. Others looked north and east with a greater sense of nostalgia for an imagined organically and uniquely Japanese past. The modern Northeast was remade into Japan's “rice basket” and its national homeland—when Japanese imagine going over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house, they often imagine Tōhoku—but only by being largely left behind.

### Japan's Internal Colony

By the outbreak of World War I, this pattern was firmly entrenched in the state and social order of modern Japan. As Kawanishi Hidemichi succinctly put it, “It was in the 1910s that Tohoku's status as a backward region came to be firmly established.”<sup>7)</sup> Kawanishi is referring foremost to the economic peripheralization of the region as an exporter of rice and manpower and an importer of the fertilizer and light machinery and goods to sustain its agricultural base. But there is another side to this problem. With economic peripheralization, the historical, cultural, linguistic, and psychological differences Noss alluded to became enshrined in the social imaginary of both the Northeast and Japan as a whole. Tōhoku became a region apart, a pariah. However, this was not a problem that sprung forth fully formed in the 1910s. Rather, the public imagination of Tōhoku as a backward region solidified in the 1910s on the basis of a series of natural and manmade disasters in the previous decades, mixed with long-term north-south animosities resurrected by the civil war of the 1860s.

The 1910s that Noss studied and wrote on constituted a pivotal period in the region's modern history. Especially when it comes to the socioeconomic predicament of the Northeast, both Noss' contemporaries and scholars in recent years agree that conditions were grim. It was a particular kind of grimness, however, one that

shaped the fate of modern Tōhoku. It was the grimness of repeated natural disaster compounded by manmade calamity. It was the grimness of a region being transformed into Japan's internal colony.

A decade after Noss arrived in Japan, Fukushima-born entrepreneur Hangai Seiju mourned the Northeast's unfolding fate as Japan's northern periphery. "How wretched have been the last four decades of Tōhoku's history!" he wrote, wondering, "Ah, is this the fault of heaven, or of man?"<sup>8)</sup> Hangai, an entrepreneur and politician who served three terms in the Diet after 1912, was born in 1858 in the coastal region of Fukushima now called Minamisōma, a name familiar to many from news coverage of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.<sup>9)</sup> Hangai was referring to the combination of political, economic, and social factors that had led to the socioeconomic marginalization of the Tōhoku region within the growing Japanese Empire.

Politically, the architects of the Meiji state generally viewed Tōhoku as a potential source of instability. The major domains of the Northeast had allied against the victorious Satsuma-Chōshū (Satchō) alliance, a decision that was easily mapped onto a pattern of north-south animosities dating back to the formation of the Japanese state in the seventh and eighth centuries. The Meiji government's most influential oligarch, Ōkubo Toshimichi, proposed to politically and economically integrate the region with ambitious programs developing the region's economy with energy production, resource extraction, and infrastructure development projects. Ōkubo hoped not only to benefit the young nation-state, but also to smooth over the rift between Tōhoku and Tokyo. Like many after him, Ōkubo believed that Tōhoku was rich in resources but hindered by ignorant, lazy people and backward customs. He also reasoned that the willing support of the Northeast and better access to its resources would defuse political volatility. With this in mind, Ōkubo devised more than a dozen infrastructure improvement plans for Tōhoku, including port- and road-building, mining, and land reclamation. This was, as Iwamoto Yoshiteru observed, the best of both worlds: the return on investment could be measured in short-term political gains and long-term economic gains.<sup>10)</sup>

Ōkubo's assassination in 1878 changed the trajectory of development. Ōkubo's support of development in the Asaka area near Lake Inawashiro, Fukushima, was part of a vision of developmental capitalism that would build up Japan as a strong, rich modern nation while creating gainful employment in Tōhoku. There were signs even before his death that Ōkubo's plans were in trouble. Prior to its destruction and punitive dismemberment in the 1860s, Aizu—where Inawashiro is located—was the most important of the so-called "loyalist" domains that questioned the overthrow of the Tokugawa regime by the Satchō alliance. Though the Asaka project was designed to transform the troublesome ex-samurai of domains like Aizu into valuable national resources, by the time of Ōkubo's visit in 1876, Asaka was already "a dumping ground for itinerants and undesirables."<sup>11)</sup> Perhaps Ōkubo's development plans could have been salvaged, but post mortem, the remaining oligarchs moved in new directions. Their Tōhoku development plans reflected and took advantage of the socioeconomic underdevelopment of Tōhoku to peripheralize the region as a source of labor and resources for the developing urban center.

The mainstream view among historians is that modern Tōhoku was a colony (or

economic periphery) manufactured by and for Tokyo.<sup>12)</sup> According to this strong consensus, the modernization and transformation of Japan leapt over the Northeast as government policy and industry choices developed Hokkaido with minimal positive effect on the Northeast. Tōhoku, like Okinawa, was passed over in favor of Hokkaido and then the colonies in the modern Japanese empire's projects of economic development.<sup>13)</sup> Okada Tomohiro described the economic peripheralization of Tōhoku in world-system terms, writing that "Tōhoku served as a 'domestic colony,' on the one hand providing rice and other primary industry products and labor for both the capitalist market and the colonization of Hokkaido, and on the other importing foreign rice and light industrial goods."<sup>14)</sup> Iwamoto Yoshiteru explained the situation as a result of the distinctly *imperialist* economic modernization process that Japan had learned from Europe and the United States. According to Iwamoto, fin-de-siècle was momentarily "an exciting frontier," but as the urban industrial centers grew, "Tōhoku was transformed into a food supply base... As England and other advanced nations had their colonies to produce food, Japan made Tōhoku its rice producer—in other words an internal colony."<sup>15)</sup>

Internal colonization was not one-dimensional; there was more to it than making Tōhoku into Japan's "rice basket." The development of rail and mining demonstrate how infrastructure and industry development projects contributed to the Northeast's peripheralization. Many, from Tōhoku-born agronomist and statesman Nitobe Inazō to contemporary historians like Iwamoto, have argued that rail was a tool to extract, not to develop, Northeastern resources. Rail was welcomed by most as a potent symbol of civilization and modernization, but Nitobe saw instead a giant "straw," bleeding rural Japan dry to feed the hungry cities. The growth of mining similarly exemplifies the exploitation of Tōhoku's resources; by 1912, a dozen or so outside enterprises controlled the overwhelming majority of the mining operations in the Northeast, funneling resources and profits southward. And the trains out of Tōhoku were hauling not just minerals, but also laborers for the factories and brothels of the major metropolises.<sup>16)</sup>

Whether these outcomes were retaliatory, as some have suggested, or merely some combination of coincidence and sound policy, the peripheralization of Tōhoku was exacerbated by a series of natural disasters and poor harvests that struck around the turn of the century. Noss arrived in Japan months before the massive Meiji Sanriku Earthquake of June 1896, a catastrophe that left more than 26,000 dead and the Pacific coast of northern Tōhoku devastated. As it would again in 2011, the wave rose to nearly forty meters, sweeping away entire towns and introducing the word tsunami into the global lexicon.<sup>17)</sup> More than 10,000 homes and buildings and almost 7,000 seagoing craft were destroyed, crippling the area's fishing-dependent economy. The damage was so serious that coastal Iwate and Miyagi had not fully recovered when another tsunami struck in 1933.<sup>18)</sup> Additionally, plans for coastal rail were delayed until the postwar economic boom.<sup>19)</sup>

Only a few years after the Meiji tsunami, a series of crop failures struck the Northeast, contributing to the region's growing public image as an impoverished, economically backward drain on national resources.<sup>20)</sup> In 1902, crop yields in northern Tōhoku were less than half of an ordinary year. The fishing industry, the re-

gion's second most important source of food and income, was also devastated; catches fell below one third of annual averages. Even the price of charcoal dropped, resulting in a triple punch to the local economy.<sup>21)</sup> In 1905, crops on the unrecovered Pacific side of Tōhoku were hit by the worst harvest since the 1780s' infamous Tenmei Famine. Nearly 90% of fields and paddies in Miyagi failed to produce a measurable crop, and the total rice harvest was only about one tenth of the annual yield. Losses totaled 76% in Fukushima and 66% in Iwate.<sup>22)</sup> Noss did not fail to notice that, as Kawanishi explained, "the image of poor and backward 'Tōhoku' was gradually implanted" in the public by media coverage of tsunami and famine, and was firmly in place by the 1910s.<sup>23)</sup>

This view played on existing prejudices rather than creating new ones *ex machina*. Space prohibits a comprehensive review of the ancient history from which the narrative of Tōhoku as the savage and backward adversary of progress were drawn, but from Meiji officials to disaster-relief volunteers, and from intellectuals to artists and diplomats, allusions to this trope were numerous. One Meiji official, referencing this history, called the region "a den of [barbarians] since antiquity... and a disease afflicting our country." Another official called the area's customs "obstinate and foolish." Still another compared Tōhoku's people to the "savages" of Taiwan.<sup>24)</sup> Unfavorable comparisons with Japan's newly acquired territories and "backward" Asian neighbors were common, in fact. This prejudice was linked to a sense of Tōhoku as alien; one historian disparagingly called Tōhoku the "Korea of Japan." Aid workers in Tōhoku after the 1896 tsunami complained of an insurmountable language barrier and reported that the filth and stink of Aomori towns brought Korea to mind.<sup>25)</sup> Even Tōhoku natives like playwright Akita Ujaku agreed that talking to a Northerner, "I don't feel as if I'm speaking to another Japanese."<sup>26)</sup> Iwate-born Nitobe Inazō echoed this sentiment, writing, "The Tohoku region of Japan is so vastly different, in terms of nature and society, from the southern and western regions that it is sometimes hard to believe that they belong to the same country."<sup>27)</sup> The region languished and the *image*—both internal and external—of Tōhoku as the "poorest region" of the home islands became a fixture in the national and local social imaginary.<sup>28)</sup> Sōma Kokkō, another Northerner, called Tōhoku a "lost land (*bōkoku*)."<sup>29)</sup>

### ***The Scotland of Japan***

Christopher Noss saw something entirely different in the Northeast. He was aware of criticisms characterizing the people of Tōhoku as "sluggish and boorish," and went out of his way to point out to his American readership that Northerners were unlike the Japanese they knew from books, magazines, or accounts by relatives in California of Japanese immigrants. But what Noss saw in his decades in Tōhoku reminded him of Scotland. So much so that he named his 1918 book *Tōhoku, the Scotland of Japan*. In explaining his choice of title, Noss invoked geography, language, and culture, and made specific reference to the differences between Northerners and "Japanese of the familiar type."

Japan is often called "The Britain of the East." We may, therefore, properly



Undated photo of Christopher Noss and a student from the Christopher Noss Papers, Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society, Lancaster PA.

compare Tohoku to Scotland, the northern end of the largest of the British Isles, as Tohoku is the northern end of the largest island of Nippon... Our chief reason for making the comparison is the desire to call attention to the fact that as the Scotch differ from the English, the people of Tohoku are considerably different from the Japanese of the Southwest. The dialect is peculiar... And there is a profound psychological difference between the northerners and the southerners.<sup>30)</sup>

But the people of this seldom-traveled area largely unknown to the outside world, he continued, were good people, “hardy and industrious,” “steadfast and honest.” While at odds with the consensus of his contemporaries, Noss’ opinion of Tōhoku’s people corresponds well with the sort of views expressed after the disasters of March 11, when both the domestic and international press praised—and by doing so, imagined and prescribed—the stoic, even-keeled response of Japan overall and the Northeast in particular to disaster on an unimaginable scale.<sup>31)</sup>

With the exception of several years of furlough and a brief teaching stint in Lancaster, PA, Noss remained in Japan from 1896 until his death in 1934 at his son’s



home in Aomori. His mission work totaled thirty-three years.<sup>32)</sup> Upon his death, Noss was remembered by Wakamatsu Christian School Principal Haga Gorō as “more a Japanese than a foreigner.”<sup>33)</sup> In his 1915 annual letter to the Mission, Noss wrote, “As we become better acquainted with the Japanese people... we are more and more impressed by their truly great qualities. The Japan that the missionary knows... is a nation worthy of the best we have to give.”<sup>34)</sup> Noss had been a Japan enthusiast from the start, even conquering initial troubles with the language to produce, in 1903, one of the most important English-language textbooks of Japanese of his time.<sup>35)</sup> During his lifetime, in writing, speeches, and sermons given during his time teaching or on furlough in America, Noss was a tireless advocate for Japan and endeavored earnestly to make the country and its people understood to Americans. Noss denounced prevailing American racism toward the Japanese and even defended Japan’s expansionism in Manchuria in the early 1930s, clinging to the fervent belief that Japan would never tread the path to war unprovoked.<sup>36)</sup> Noss elsewhere speculated that tofu might eventually become a familiar food to Americans; surely he would have been happier to see his predictions of peace come true.<sup>37)</sup>

In addition to his writings, Noss delivered his anti-racist and pro-Japanese stances directly to American churchgoers. According to a local newspaper report on one of Noss’ sermons given in Reading, PA, in 1926:

Dr. Noss said that there is a feeling among the white race that they are superior to any other race [but] that we are in no way superior to any other race other than that we have a superior religion. He said that the Japanese are the kindest people he has ever come into contact with [and that] under no circumstances would there be a Japanese-American war unless America would cross the Pacific to attack them.<sup>38)</sup>

Noss loved Japan, but he loved Tōhoku especially and rural Fukushima most. The city of Sendai was, and remains, the political and economic center of Tōhoku, but Noss found the city boring, calling it “little more than an overgrown rural town.”<sup>39)</sup> Still, Sendai was the hub of the Reformed Church mission in Japan, and Noss was dedicated to his work and therefore to Sendai. “One can hardly exaggerate the historical importance of the work being done today in Tōhoku,” he wrote.<sup>40)</sup> In addition to establishing several churches in Sendai, Noss served on the faculty of North Japan College (Tōhoku Gakuin), established in 1892. In later years, Noss returned to Sendai to focus on “newspaper evangelism.” But until the 1920s, Noss traveled—mostly by bicycle—over treacherous mountain passes to preach in the remote villages of Tōhoku, especially Fukushima’s Aizu-Wakamatsu region, where he supported church building and was involved in the Rural Evangelistic Institute. His greatest praise was for the southern Aizu region, “where civilization had brought few benefits but where simple people responded quickly to compassion and were eager to learn,” and Noss wrote that his first wife, Lura, too, “fell in love, as every Christian must, with the mountain-folk” who lived there.<sup>41)</sup>

On the other hand, Noss lamented the difficulty of explaining Japan to Americans, even to those of his own church. In a 1916 letter to Allen E. Bartholomew,

Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions, Noss made no attempt to conceal his frustration and exasperation that for missionary work in Japan,

the harvest is upon us and the grain is rotting the fields. It may be our own fault that the situation is not better understood. But it is really very hard to write Japan up properly. What most Americans seem to desire in the way of missionary literature is food for their racial pride. They enjoy pitying the poor heathen. If in our writing we emphasize the bright side of Japanese life, interest is killed. If we emphasize the dark side we soon find ourselves in trouble on this side of the water. If then we try to show both sides and really explain the situation as a whole our articles become long and tiresome and we are turned down by the editor.<sup>42)</sup>

This, it appears, was the impetus for *Tohoku, the Scotland of Japan*. “Japan,” he wrote, “especially Tohoku, is very different from what 99 per cent of the American people imagine.”<sup>43)</sup> With this in mind, Noss described his vision for *Tohoku* as “a mission-study text-book of North Japan... a book that shall be concrete, interesting and popular and at the same time truthful, comprehensive and educative.”<sup>44)</sup> It is difficult to judge the impact of *Tohoku*, which appears to have been largely used as an internal training text for missionaries of the Reformed Mission, but it is clearly a work of love and devotion, based on strong sentimental attachment combined with both personal observations and extensive data collection.

### The Survey of Rural Fukushima

*Tohoku* was based on studies that had begun several years earlier. The only extant record appears to be a survey of five districts of rural Fukushima dated December 14, 1914 and hand-signed by Noss for presentation to the Conference of Federated Missions based in Tokyo.<sup>45)</sup> The report is important for understanding the empirical basis upon which *Tohoku* was written, for providing a different perspective on Tōhoku from that found in standard and less finely grained histories, and specifically as a study of conditions in Aizu. Since March 2011, however, Noss’ survey is particularly interesting as a survey of the affected areas of coastal Fukushima 50km north of Tepco’s Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Reactor.

The “Survey of Conditions in Rural Fukushima Ken” covered five districts of rural Fukushima, two inland and three along the Pacific coast. The two inland villages studied are Niitsuru and Wakamiya, located west and northeast of Lake Inawashiro, respectively. On the coast, the villages of Odaka (birthplace of Hangai Seiju), Fukuura, and Kanafusa were surveyed. In 1954, these three villages were the subject of the first municipal merger in Fukushima’s history. A half-century later, in 2006, the resulting town of Odaka merged again with neighboring Haramachi and Kashima to become Minamisōma.

The survey is concerned primarily with social conditions, especially sharecropping and absentee landlordism, the indentured servitude of young women, liquor consumption, and the conservatism and opposition of the rising militarist class and older generations.<sup>46)</sup> While young country people were, according to Noss, thought-



ful and open, their lives were badly circumscribed by poverty and the traditionalism of their society and elders. Unsurprisingly, religious life is given special consideration, and Noss recommended focusing on the “the months of February and March, which are months of idleness, tedium and temptation” in order to boost the success of proselytization.<sup>47)</sup> His report opens with a brief summary of the state of education, which is described as adequate in terms of facilities and staffing, “bureaucratic and mechanical, but... sufficiently comprehensive” in its curriculum, and quite good in terms of attendance rates and educational outcomes, producing adults with relatively high literacy rates.<sup>48)</sup> These results did not appreciably affect, Noss observed, socioeconomic conditions in rural Fukushima, which he described in stark terms. “The whole of north Japan is in very bad economic condition,” he wrote, and while Fukushima was not as desperate as Miyagi or Iwate to the north, the farmers’ plight was dire.

Agriculture was the primary industry in Fukushima as it was in the other five prefectures of Tōhoku. According to Noss’ data, only about one in ten households in the five surveyed villages made their living independent of agriculture. The importance of agriculture to the villages surveyed was also linked directly to many of the major socioeconomic problems he identified in rural Fukushima. For example, while the average debt of farming households throughout the Empire was about ¥100, in Fukushima household finances ran about ¥230 in the red. Noss classified more than 50% of the households surveyed as “poor,” and remarked that the situation was deteriorating due to the increase in absentee landlordism. While tenancy in the surveyed areas was significantly lower than the Fukushima-wide 38% (the highest rate in the five villages was 30% in Niitsuru and the lowest only 13% in Kanafusa), Noss was deeply concerned by the treatment of tenant farmers by the “heartless agents” of absentee landlords, who “make [illegible] the peasants miserable.”<sup>49)</sup>

But the report also contains reminders that the picture was more complex and finely granulated. Of the 264 non-agrarian households studied, 226 were in Odaka.<sup>50)</sup> Odaka was one of several villages in the area that made coastal Fukushima a major producer of woven silk for the export market. The Kawamata area of modern Fukushima had been home to a significant silk textile industry since at least the seventeenth century, and began exporting raw and refined silks in the mid-1880s. Kawamata’s silk industry suffered after the opening of Japan’s ports in the 1850s, but was revived in 1884 with the introduction of mechanized looms. By 1889, these steam-powered looms had been adopted in surrounding areas, including Odaka. Hangai Seiju was instrumental in transforming Odaka’s economy. In 1887, he procured a government loan to found a textile firm. He purchased sixty mechanized looms, ten of which were used to train young women from former samurai (*shizoku*) families. The other fifty were loaned to local families. By 1889, there were as many as 250 steam-powered looms in use in Odaka, which was well on its way to being a major silk producer. Less than two decades later, in 1907, that number had reached three thousand. This was related to the 1904 founding of a silk refining company in Odaka that helped local producers bypass Kawamata and sell directly to exporters in Yokohama at greater profit. Only a year before Noss took stock of conditions in

rural Fukushima, Odaka had taken another step toward becoming one of Japan's most important habutae producers. The opening of an electric power plant spurred the creation of smaller factories, which proliferated during the economic boom produced (in Japan) by World War I; though 1920 would see silk prices halved by the end of the Japanese bubble and the consequent collapse of many silk producers in Odaka as elsewhere around Japan, in 1919, the export value of Odaka's silks was more than 2.2 million yen, supporting hundreds of families.<sup>51)</sup>

Noss counted a dozen habutae factories in Odaka variously employing between twenty and three hundred young women each, many indentured for three years in exchange for advance payment of about ¥10 to their parents. In addition to silk manufacture, Odaka was also home to a clog (*geta*) producer and a sawmill. The village economy was far more diverse than Fukuura, for example, of which Noss remarked only that it "has a very small foundry."<sup>52)</sup> Considering the dramatic changes Japan underwent in the intervening decades, it might surprise some that little had changed by 1987, when an examination of the municipalities around Fukushima's nuclear reactors concluded that the economies of Fukuura and Kanafusa remained almost entirely agricultural while that of Odaka was commercial and industrial, with habutae its most important product.<sup>53)</sup>

Noss reiterated many of these fundamental points in *Tohoku*. In his closing chapter, Noss roundly praised Japan for everything from the highly successful public education system to the decline of Confucian values and increased prominence of women in public life, and from increasing labor organization to the country's overall trajectory toward democracy, "appearances to the contrary notwithstanding."<sup>54)</sup> He lauded national virtues including eagerness to learn, a ("somewhat conventionalized") reverence for aesthetic beauty, self-sacrifice, and self-control. The problems of intemperance, extravagance, the subjugation and denigration of women, and the sexual immorality of Japanese men were, in Noss' estimation, curable by the Christianization of Japanese society.<sup>55)</sup>

Turning to economic matters, Noss explained that while rice and bean farming were the foundation of Tōhoku's economy, mining, silk production, and lacquerware and other handicrafts were also important industries. He added that rampant labor exploitation (especially young women in the mills and mines) was a cause of great concern. Horrific work and living conditions were contributing to the spread of tuberculosis and discontent among laborers, with the prevalence of the former estimated at a staggering 25% and the latter undoubtedly much higher.<sup>56)</sup> Additionally, Noss concluded that the repeated famines and accompanying poverty in Tōhoku sapped the region's "tremendous reserves of energy."<sup>57)</sup> The fundamental problem was, according to Noss, "that most of the people are terribly poor, weary and heavy-laden."<sup>58)</sup>

## Conclusion

Through his missionary work in Japan and teaching and preaching in both Japan and America, Christopher Noss left a lasting legacy. He was an eloquent explainer of Japan and a staunch opponent of American racism toward Japan. Noss contributed greatly to the Reformed Church mission in Tōhoku—especially in Sendai and

the Aizu region of Fukushima, and also to the development of Tōhoku Gakuin University. Noss himself would probably have been both bemused and touched to know how he was remembered in Aizu. As his biography recounts, “For years a foreigner coming into the [South] Aizu district was affectionately called ‘Noss San’ by the children.”<sup>59)</sup>

His legacy to historians is different. Noss’ unpublished survey of rural Fukushima and his book *Tōhoku, the Scotland of Japan* provide some of the only English-language materials on a region neglected by most modern histories, and especially on Fukushima. Rereading Noss’ work now is particularly important to enrich and complicate our picture of the Minamisōma area’s history as it moves slowly toward recovery.

## Note

This article is based on archival research at the Evangelical & Reformed Historical Society, Lancaster, PA. A brief preliminary report appeared in the Society’s Fall 2015 newsletter. Additionally, the author would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the Minamisōma Public Library and the helpful comments of an anonymous reviewer for the journal.

## Notes

- 1) Christopher Noss, “The Tohoku,” in *The Christian Movement in Japan, Korea & Formosa*, ed., Daniel Clarence Holtom (Kobe: Federation of Christian Missions, 1924), 127.
- 2) Armin H. Kroehler, *Forth to Sow: The Life of Dr. Christopher Noss, Missionary in Northern Japan* (Japan: Kyo Bun Kwan, 1961), 1; Noss, “The Tohoku,” 129–133.
- 3) “Address by Former Missionary Noss,” *Reading Eagle*, March 19, 1909.
- 4) Nathan Hopson, “Systems of Irresponsibility and Japan’s Internal Colony,” *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 11, no. 52 (December 30, 2013), <http://japanfocus.org/-Nathan-Hopson/4053>. See also Oguma Eiji, in Akasaka Norio, Oguma Eiji, and Yamauchi Akemi, “*Tōhoku*” *saisei* (Tokyo: Isuto Puresu, 2011), 63, 91, 126–128.
- 5) Kawanishi Hidemichi, *Tōhoku: Tsukurareta ikyō*, Chūkō shinsho 1584 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2001).
- 6) 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*, ed., Tōhoku Gakuin Daigaku Shigakka (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 1998), 237–67; *Tōhoku kaihatsu hyakunijūnen*, Zōhoban (Tokyo: Tōsui Shobō, 2009), 18–22, 50–53.
- 7) Hidemichi Kawanishi, “Regional History and International History (From Hara Katsuro to Ellsworth Huntington),” trans., Hiraku Shimoda, *Asian Cultural Studies*, no. 39 (2013), 33.
- 8) Hangai Seiju, *Shōrai no Tōhoku*, ed. Takahashi Tomio (Sendai: Aie Shoten, 1969), 81.
- 9) Hangai’s plans for economic development in the Northeast influenced the first Tōhoku Promotion Association (Tōhoku Shinkōkai, 1913–1927). Takahashi Tomio, “Kaisetsu,” in *Shōrai no Tōhoku*, ed., Takahashi Tomio (Sendai: Aie Shoten, 1969), 43.
- 10) Harry D. Harootian, “The Economic Rehabilitation of the Samurai in the Early Meiji Period,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 19, no. 4 (August 1, 1960), 433–44; Takahashi Tomio, *Tōhoku no fūdo to rekishi* (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1976), 281–293; Hiromi Masuda, “Japan’s Industrial Development Policy and the Construction of Nobiru Port: The Case Study of a Failure,” *The Developing Economies* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 1980), 333–63; Iwamoto, *Tōhoku kaihatsu hyakunijūnen*, 18–22.
- 11) Hiraku Shimoda, *Lost and Found: Recovering Regional Identity in Imperial Japan*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 46 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2014), 71.
- 12) See Oguma, in Akasaka, Oguma, and Yamauchi, “*Tōhoku*” *saisei*, 126–128.

- 13) This was in part fallout from the Boshin War, in which Tōhoku's chief domains allied against the Satchō "Restorationists." Ichinohe Fujio, "Joshō: Tōhoku minshū kara mita jūgonen sensō zenshi," in *Kataritsugu Tōhoku to Jūgonen Sensō*, ed., Rekishi Kyōikusha Kyōgikai (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1997), 12–37; Iwamoto, "Tōhoku kaihatsu o kangaeru," 249; Kawanishi Hidemichi, "'Tōhoku'-shi no imi to shatei," *Rekishigaku kenkyū*, no. 742 (October 2000), 93–94.
- 14) Okada Tomohiro, "Nihon teikokushugi keiseiki ni okeru Tōhoku kaihatsu kōsō (jō): (Dai ichiji) Tōhoku Shinkōkai no katsudō o chūshin ni," *Keizai ronsō* 131, no. 1–2 (1983), 40.
- 15) Kabayama Kōichi, Iwamoto Yoshiteru, and Yoneyama Toshinao, *Taiwa: "Tōhoku" ron* (Tokyo: Fukutake Shoten, 1984), 17.
- 16) Iwamoto, "Tōhoku kaihatsu o kangaeru," 244–256; and see also Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, *Rise and Demise: Comparing World-Systems*, New Perspectives in Sociology (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Kären Wigen, *The Making of a Japanese Periphery, 1750–1920* (University of California Press, 1995).
- 17) Eliza Ruhamah Scidmore, "Japan Tsunami," *National Geographic Magazine*, September 1896, <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/1896/09/japan-tsunami/scidmore-text>.
- 18) Kazuyu Hosoi et al., eds., *Iwateken no rekishi*, Kenshi 3 (Yamakawa Shuppansha, 1999), 284–286.
- 19) The joint public-privately funded ("third sector") Sanriku Railway Company serving the Iwate coast was founded in 1981.  
Almost forgotten in the magnitude of the calamity is the Rikuu Earthquake that followed in August, killing more than 200, flattening over 5,000 buildings, and ruined that year's crops. Miura Tamiaki, "Taishō shoki Iwateken nōson no bunseki: 'Iwateken Esashi-gun Fujisato-mura sonze chōsa' o chūshin ni," *Tōhoku Gakuin Daigaku keizaigaku ronshū*, no. 177 (December 2011), 389–402.
- 20) Yonechi Fumio, Fujiwara Takao, and Imaizumi Yoshikuni, "Chimei 'Tōhoku' to Tōhoku shinkōron oyobi kyōdō kyōiku: Meiji kōki kara Shōwa zenki no yōrei o megutte," *Annual Report of the Faculty of Education, University of Iwate* 55, no. 1 (1995), 145–63; Yonechi Fumio, Imaizumi Takao, and Fujiwara Takao, "Shinbun/zasshimei 'Tōhoku' ni miru Meiji kōki no Tōhoku chiiki-kan," 1998; Kawanishi Hidemichi, "Kindai Nihon keiseiki ni okeru 'Tōhokuron' no kisoteki kenkyū," 2001, <http://www.juen.ac.jp/shakai/kawanisi/research/touhoku.html>; Omachi Masami, *Kyōshū no yashū tetsudō: Tochigiken tetsudō hiwa* (Utsunomiya: Zuisōsha, 2004); Iwamoto, *Tōhoku kaihatsu hyakunijūnen*, 35.
- 21) "Iwate, Aomori chihō no daikyōsaku," *Mainichi Shimbun*, March 6, 1903, Morning edition.
- 22) "Tōhoku kyōsaku no sanjō," *Asahi Shimbun*, November 16, 1905, Morning edition; Kondō Junsei, "1993-nen no daireika: 80-nen buri no daikyōsaku," *Tenki* 41, no. 8 (August 31, 1994), Table 2; Ichinohe, "Joshō," 19; Kawanishi, *Tōhoku*, 144.
- 23) Kawanishi, *Tōhoku*, 145.
- 24) Quoted in Okamoto Masataka, "Aterui fukken to Emishi ishiki no kakusei," *Ajia Taiheiyō rebyū*, no. 8 (2011), 5–6.
- 25) Takahashi, "Kaisetsu," 42; Kawanishi, *Tōhoku*, 141–143.
- 26) Quoted in Hoyt J. Long, *On Uneven Ground: Miyazawa Kenji and the Making of Place in Modern Japan* (Stanford University Press, 2012), 93.
- 27) Quoted in Kawanishi, "Regional History and International History," 45.
- 28) Kawanishi Hidemichi, *Zoku Tōhoku: Ikyō to genkyō no aida*, Chūkō shinsho 1889 (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2007), 212.
- 29) Takahashi, "Kaisetsu," 42.
- 30) Christopher Noss, *Tōhoku, the Scotland of Japan* (Philadelphia, PA: Board of Foreign Missions, Reformed Church in the United States, 1918), 15–16.
- 31) See, for example, "Banyan: Japan and the Uses of Adversity," *The Economist*, March 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/18388874>; Marnie Hunter, "Orderly Disaster Reaction in Line with Deep Cultural Roots," CNN, March 2011, <http://news.blogs.cnn.com/2011/03/12/orderly-disaster-reaction-in-line-with-deep-cultural-roots/>; "Stoicism amid the Debris: After the Earthquake," *The Economist (Online)*, March 14, 2011, [http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2011/03/after\\_earthquake](http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2011/03/after_earthquake); Abi Sekimitsu, "Even Japanese Amazed by Stoicism of Disaster-Struck North," *Re-*

- uters, March 21, 2011, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2011/03/21/idINIndia-55734620110321>; Suzuki Hideo, “Iwakan aru ‘kamoku de nebarizuyoi’ Tōhokujin,” *Mainichi Shimbun*, April 26, 2011, Evening edition, sec. Geinō; Fukushima Kaori, “Nihonjin no nintaizuyosa ni sunao ni odoroku,” *Nikkei Business Online*, March 21, 2012, <http://business.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/world/20120319/229941/>; Ian King, “Stoicism in Face of a Different Kind of Crisis: The Strength of Spirit for Which Japan Is so Well Known Is Being Tested Again,” *The Times.co.uk*, September 17, 2012, sec. Columnists, <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/business/columnists/article3540110.ece>.
- 32) “Rev C. Noss, 65, Dies in Japan,” *Lancaster New Era*, December 31, 1934.
  - 33) Haga Gorō, “Nihonjin Nossu Sensei,” *Kiyoki ayumi*, February 10, 1935, Ms. Coll. 12 (Noss Family) Box 1, Evangelical & Reformed Historical Society.
  - 34) Kroehler, *Forth to Sow*, 68.
  - 35) Christopher Noss, *A Text-Book of Colloquial Japanese*, Revised English Edition (Tokyo: Methodist Publishing House, 1907).
  - 36) “Minister Defends Japan,” *Reading Eagle*, February 2, 1932.
  - 37) Noss, *Tohoku*, 29.
  - 38) “Earnest Plea for Japan,” *Reading Eagle*, February 15, 1926.
  - 39) Noss, “The Tohoku,” 128.
  - 40) Noss, *Tohoku*, 287.
  - 41) Kroehler, *Forth to Sow*, 4, 8.
  - 42) Christopher Noss, November 9, 1916, Ms. Coll. 12 (Noss Family) Box 1, Evangelical & Reformed Historical Society.
  - 43) Noss, *Tohoku*, 17.
  - 44) Noss, November 9, 1916.
  - 45) The authorship of the document is not specified, but Noss’ signature indicates that he endorsed its results.
  - 46) Christopher Noss, “Survey of Conditions in Rural Fukushima Ken” (Aizu, December 14, 1914), 5, Ms. Coll. 12 (Noss Family) Box 1, Evangelical & Reformed Historical Society.
  - 47) *Ibid.*, 3.
  - 48) *Ibid.*, 2.
  - 49) *Ibid.*
  - 50) *Ibid.*
  - 51) Odakachō Kyōiku Iinkai, ed., *Odaka chōshi* (Odaka, Fukushima: Odakachō, 1975), 504–508; Odaka Gyōseiku, ed., *Odakachō Ōaza Kodaka shi* (Odaka, Fukushima: Odakachō Odaka Gyōseiku, 1998); Minamisōma Kyōiku Iinkai, ed., *Odaka no rekishi nyūmon: Odaka-ku ni kakawaru Minamisōmashi shi*, *Odaka no rekishi*, Tokubetsuhen 3 (Minamisōma, Fukushima: Minamisōma, 2006), 136–140.
  - 52) Noss, “Survey of Conditions in Rural Fukushima Ken,” 3.
  - 53) Yamakawa Mitsuo, “Fukushima-ken genpatsu chitai no keizai genkyō ni tsuite,” *Tōhoku keizai*, no. 82 (March 30, 1987), 154.
  - 54) Noss, *Tohoku*, 274.
  - 55) *Ibid.*, 64–68.
  - 56) *Ibid.*, 37.
  - 57) *Ibid.*, 257.
  - 58) *Ibid.*, 264.
  - 59) Kroehler, *Forth to Sow*, 24.

