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Takahashi Tomio's *Henkyō*: Eastern Easts and Western Wests

Nathan HOPSON

In 1979, historian Takahashi Tomio applied Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" to the history of Japanese state and national formation, arguing that as the Western frontier had determined American national character, the Eastern frontier had determined the course of ancient Japanese history and the character of Japan itself. Takahashi was a scholar of Northeast Japan (Tōhoku) who attempted to transcend the limitations of Japanese history with a structural model recognizing the mutually constitutive nature of core and periphery, metropole and frontier. This article traces the development of Takahashi's argument, with attention to the influence of his personal history and the universalist tendencies of early postwar Japanese historiography. Ultimately, Takahashi's appropriated frontier thesis did not catch on, and his prominence in Tōhoku studies diminished. However, the so-called "Jōmon boom" of the early 1990s and the rise of "Tōhoku-ology" (*Tōhokugaku*) accomplished his goal of imparting value to the Northeast better than his frontier thesis could have. On the other hand, the frontier thesis was explicitly rejected by *Tōhokugaku*'s leading figure, Akasaka Norio, as an expression not of universal historical laws, but of a view of the Northeast as a backward periphery to be conquered and exploited.

Keywords: frontier, Frederick Jackson Turner, Tōhoku, universalism, historiography, postwar thought, regionalism, Umehara Takeshi, Akasaka Norio, Emishi

In 1979, historian Takahashi Tomio penned a polemic on Japanese history called *Henkyō* 辺境, meaning "Frontier." In it, he applied Frederick Jackson Turner's (Figure 1) "frontier thesis" to the history of Japanese state and national formation, arguing that as the Western frontier had determined American national character, so the Eastern frontier had determined the course of ancient Japanese history and the character of Japan itself. Takahashi was a fierce critic of the historical imaginary propagated by popular and official national history. The subtitle of this book, "Mō hitotsu no Nihonshi" もう一つの日本史, has a double meaning. "Another Japanese history" declares Takahashi's intent to rethink Japanese history completely, but can also be read to mean that the frontier itself is "another Japan," which is

how Takahashi often referred to the Tōhoku region of his birth.[1] It was not a corrective, but a revolution that Takahashi sought.

The rhetorical turn in *Henkyō* was produced by a combination of three factors. First is the trajectory of Takahashi's career as a historian. Second is the history of Takahashi's native Tōhoku region in the early twentieth century, which profoundly influenced his relationship to the nation-state. Initial attempts to develop the Northeast economically were abandoned for a program of systematic peripheralization that enervated Tōhoku and left it vulnerable to the whims of climate and international economic downturn. The misery and disenfranchisement experienced in Tōhoku during these years contributed, if in complex and often contradictory ways, to popular regional support for "fascism" and expansionism during the 1930s.[2] *Henkyō* was a milestone in Takahashi's personal "postwar thought," shaped by the experience of modernization, war, defeat, and recovery; this experience was markedly different in the Northeast than in the urban centers of economic, cultural, and political power. Third, Takahashi's work should be seen both as a rejection of mainstream accounts of Tōhoku's history, and also within the more limited context of postwar Japanese historiography. *Henkyō* is best understood as part of postwar historians' attempts to refashion Japan's history within universal frameworks of world history, though Takahashi's frontier model ultimately failed to make significant inroads in the historical community. In fact, it was explicitly rejected by folklorist Akasaka Norio 赤坂憲雄, who followed Takahashi in the 1990s as the most important voice in Tōhoku studies, and whose prominence suggests a turn away from universalism. On the other hand, Takahashi's primary goal of recuperating the history and culture of Tōhoku within and against national history has been far more successful.

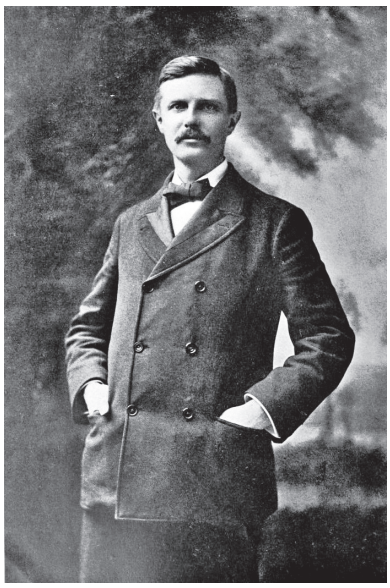

Figure 1. The "frontier thesis" of American historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861–1932) distilled the popular notion that the Western frontier had defined American national character.

This article consists of five sections. The first section provides an overview of Turner's frontier thesis, including its numerous applications in world historiography and a summary of its critiques. The second section briefly sketches Takahashi's relevant personal and professional history. The third section is a limited examination of aspects of Tōhoku's modern history pertinent to Takahashi's political and historiographical stance. The fourth section explores facets of mainstream postwar Japanese historiography overlapping Takahashi's work. Finally, I summarize the essence of Takahashi's frontier argument from initial formulation in 1955 to fruition in *Henkyō* in the context of postwar historiography.

1 Takahashi and Umehara 1985; Takahashi 2007a.

2 Kawanishi 2000, pp. 95–97. A good case study of the support for "fascism" engendered in Tōhoku by conditions in the 1930s is Mori 1976.

Section 1: Turner's Frontier Thesis

The historical significance of the frontier in American history was recognized early and often. Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were among those who argued for its formative influence on American national character and institutions, by which they meant "the values of independence, individualism, self-sufficiency, resistance to imposed authority, and so on."[3] But it was Frederick Jackson Turner who popularized the significance of the frontier in American national character. More than 120 years have elapsed since Turner presented his epoch-making paper on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" to a special 1893 meeting of the American Historical Association. The Census Bureau defined the frontier as an area with a population density of two to six inhabitants per square mile, and everything beyond that as wilderness. The 1890 Census revealed that, by this definition at least, American settlement had erased the last traces of Western frontier. Reacting to this momentous declaration, Turner declared, "Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development."[4] It was not the establishment of the New England colonies, but the encounter with and conquest of the wilderness—the *process* of the frontier—that had created a uniquely American culture. It was not the still-too-European cities of the East, but the successive devolution and evolution occurring in the not-yet-civilized "free land" of the American wilderness that was responsible more than anything else for producing American society and American history. "The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization," wrote Turner. At first, "The wilderness masters the colonist," but in time the tables are turned. Sudden exposure to land and opportunity unbound by history and European civilization returned settlers to a sort of primitivity, from which sprang anew a culture of independence and individualism to meet the challenges of this brave New World. In other words, though the geography of the frontier shifted over time as settlement advanced, it was the *process* of the frontier that made America and "Americans."[5]

In 1896, Turner eloquently reprised his argument, the genesis of his now (in)famous "frontier thesis," in an article for the *Atlantic Monthly*:

> The West, at bottom, is a form of society rather than an area. It is the term applied to the region whose social conditions result from the application of older institutions and ideas to the transforming influences of free land. By this application, a new environment is suddenly entered, freedom of opportunity is opened, the cake of custom is broken, and new activities, new lines of growth, new institutions and new ideals, are brought into existence. The wilderness disappears, the "West" proper passes on to a new frontier, and, in the former area, a new society has emerged from this contact with the backwoods. Gradually this society loses its primitive conditions, and assimilates itself to the type of the older social conditions of the East; but it bears within it enduring and distinguishing survivals of its frontier experience.[6]

3 Furniss 2005, p. 25. To the extent that the "frontier" was at various times the zone of contact with Native American societies, and that these native groups were often quite happy to welcome "deserters" from Anglo-European settlements, there may well have been a strong disincentive toward overly coercive government mechanisms even in the early days of the Puritan colonies. Mann 2005, pp. 329–37.

4 Turner 1893.

5 Turner 1893.

6 Turner 1896.

A stream of articles in both academic and popular forums fueled rapid acceptance of his vision of a uniquely American history, heritage, and character—and not incidentally earned a previously unknown Midwesterner a professorship at Harvard. The buzz created by Turner's hypothesis is a testament to the power of his idea. To establish such a firm grip on the American imagination, Turner's frontier thesis must have had "social plausibility" with a significant number of Americans.[7] To be considered a truly great thinker in one's own time, as Turner was, often requires not originality or uniqueness, but rather clarity and eloquence in distilling currents of popular, or highly credible, thought.[8] If Turner's idea had not resonated with public consciousness, it would never have been elevated to such a fundamental national myth, his elevation to Harvard notwithstanding. And if it did not retain a level of plausibility and explanatory power—factual basis notwithstanding—it seems unlikely that Turner's frontier thesis would still be important to the American social imaginary. Turner's vision of American history is so powerful that, decades after its academic rigor has been thoroughly discredited, the "frontier thesis" is still front and center in the popular social imaginary of the American past.

Beginning in the 1930s, and especially since the 1960s' rise of new social histories, Turner's frontier thesis has been subjected to pointed, salient criticism. Turner has been lambasted for "ethnocentrism and triumphalism," and a narrative that elides all but Anglo-white male settlers' conquest of "free land" and its "abundant resources."[9] Richard Hofstadter's 1968 *The Progressive Historians* contains a particularly exhaustive accounting of Turner's exclusions from his frontier vision. They include:

> the careless, wasteful, and exploitative methods of American agriculture;... the general waste of resources and the desecration of natural beauty; the failure of the free lands to produce a society free of landless laborers and tenants...; the rapacity… of the new towns; ... the crudeness and disorder, the readiness to commit and willingness to tolerate violence; the frequent ruthlessness of the frontier mind…; the arrogant, flimsy, and self-righteous justifications of Manifest Destiny engendered by American expansionism.[10]

The mantle of this critique has been taken up by the so-called "New Western historians."[11] Though as the New Western History has continued to grow and mature, Turner is perhaps no longer the overwhelming phantasmal presence at the table that he once was, these scholars have often defined their stance as a Turnerian antithesis. The ritual disavowal of Turner in many New Western histories is, however, further testament to the power and longevity of his idea. As might be expected, then, this scholarly turn has done little to weaken Turner's hold on the popular imagination (Figure 2).[12]

7 The idea of "social plausibility" is taken from Alfonso Pérez-Agote's work on Basque nationalism. Pérez-Agote 2006, p. 50.
8 Oguma 2002, p. 21.
9 Furniss 2005, p. 28.
10 Quoted in Limerick 1995, p. 698.
11 The choice of "Western" rather than "frontier" or "American" history is already an opening salvo against Turner; though Turner was not averse to using the word "West," it is not what he is remembered for. The New Western historians' abandonment of the "'F' word" has not been universally lauded. Klein 1996.
12 Brinkley 1992.

Figure 2. Buffalo Bill and Kit Carson were among the most important popular purveyors of the frontier myth in the late nineteenth century.

The robustness of Turner's frontier thesis is due not merely to its emotional appeal, but also to its malleability, which has made his ideas resilient, and resistant to factual disproval. As eminent New Western historian Patricia Nelson Limerick once lamented, while Turner's work has been exposed as a factual shambles existing on an ephemeral foundation of meta-level presuppositions, his frontier thesis is a conceptual juggernaut. "As they have for nearly a century, Turner's conditions, forces, ideals, institutions, traits, types, elements, and processes remain undissolved… You are free to show, at length and in detail, that these concepts exist without the support of much evidence," but Turner's abstractions, and his legacy, remain undisturbed. Limerick likened struggling with the Turnerian titanic to "fighting the Pillsbury Dough Boy, [which] bent momentarily to absorb challenges and then instantly resumed its previous shape."[13] This is unsurprising, because as Juliet Mitchell argued, "we live as ideas," meaning that narratives, not data, direct and "constrain the possibilities of public discourse."[14] In a discussion of the American frontier in popular culture, Richard Slotkin expressed a similar idea in—perhaps accidentally—more Orwellian terms when he wrote, "Repetition is the essence of [the] process" of creating "visions which compel belief."[15]

In part because he considered the frontier not a fixed locale "but rather a moving zone of occupation," Turner resisted a binding definition for his key term.[16] As a result of its elasticity, Turner's *American* frontier thesis has been applied profusely in world history. Despite its dubious factual basis, Turner's frontier thesis has provided scholars a useful yardstick against which to compare and contrast the developmental history of expanding states. In Russian history, several authors have successfully applied the frontier framework

Figure 3. "Yermak's Conquest of Siberia" (Vasiliy Surikov, 1895), portraying the campaign of Yermak Timofeevich to conquer the khanates and open the Siberian frontier for Moscow.

13 Limerick 1995, pp. 697–98.
14 Davis 2005, pp. 11, 42.
15 Slotkin 1973, p. 20.
16 Furniss 2005, pp. 29–30.

to various stages of Russian history, from the medieval Kievan state to the expansion of the Muscovite empire across Siberia to the Pacific Coast, wherein Siberia is equated with the American frontier. Joseph Wieczynski was the most unabashedly Turnerian, concluding that "the celebrated 'frontier hypothesis' enunciated by Professor Frederick Jackson Turner seems relevant to the evaluation of Kievan Russian history as well as to the American West."[17] But he was hardly alone (Figure 3).[18] The histories of modern colonial states such as Canada, Australia, and Israel have frequently been told around the frontier idea.[19] Israeli history has also been imagined in terms of Turner's frontier narrative, though here the differences are highlighted as often as the similarities. In S. Ilan Troen's schematic overview, for instance, both the United States and Israel were colonized by European émigrés with little regard for the welfare of prior inhabitants, but the Israeli experience of "Zionist colonization was a highly centralized and directed experience that often supported socialist… forms of settlement. It encouraged… self-sacrifice rather than 'individual self-betterment,' which was the guiding ethos and purpose of the American pattern."[20]

One of the most striking uses of the Turnerian frontier thesis came from outside the field of history altogether. In 1978, reflecting on the 24/7-ization of American society, sociologist Murray Melbin explored the premise that time, as well as space, was being colonized by humans. Melbin hypothesized that as life was increasingly lived around the clock, the American night should exhibit characteristics similar to those described by Turner. By the time Melbin wrote "Night as Frontier," Turner's thesis had long been discredited as a narrative of the history of the American West, but its descriptive and evocative power still invited appropriation. Melbin, following Turner, borrowed the Census's quantifiable, demographic frontier definition.[21] To this he added several qualitative characteristics derived from the scholarly literature, including fewer social constraints, decentralized and limited government, and a seemingly contradictory mix of increased violence and increased helpfulness. Melbin's statistical research and fieldwork led him to conclude that though Turner had declared that the frontier was gone, "it has not gone. During the era that the settlement of our land frontier was being completed, there began—into the night—a large-scale migration of wakeful activity that continues to spread over the world."[22]

Despite claims that space and Alaska are, respectively, the "final" and "last" frontiers, new frontiers appear with startling regularity. In recent years, the possibilities of the internet as an "electronic frontier" led more than one scholar to compare the online world to Turner's American West, and to view the communications technology industry as a (post)modern Wild West.[23] While the internet changes at a breakneck pace, the idea of an "electronic frontier" is, for now, alive and well, not least in the form of the non-profit, online civil liberties watchdog organization, the Electronic Frontier Foundation. Today, the headlines tell us, investors are braving new frontiers, facing considerable risk in "frontier markets."[24] In just

17 Wieczynski 1974, p. 284.
18 See, for example, Khodarkovsky 1992; Sixsmith 2012.
19 Application of the model has not prevented scholars from noting differences from American history. Eccles 1983; Davis 2005; Furniss 2005, pp. 32–40.
20 Troen 1999, p. 303. See also Dann 2013.
21 Melbin 1978, p. 6.
22 Melbin 1978, p. 21.
23 English-Lueck 1994; Carveth and Metz 1996.
24 Caldwell 2013.

the last three years, more than a dozen articles with "frontier" in the title have appeared in the journal *Science* alone.[25] We are at no loss for frontiers, and much of both the blame and thanks for the enduring power of this idea is owing to Turner.

Section 2: Takahashi Tomio

Though an important postwar Japanese historical thinker, Takahashi Tomio remains relatively unknown outside Japan. As a leader in Tōhoku studies from 1950 until the mid-1980s, he shaped academic inquiry and public perception of Tōhoku as much as any single scholar of the period.[26] Takahashi came of age professionally in the postwar period, but his writings were in large part a product of his own youth in Tōhoku. He was born in southern Iwate 岩手 prefecture, one of the poorest areas of Japan, in 1921 (d. 2013). Takahashi grew up during Tōhoku's harsh 1930s and the continued deprivation and oppression of Japan's Fifteen-Year War. After graduating from Tōhoku Imperial University's Japanese history program in 1943, Takahashi briefly remained at his alma mater as a researcher before teaching in a high school for several years. He returned to the renamed Tōhoku University in 1949, eventually retiring from a full professorship in 1985 to become president of Morioka College, a private Christian school in his native Iwate. Takahashi was never chaired in history at Tōhoku University. He was relegated to the far less prestigious faculty of "general studies."

Figure 4. Takahashi Tomio. Courtesy of Morioka College Seiryō Dōsōkai.

In hindsight, institutional marginalization was strangely appropriate for a career spent reevaluating the ancient state from its margins and frontiers. *Henkyō* was one of the peaks of Takahashi's lifework, and also one of just a handful of instances in which he applied an overtly theoretical framework to his research. More often, Takahashi's message preceded theoretical considerations as he sifted through the sparse, unilateral documentary evidence about the ancient Northeast. Takahashi's research centered on three topics. First was the identity of the Tōhoku indigenes designated "Emishi" 蝦夷 in ancient accounts. He was instrumental in creating scholarly consensus that this term was not an ethnonym but an ideational abstraction applied more on the basis of sociopolitical and cultural affiliation than on biological difference.[27] His second topic was Hiraizumi 平泉, the twelfth-century Tōhoku polity inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage in 2011. Hiraizumi was the pinnacle of Tōhoku's premodern cultural, economic, and political achievements, and represented the latent potential of the region and its people when not beaten down by a harsh climate or harsher southern neighbors.[28] The third pillar of Takahashi's research was

25 Won 2013.
26 Akasaka 2003.
27 Takemitsu 1994; Kudō 2000, 2001. Takahashi built on the seminal insights of Kita Sadakichi. Kita 1972, 1979b, 1979a; Takahashi 2008. For an extended discussion of Takahashi's "postwar thought" and its relation to the Emishi question, see Hopson 2013.
28 At the time of writing, the only English-language monograph on Hiraizumi is Yiengpruksawan 1998.

the frontier. Other than *Henkyō*, however, the importance of the frontier was mostly taken for granted rather than systematically spelled out.

These themes had a perichoretic relationship to Takahashi's triune project, namely, a subjective history of the Northeast that would demonstrate cultural and historical value where little had been found before.[29] This ambitious revisionism seemed incongruous when Takahashi began his career in the early 1950s. Popular sentiment in and regarding Tōhoku at the time focused on the area's overwhelming "backwardness."[30] Scholars bemoaned the feudal remnants that dragged Tōhoku down, while journalists resurrected prewar images of the Northeast as "the poorest and most culturally backward" area in Japan, no better than the erstwhile colonies.[31] For Takahashi, the issue was not whether Tōhoku was impoverished, but rather how it had become so, what it had been before, and who or what was ultimately responsible. Takahashi argued that the observable economic and cultural "backwardness" of Tōhoku was not a product of modernity, but was established in antiquity with the first encounters between eastern Japan's hunter-gatherers and the rice-centered agrarianism of the western Japanese polity ("Japan"), and maintained by millennia of unrelenting political and economic exploitation and oppression. In this, Takahashi disagreed with the majority of postwar historians, who tend to blame the processes of Japan's modernization.[32] In any case, there is good reason to believe that the particular experiences of his youth in Tōhoku informed Takahashi's perspective more than even he may have realized.

Section 3: Modern Tōhoku, Modern Japan

As hinted above, Takahashi's antipathy to the Japanese state and its rice-centric culture has been attributed in part to his upbringing in Tōhoku.[33] When the modern Japanese state set about developing the home islands and new colonies, Tōhoku was briefly one of the new "frontiers" before quickly being relegated instead to a periphery.[34] The transformations of landscape, society, and economy that accompanied modernization swept through the empire, but after piecemeal initial efforts, policymakers and business leaders mostly abandoned efforts to nurture local secondary and tertiary industry in the Northeast. The rhetoric of "development" continued, but the underlying meaning shifted from industrializing Tōhoku to extracting its resources.

Though the height of open warfare came in the last quarter of the eighth century, conflict between Tōhoku and the Japanese state predates even the Taika Reforms 大化改新 that began in 645, a fact never forgotten by either side.[35] When Tōhoku's chief domains ended up on the wrong side of the Meiji coup, an abundance of historical evidence could be (and was) mobilized to show that the Northeast was recalcitrant, incorrigible, and required stern justice.[36] One

29 Takahashi 1955, pp. 43–44. In another context, Peter Perdue has cogently commented on the importance and difficulty of such a history. Perdue's comments echo Takahashi's rationale and ultimate optimism. Perdue 2005, p. 411.
30 Kawanishi 2007, p. 225.
31 Kawanishi 2000, p. 97.
32 Okada 1983b, 1983a; Kawanishi 2001; Iwamoto 2009.
33 Kikuchi 2002, pp. 262–68.
34 Kabayama et al. 1984, pp. 13–17, 32–33.
35 On the early history of relations between the Japanese polity and the Northeast, in English, see Friday 1997.
36 Ichinohe 1997; Iwamoto 1998, p. 249; Kawanishi 2000, pp. 93–94.

of the first proposals to smooth over the resultant rift was made by Meiji oligarch Ōkubo Toshimichi 大久保利通. Perhaps believing that the combination of active and willing support of the north and better access to its resources was necessary to stabilize political volatility, Ōkubo outlined dozens of projects to buy goodwill in the Northeast and simultaneously extract wealth and resources for Tokyo's use. His plans included expanding and improving port facilities, upgrading roads and waterways, laying rail connecting the provinces and capital, and opening mining operations across the region. These public works projects were to provide at least temporary local employment and long-term benefits to local commerce, and to make the resources of Tōhoku more easily available to industrialists and the new Meiji government. This was the best of both worlds: the return on investment for Ōkubo and the new oligarchs could be measured in short-term political rewards and long-term economic gains.[37]

This work went forward even after Ōkubo's 1878 assassination. But with Ōkubo out of the picture, interest in winning the hearts and minds of Tōhoku diminished. The shift was one of degree, but resulted in a battery of development projects designed more specifically to peripheralize Tōhoku as a source of labor and resources for the developing urban centers. Though rail was welcomed by many in the north as the symbol of civilization itself, some immediately identified the railroad as a giant "straw," bleeding rural Japan dry to feed the hungry cities. The growth of mining and refineries likewise exemplifies the exploitation of Tōhoku's resources by outside capital; by 1912, a dozen or so outside enterprises controlled the overwhelming majority of the mining operations in the Northeast, siphoning off resources and profits to the south and west. The trains out of Tōhoku were hauling not just minerals, but also laborers for the factories and brothels of the major metropolises. Rhetoric notwithstanding, the identity of the actual and intended beneficiaries of "development" was painfully clear. As mining, port, and rail facilities were created and improved to transport Tōhoku's wealth to the cities, electrical power plants were being developed less to electrify the northern reaches of Honshū than to support industry in Kantō.[38] Infrastructure was set in place for the exploitation, not development of the Northeast, and the region remade as a periphery to the new urban cores.[39]

This situation has been described in contrast with that in the colonies, but this is only partially accurate. The Northeast became a convenient supplier of cheap labor and unfinished goods from primary industries, as did the colonies. In Hokkaido, Taiwan, and Korea, military, industrial, and cultural capital was invested to integrate these new colonial possessions into the imperial system. Existing cultural, political, economic, and physical infrastructure were, in some cases, replaced wholesale. Both Tōhoku and the colonies were developed into economic peripheries supporting the Japanese empire's metropole. In Tōhoku, however, the sociopolitical infrastructure of control was already in place, and the metropole already existed. Still, those who claim that Tōhoku was passed over by modernization have a point. Though the fear of being "left behind" by national progress was key to realigning identities and allegiances from the local to the national,[40] the Northeast fell behind the

37 Takahashi 1976, pp. 281–93; Iwamoto 2009, pp. 18–22.

38 Iwamoto 2009, p. 58; Okada 2012, p. 23. Fukushima Daiichi is a notable hangover of Tōhoku's long use as a "National Sacrifice Zone," paralleling the placement of nuclear reactors on Native American reservations in America. Ishiyama 2011; Kawanishi 2011, p. 20.

39 Iwamoto 1998, pp. 244–56; and see also Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997; Wallerstein 2004; Wigen 1995.

40 A similar pattern has been observed in the postwar siting of nuclear and other NIMBY facilities. Penney 2012.

rest of the home island in Japan's rush to modernize and industrialize.[41] Tōhoku's image—both emic and etic—as the "poorest region" of Japan proper, where people lived like the "primitives" of Taiwan, was not entirely unfounded.[42]

The Tōhoku Shinkōkai 東北振興会(Tōhoku Promotion Association; TPA), founded in 1910 and disbanded in 1923, was typical of failed efforts to "develop" the Northeast. The TPA, represented mostly the desires of government oligarchs and urban capital to economically peripheralize Tōhoku, was also typical of contemporary analyses of the region's "backwardness." Chairman Shibusawa Eiichi 渋沢栄一 attributed Tōhoku's failure to industrialize to a combination of "political factors, including the prejudicial administration of the Meiji government," and the feckless and unenterprising spirit of the region's people. He proposed improvements to transportation and industrial infrastructure through outside investment the better to extract Tōhoku's underexploited resources.[43] Businessmen similarly argued that Tōhoku's problem was not poverty, but undeveloped wealth. Virgin forests and fields abound, wrote Kyoto merchant Murai Kichibei 村井吉兵衛, but do nobody any good unless developed. Like Shibusawa, Murai blamed both locals' indolence and the government's failure to take a leading role in using Tōhoku's "embarrassment of riches" to benefit the empire.[44]

Nearly identical sentiment can be found in the work of eminent historian Hara Katsurō 原勝郎. In 1920, Hara, originally trained in Western history, was the first Japanese author to produce a modern, English-language survey history of Japan. He was also responsible for introducing the concept of the medieval (*chūsei* 中世) into Japanese history. Hara, born in 1871 as the son of a samurai of the Morioka domain (now Iwate prefecture), was educated at Tokyo Imperial University and became the first professor of Western history at Kyoto Imperial University. His *Introduction to the History of Japan* brims with pride at Japan's long history and recent accomplishments: "Japan has a brilliant civilization of which we can justly be proud," Hara wrote, one both unique and also a microcosm of world history.[45] Hara's feelings toward his native Northeast are the embarrassed inversion of national pride. In a lecture given in Tōhoku in 1917, he asserted that the Northeast had always been the most savage and backward region of Japan, and still threatened to drag down the entire empire. The Northeast had only begun to ascend from abject barbarism due to the concerted efforts of Tokugawa-period daimyo, and offered no value to Japan. From Hara's perspective as a renowned world historian and devotee of the West on the one hand, and a proud nationalist on the other, Tōhoku's backwardness was a black mark on the new Japanese Empire.[46] Hara's tone softened in *Introduction to the History of Japan*, in which, like Shibusawa and Murai, he recognized the failings of the modern state. In 1920, Hara attributed the "backwardness" of the Northeast less to its inhospitable climate—no worse than northern Germany or Scandinavia—than to exploitation by the modern state:

41 Kawanishi 1996.
42 Kawanishi 2007, p. 212. Kawanishi cites an article by journalist Shimomura Chiaki, reproduced in English as "Touring Famine-Struck Regions: A Report on the Ghastly Conditions in the Northeastern Farm Villages" in Hane 2003, pp. 119–33.
43 Okada 1983b, pp. 35–43. See also Okada 1983a; Iwamoto 2009, pp. 50–53.
44 Kawanishi 2001, p. 32.
45 Hara 1920, p. 1.
46 Hara 1972.

> Unfortunately for the North[east], however, just at the most critical time in its development, the attention of the nation was compelled to turn from inner colonisation to foreign relations. Besides, the subsequent acquisition of new dominions oversea [*sic*] made the nation still more indifferent to [Tōhoku's] exploitation."[47]

All this was before the Depression, tsunami, and famines of the 1920s and 1930s. In the Tokugawa period, Tōhoku had suffered poor rice harvests at the alarming rate of about once every three to four years, but this number actually increased to almost every other year between 1868 and 1926, the result mainly of poor economic policy, rampant commodities speculation, and a string of cold summers. At the same time that Japan was trying to make Tōhoku into the empire's main domestic grain supplier, the Northeast was hammered by continued poor weather that led to a massive famine in 1913.[48] Already high tenant farming rates spiked, adding to the economic vulnerability of many households.[49] When the Great Depression hit, silk prices plummeted, gutting the cash incomes of many families. Wildly fluctuating harvests drove a cycle of precipitous price drops followed by speculative hyperinflation. All across Japan the rhetoric of national crisis and "time of emergency" ruled the day, but in the Northeast the early 1930s' crisis was truly a matter of daily survival. Between 1929 and 1934, Tōhoku experienced two devastating rice crop failures (1931 and 1934) and the 1933 Shōwa Sanriku Earthquake 昭和三陸地震 and tsunami that destroyed more than 7,300 fishing boats and 470 homes, and took over 3,000 lives.[50] As G.C. Allen wrote, the "peasantry faced ruin."[51] The net result of the 1920s' economic doldrums and market instability after 1929 was that rural cash incomes in 1931 were only one third of what they had been five years earlier. Rural debt soared. The only saleable goods left to many families were their daughters, thousands of whom were sold—under many guises—into prostitution. This was compounded by the return of large numbers of unemployed from the cities to their already empty-bellied families, and yet again by ill-advised government fiscal policy. Famine gripped large swathes of Japan in 1931, but the situation in Hokkaido and the three prefectures of northern Tōhoku, where more than 500,000 people went hungry, was particularly dire.[52]

Even after the staggering loss of life and property—including all but four homes in one coastal village—wrought by the Sanriku tsunami, a record 1933 yield signaled the possibility of recovery. This signal was deceiving. 1934 was the Northeast's worst famine year in a century. Conditions in 1931 had been described as inhuman; 1934 was hellish.[53] The summer was almost preternaturally cold, and rain fell every day but one from July 10 until August 8. In September, the Muroto typhoon 室戸台風, which set world records for both low atmospheric pressure and wind speed, sounded the death knell for Tōhoku's grain harvest, and consequently tens of thousands of people. Muroto destroyed 40% of the

47 Hara 1920, p. 27.

48 Amazingly, prior to the crushing 1934 crop failure and resulting famine, harvests were severely depressed in the 1868–69, 1871–72, 1877–80, 1882–87, 1889, 1892, 1894, 1896–97, 1902, 1905, 1910–13, 1919, 1925, and 1931. Chō 1965, p. 78. On the 1913 famine, see Kawanishi 2007, pp. 29, 76.

49 Ichinohe 1997, pp. 28–31.

50 Kawanishi 2007, pp. 64–65.

51 Allen 2003, p. 98.

52 Chō 1965, pp. 78–81; Yamashita 2001, p. 88.

53 Journalist Ōya Sōichi 大宅 壮一 had traveled Tōhoku in 1931 and commented on the "inhuman conditions" of farmers' lives. Yamashita 2001, p. 81.

Northeast's rice crop for that year, or roughly 2,400 kg per household. That same year, raw silk prices plummeted to half of their 1896 value. Starvation was widespread, as even cold-hardy staples like millets did not survive.[54]

Several years later, as Japan's war on the continent stretched on, one Interior Ministry official attributed the "fine bodies" of soldiers from Tōhoku to natural selection: only the fittest survived the harsh conditions of the Northeast.[55] It is hard not to be reminded of the many unfortunate comments that have been made about the positive effects of slavery on the "racial stock" of African-Americans, and easy to imagine that, upon reflection, the appalling socioeconomic conditions described would have left a bitter taste in Takahashi's young mouth. Indeed, though a stunning reversal occurred during the war years, anti-state and anti-rice sentiment ran high in Tōhoku during Takahashi's childhood.[56] His response, once the Fifteen-Year War was over, was threefold. Takahashi accepted the consensus that policymaking was responsible for the impoverishment of the Northeast. He rejected the oft-paired notion that character or "racial" faults shared blame. And he extended Tōhoku's oppression by the state backward in time as far as possible, describing the sweep of history in the Japanese isles in terms of a never-ending struggle between East and West.

Section 4: Postwar Universalist Historiography

In the fall of 1945, Japan's physical, political, and emotional infrastructure lay in ruins. For the majority of Japanese, surrender ended not just an era, but also the value system that had supported it. Early postwar intellectuals were acutely aware of the need to reevaluate Japan's place in the world and their place in Japan.[57] Many postwar thinkers gravitated toward universalist interpretations of history. On the one hand, universalism signaled rejection of the particularism and exceptionalism that had led Japan into war and defeat. On the other, it was a positive response to the modern democratic systems that had led Japan's erstwhile enemies and new overlords to such resounding victory. At the most banal level, if modern, individualistic, American democracy meant strapping soldiers with full bellies and wallets, then for many Japanese there was clearly something to be learned.[58]

Universalist historiography was a prominent feature in the intellectual life of postwar Japan, but was not initially limited to, or even dominated by, embrace of the modernity Japan had struggled so hard to "overcome." The enormous popularity enjoyed by Marxist thought, and Communism especially, during the first years after surrender derived in part from the systematic and universal historiography of past, present, and future offered up by Marxian theory. History unfolded according to "universal laws," which followed a discernible and predictable path to proletariat victory, though Marx himself recognized multiple paths of development. In the first postwar decades, Marxism was so influential in academic circles, and had such a palpable effect on social movements that the United States government was prompted to fire back with its own universalist historiography, "modernization theory." Under this initiative, the Conference on Modern Japan produced six volumes on Japanese modernization praising the accomplishments of Meiji and downplaying both the influence of

54 Ida 1997, p. 62. Overall, the situation is reminiscent of that described in Davis 2001.
55 Ichinohe 1997, p. 30.
56 Kawanishi 2007, pp. 44–49, 143. See also Ichinohe 1997; Kawanishi 1996.
57 Yasumaru and Gluck 1995.
58 Dower 1999, p. 43.

premodern "feudalist" leftovers and the possibility of any deep, structural or cultural causes for Japan's recent stumble into militarism and expansionism. "Modernization theory grew out of efforts by Western… social scientists during the 1950s to chart universal processes of modern transformation," and proponents naturalized Japan's transformation into a democratic-capitalist society as Marxism naturalized the march to proletariat revolution and socialist society.[59] That Arnold Toynbee also enjoyed more enduring popularity in Japan after 1945 than anywhere else in the world is consonant with the widespread popularity of universalist historical visions in the wake of defeat.[60]

Takahashi's work is an example of "postwar thought." Takahashi was an intellectual member of what Maruyama Masao 丸山真男 famously called the "community of contrition" (*kaikon kyōdōtai* 悔恨共同体), meaning that he struggled with the question of how to metabolize the experience of war and defeat to produce a new value system and a new life from the ashes of the wartime regime.[61] In a 2003 interview, Takahashi reflected on the relationship of his career to Japan's 1945 defeat and the postwar process of national reconstruction.

> The study of Tōhoku… was in a sense my answer, from the field of history, to the question of what to do with postwar Japan. I believe that this was something that everyone who directly experienced Japan's defeat and the postwar felt. We had been taught until defeat that Japan was the greatest [country] in the world, but that all vanished in an instant. In its place we were faced with the inescapable reality that Japan was, to the contrary, the worst people and the worst country in the world… I was in the position of looking at things from the field of history, so after some time I began to look for a path to recovery through history. The Japan we had believed in was not a desirable one, so with the rest of the nation I began searching for a Japan to be proud of and have hope for.[62]

As befits his idiosyncratic relationship with Marxism, Takahashi was heavily influenced by both the so-called "*minzoku* faction" 民族派 of Japanese Marxist historians and the anti-Marxist Toynbee. In the final article of a 1958–59 survey of Japanese historiography, Takahashi was effusive about the *minzoku*-faction Marxists—including Ishimoda Shō 石母田正, Tōma Seita 藤間生大, and Matsumoto Shinpachirō 松本新八郎—who constituted the ethnic nation (*minzoku* 民族) as a talismanic subject of "histories that could be mobilized against what they held to be the antagonists of progressive social change, namely, the Japanese state and the American Occupation."[63] Yet Takahashi's subsequent work broadly disparaged the *minzoku* as essentially coeval and coterminous with the state. Whereas the *minzoku* faction discovered the organic *Volk* as victim of the state and its opposing pole of legitimacy, Takahashi saw the emergence of a Japanese "nation-state" in antiquity. He therefore placed blame for both premodern maltreatment of Tōhoku and modern militaristic

59 Garon 1994, p. 347.
60 Kovalio 1994.
61 My definition of "postwar thought" draws from Oguma 2002. For more on the shared struggles of intellectuals in the postwar, see, for example, Oguma 2007; Umehara 2009; Umehara and Azuma 2012, pp. 305–313. On Maruyama, the "community of contrition" and its limitations, see Barshay 1988, pp. 238–47; Yoneyama 1999, pp. 187–89.
62 Interviewed in Akasaka 2003, pp. 222–23.
63 Takahashi 1959, p. 102.

imperialism as much on the nation as on the state.[64] He agreed with the *minzoku* faction historians' conflation of civil and ethnic people, but not entirely with their separation of ethnic nation and state. In essence, he agreed with the conservative premise of the ancient nation-state but found little there to celebrate, and agreed with the Marxist premise of activist, anti-state history writing but took issue with its subject.

He took issue with its scope, as well. Takahashi detested the status afforded the "history of state development" (*kokka hattenshi* 国家発展史) as the sum total of Japanese history because—to the sole benefit of vested interests—records of elites and their power centers, intrigues, and institutions exclude more than they include and hide more than they reveal. According to Takahashi, the two central projects of the ancient state were capital-building in the west and the conquest and rule of the frontier in the east. The latter was "the great project in the frontier of completing an ethnic nation-state (*minzoku kokka* 民族国家)."[65] However, the (mostly retrospective) view from official history was always a one-sided conquest narrative of civilization over savagery and the inevitable march of progress, as illustrated in a famous passage in the *Nihon shoki* in which the sovereign Keikō 景行 is counseled to seize the lands of the Eastern barbarians (*Tōi* 東夷 or Emishi), i.e. Tōhoku. Keikō's advisor reports that "the men and women of this land tie up their hair… and tattoo their bodies. They are of fierce temper [but] their land is wide and fertile. We should attack them and take it."[66] This echoed earlier description of the "Emishi" as ruthless, cultureless animals not "steeped in the kingly civilizing influences." This view persisted down the centuries, leaving no room for a subjective history of the Northeast.[67] Takahashi sought to remedy this imbalance with an "archipelagic history." In practice, this was historiography assigning significance and agency to the eastern half of Japan as well as the western.[68]

Dividing the archipelago at the Fossa Magna, Takahashi saw an East-West cultural and political dynamic as the impetus driving its history—a view in which he was hardly alone. Though Takahashi was a vocal critic of Hara Katsurō, both men subscribed to this environmentally determinist view.[69] Since 1945, a number of prominent intellectuals, including art historian Tanikawa Tetsuzō 谷川徹三, improbably popular iconoclastic medievalist Amino Yoshihiko 網野善彦, and influential philosopher-critic Umehara Takeshi 梅原猛, have shared Takahashi's view of the premodern archipelago as bifurcated east-west into incompatible ecological, cultural, and political systems.[70] Working from this premise, which located the Japanese state proper south and west of the Fossa Magna, and "another Japan" north and east, the greater part of Takahashi's "answer" to the postwar question focused on the history

64 Takahashi 1950, p. 166.
65 Takahashi 2007b, p. 317.
66 Translations of the *Nihon shoki* adapted from Aston 1972, vol. 1, p. 200.
67 Aston 1972, vol. 1, p. 203.
68 Takahashi 1979, p. 10; Takahashi 1986, pp. 3–6. The idea is not unproblematic, but a discussion of the issues inherent in this historical vision is beyond the parameters of this article.
69 Hara cited Ellsworth Huntington as evidence that Tōhoku remained the nation's backwater. This was a disingenuously circular argument, as Hara was one of the three Japanese surveyed to create these rankings; another was fellow Morioka native Nitobe Inazō. Kogita 2009. See Huntington 1915, pp. 1–30, and figure 24. Hara in fact went beyond both Huntington and Takahashi to propose that geography was responsible for an east-west split within Tōhoku, between the more advanced Japan Sea side (old Dewa) and the hopelessly backward Pacific side (old Mutsu). This was one of the first historical conceptions of Tōhoku that Takahashi set out to correct. He argued that "the [modern] field of Japanese history has propagated a myth, namely that it was Dewa in which colonization and the flowering of culture proceeded most quickly, and that Michinoku was a backward province always lagging one step behind." Takahashi 1955, p. 33; Hara 1972.
70 Tanikawa 1971; Amino 1982; Umehara 1994.

of Tōhoku and its indigenous people, culture, and values. Tōhoku had always been the uncivilized, backward, savage outback of Japan, but this audacious inversion of polarities was enabled because defeat momentarily reversed the cline of legitimacy emanating outward concentrically from the imperial throne.[71] The Northeast proved fertile ground for this new history of a "desirable" Japan, an endeavor that occupied the bulk of Takahashi's career.

If Takahashi reified Tōhoku, and if his revisionism was facile, this was because a monolithic "Japan" elicited a monolithic "Tōhoku" as a rival subject of history and source of a postwar value system. Indeed, Takahashi might well be critiqued for historically reifying the nation-state as well. Nor was Takahashi alone in these faults. The *minzoku*-faction Marxists, for instance, structurally reproduced the reductionist régime of collective identity that had supported consolidation of the modern nation and Japanese militarism. The postwar return by Marxist historians to ethnic solidarity through the deliberate erasure of difference, and through the institution and sustenance of a myth of homogeneous national identity, were central to the reconstitution of ethnic nationality. This was intended to present a united front against (variously) capitalism, the state, and the American Occupation. What it actually presented was, in form, a mirror image of the state. As Takahashi's Tōhoku and "archipelago" had done, postwar Marxist resurrection of the ethnic nation reproduced the modern state's logic of representation by collapsing the diversity of identities within the geographical boundaries of the state.[72]

Section 5: *Henkyō* and Beyond

In Japan, interest in regional and local history has consistently been strong—if the uses of both have been inconsistent—but the frontier concept has been relatively weak outside of discussions of Hokkaido. Takahashi Tomio observed in the work of his predecessors and contemporaries alike systemic failure to apprehend the role played by East-West conflict in determining the course of archipelagic/Japanese history. However, Turner's frontier concept offered, he believed, an opportunity to understand archipelagic history in a systematic, theoretical framework. Contrary to the one-way flow of politics, economics, and culture portrayed in national histories, center and periphery, core and frontier, metropole and colony, imperial Other and Self, are mutually constitutive.[73] Turner's frontier theory was the universalist historiographical model chosen by Takahashi to describe the multidirectional flows of archipelagic history. Takahashi initially adopted Toynbee's challenge-and-response model, but by *Henkyō*, Takahashi had abandoned this as "overly formulaic and general" for the Japanese situation. Takahashi turned instead to Turner's frontier theory, admiring its seemingly universal applicability.[74] In universalizing the American experience, Takahashi agreed with Turner himself, who, quoting Achille Loria's *Analisidella Proprieta Capitalista*, declared that "the land which has no history reveals luminously the course of universal history."[75]

71 Barshay 1992, p. 297; Kersten 2004; Sasaki 2012, p. 42.
72 On postwar Marxist historiography generally, see Gayle 2003.
73 See, for example, Nandy 1989 and Hall 2002. Limerick expresses a similar sentiment when she writes, "Like slavery, conquest tested the ideals of the United States. Conquest deeply affected both the conqueror and the conquered, just as slavery shaped slaveholder and slave." Limerick 1988, p. 18.
74 Takahashi 1955; 1979, pp. 12–15.
75 Turner 1920, p. 11.

The frontier model brought into relief the formative and destructive tensions between different cultural, political, and economic systems, one that affected both sides of the equation in profound ways. Takahashi's logic overlaps with Tessa Morris-Suzuki's observation that "The shape of things becomes clearer when one looks at the edge than when one looks at the centre."[76] As noted above, the history of ancient Tōhoku had been written almost exclusively as the Japanese state's unilateral conquest of the Northeast's savage indigenes.[77] In a contradiction emblematic of colonial visions of the "savage natives" and their lands, Tōhoku was always the uncivilized, apolitical, eastern cultural "desert" waiting to be fertilized by the "civilizing influences" of Japan, and simultaneously a land fertile and ripe for the taking.[78] The 749 discovery of gold in present-day Miyagi, the first significant strike in Japan, added volatile fuel to a long-smoldering fire.[79] With this in mind, Takahashi was not above implying at times that the Northeast was the "challenge" and Japanese expansionism the "response," but sly nods and knowing winks aside, it was entirely clear to him that the existence of a frontier rich with resources and land was the prime mover in Japanese state and national expansion and consolidation. As Takahashi put it in *Henkyō*, "the frontier creates both state and nation."[80]

Takahashi had recognized the salience of the frontier concept in his early work. In 1955, his attempt at a "scientific" history of Tōhoku began by combining Toynbee's challenge-and-response model with the concept of the "frontier polity" (*henkyō kokka* 辺境国家) drawn from Matsumoto Shinpachirō's work on the Roman Empire. Takahashi likened the Northeast's response to the challenge posed by the Japanese state to that of the Germanic tribes at the outskirts of the Roman Empire. Following Matsumoto, Takahashi described the faceoff between Romans and Germanics in terms of the "fundamental laws of world history," i.e., challenge and response. However, in keeping with his overall view of history and his Japanese history project, he saw influence as a two-way street. To wit, the Romans and the Germanic peoples influenced each other through trade and exchange as much as through war, and in time the Germanic tribes developed into states with more complex political and economic structures.[81] The transformation of disparate "barbarian" tribes into a fierce and well-organized opponent of the state, imitative in societal and governmental structure but an independent antithesis to the state's thesis, was the same in both Europe and Japan, argued Takahashi, with the external challenge providing the catalyst for development.[82]

The first hints of Takahashi's interest in Turner appear as a chapter of his 1967 *Michinoku no fūdo to kokoro* みちのくの風土と心, fittingly entitled "Frontier" (*furontia* フロンティア):

> Frontier. The word brings to mind the epic of American nation building. The United States transformed the ideals of liberty and independence into national development with hoe and spade, setting in motion westward, ever westward the process of national

76 Morris-Suzuki 1994, p. 1.
77 "In typical outlines of Japanese history," Takahashi wrote, "ancient Tōhoku is reduced to the problem of Emishi conquest." Takahashi 1967, p. 35.
78 Takahashi 1955, pp. 31–32.
79 Takahashi 1963, pp. 190–11.
80 Takahashi 1979, pp. 16, 199–202.
81 Recent work has provided a nuanced picture of the empire-barbarian relationship in Europe, one that agrees, in principle, with Takahashi's supposition of mutual influence. Heather 2006, 2010.
82 Takahashi 1955.

> formation. This is [America's] modern national birth myth… This is a modern, foreign story, whereas the one I want to tell is that of Japan's premodern frontier management. The era and scale of these two narratives is different, but the basic structure of the frontier and its historical significance is essentially unchanged.[83]

However, a dozen years before *Henkyō*, Takahashi was hesitant to apply the model wholesale. He hedged, claiming that the "development" (*kaihatsu* 開発 or *kaitaku* 開拓)—his substitute for "conquest" (*seibatsu* 征伐)—of the Northeast was not as definitive in the history of ancient Japan. Takahashi's most illuminating insight in 1967 is that the commonsense view of the Northeast as an eternally poor and uncivilized backwater cannot possibly be the only historical truth. There is no way to explain why the state and so many of its proxies and pretenders invested tens of thousands of men and untold wealth over centuries in the attempt to control Tōhoku unless the north had something or some things of exceptional value to offer. Sometimes land was forefronted, sometimes wealth, but the appeal of the Northeast was always more than either one.[84]

It is unclear what happened in the interim between Takahashi's initial, tentative forays into a Japanese frontier theory and the confident, book-length argument found in *Henkyō*. This change might be related to the philosophical shift Takahashi underwent after his encounter with Tanaka Kakuei's 田中角栄 *Nihon rettō kaizōron* 日本列島改造論 in the early 1970s. Prior to this, Takahashi had been hopeful that the new postwar order might break the cycle of Tōhoku's oppression.[85] In 1972, then-prime minister Tanaka laid out a bold plan to "reform the archipelago," one that Takahashi uncharacteristically censured by name. In a pointed response, he denounced Tanaka's plan as "evil egalitarianism," and "anti-human development" that would spread the ills of bourgeois urban modernity evenly across every village and hamlet in Japan. Instead of erasing cultural and economic diversity, Takahashi wrote, Japan ought to recognize and utilize heterogeneity as a strength.[86] Perhaps Takahashi saw in Tanaka's plan yet another echo of the ancient pattern of Japanese national development through the subordination of the Northeast within its political, cultural, and economic patterns. This conclusion is suggested by a similarly angry passage in 1976's *Tōhoku no fūdo to rekishi* 東北の風土と歴史, in which Takahashi wrote that the drive to urbanize and homogenize—to "Tokyo-ify"—the landscape is symptomatic of the "ills of civilization" afflicting modern Japan. Japan must start over, he wrote, abandoning modernity, civilization, and even "advancedness" to embrace a different future path, the prototype for which should be provided by Tōhoku.[87]

More likely, however, it was the work of historical geographer Yamada Yasuhiko 山田安彦 that spurred Takahashi on. Yamada read widely in English, French, and German texts, bringing a comparative perspective to ancient Japanese history. In 1976's *Kodai Tōhoku no furontia* 古代東北のフロンティア, Yamada applied the international scholarly literature on frontiers to the problem of ancient Tōhoku. This is an important and suggestive work in its own right, and it is probably no coincidence that it preceded *Henkyō* by only three years. As

83 Takahashi 1967, p. 33.
84 Takahashi 1967, pp. 35–36.
85 Takahashi's most openly optimistic work was probably Takahashi 1971.
86 Takahashi 2004, pp. 478–83.
87 Takahashi 1976, pp. 301–303.

Takahashi had been in the 1950s and 1960s, Yamada was cautious about applying Turner's frontier thesis to the history of ancient Tōhoku, preferring a more nuanced picture of the frontier as a contact (or transitional) zone between cultures. "For our purposes, 'frontier' refers to the zone in which the *ritsuryō* system contacted the Emishi system." While arguing that all historical frontiers share certain characteristics, Yamada identified more structural similarities between the Roman frontier and ancient Tōhoku than between Japan and the American West, arguing that, as both represent the transformation of socioeconomic conditions and the landscape itself, Roman *centuriae* were similar to the *ritsuryō* state's *jōri* 条理 paddy arrangements. Like Takahashi, he saw the "conquest" of Tōhoku as similar to modern Japanese colonial expansionism, contending that state expansion into Tōhoku was primarily the search for an economic solution to domestic political problems.[88]

Yamada cited Takahashi frequently, and in 1979 Takahashi appears to have returned the favor with characteristic flair and audacity. In *Henkyō*, he argued that with only a reversal of cardinal directions, Turner's frontier thesis explained the essence of the ancient Japanese state's historical march, and assigned due importance to the Northeast's role in this process. As the frontier and the "Great West" defined American national history and character to a greater extent than any other factors, so did the frontier project and the "Great East" define the character of the ancient Japanese state; the taking of Tōhoku was the first major project of the *ritsuryō* state.[89] In this context, "frontier" designated the outer limits of the state's political influence as it expanded outward. Thus defined, the frontier is relative to the self-declared "center." Drawing from Yamada and Kita Sadakichi 喜田貞吉, Takahashi wrote that the "frontier" was not a fixed area or areas, but rather a designation for moving, relative zones of contact with uncivilized Others. "Frontier" designates both a condition and a process: it is the process of being assimilated by the center, and the condition of that process's incompletion. It is the expression of an ideal unattained, and a political and cultural goal often framed as a *mission civilisatrice*. For Japan, as for the United States, the history of the frontier is the history of state and national formation. Turner had written that "The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West," and Takahashi concurred wholeheartedly.[90]

This should not be taken to imply that Takahashi had uncritically adopted the Turnerian model, unaware of its shortcomings or critiques. To the contrary, Takahashi was at pains to point out that Turner's is a history "inextricably linked with American imperialist theory, which is philosophically rooted in the idea of Manifest Destiny" (Figure 5), and that his vision of the Western frontier and its place in national formation ignored slavery, erased Native Americans, and beatified the colonization of the West as a sacred mission. However, he pointed out, this is precisely why Turner's model was applicable to Japanese history: Japanese national history had similarly relegated its succession of frontiers to the recalcitrant

88 Yamada praised Takahashi's work as the first systematic historical research on the "frontier structure of ancient Japan" and the structure of Emishi society, calling it "a great beacon for Emishi studies." Yamada 1976, p. 29. On *jōri*, see Kito 1986.

89 What Takahashi called the "Great East" is an aggregate of Azuma (Chūbu-Kantō) and Michinoku (Tōhoku). Though there are important differences in the history and character of these regions, and though they were each "the frontier" in different ages and by different Japanese regimes, Takahashi maintained that in every age the frontier occupied an identical place in state cosmology. Takahashi 1979, p. 19.

90 Turner 1920, p. 3.

objects of history, and in so doing erased their subjectivity.[91] The frontier is never as empty and its land never as "free" as national histories imply. Turner accurately described the frontier's critical role in defining the course of national history, according to Takahashi, but he failed to recognize the subjectivity of the frontier's indigenous inhabitants. Takahashi did not consistently distinguish between the Turnerian frontier as universal historical dynamic and the frontier thesis as national mythology because he wanted to describe Japanese history using both Turner and his critics.

Figure 5. "American Progress" (John Gast, 1872), an allegorical painting capturing the spirit of "manifest destiny."

Takahashi, whose mission was to find value in the indigenous culture and people of the frontier, split with Turner on this critical point. Still, as he had in 1967, Takahashi insisted that the structural similarity of Japanese and American history was indicative of similar underlying forces at work and a similar historical course. In summary, Takahashi understood Turner's model to argue that the frontier was the center of American history. The westward advance of American settlement was the course and explanation of American development. The frontier both served as a "safety valve," providing release for tensions built up in the East, and was "the line of most rapid and effective Americanization," the source of innovation and renewal that sundered "the bond of custom." The three-century process of westward expansion differentiated Americans from Europeans, making a "New People" for the "New World." The frontier gave rise to the qualities, ideologies, and institutions characterizing the New People and their New World, such as democracy, individualism, isolationism, and nationalism. This "westward movement" in the North American continent was the continuation of the "westward movement" across the Atlantic.[92] Turner wrote that

91 Takahashi 1979, p. 21. Turner's theory is an example not only of the critical dynamic of state and national formation, but also of what James Scott has called "seeing like a state." Scott 1998, p. 3.

92 Quotations from Turner 1920, pp. 1, 4, 38.

"The oldest West was the Atlantic coast," the western "frontier" for the so-called "pilgrims."[93] The ancient Japanese polity, also established by immigrants, or at least by imported culture (Takahashi is not explicit), expanded outward from a base in the Kinai region of southwestern Japan; it is analogous to the thirteen colonies. It is the cradle of the state, and of its culture, people, and ideals. New England and Kinai 畿内 were the tiny incubators (both only one-tenth of the national landmass total) in which the dream of national unification was hatched and matured. Just as the American colonies would expand westward, so the Kinai polity had turned its eyes to the east. The Chūbu and Kanto regions (Azuma 東国) were together Japan's "Old East" 古東部, equivalent to Turner's "Old West." For Turner, the Old West "includes the back country of New England, the Mohawk Valley, the Great Valley of Pennsylvania, the Shenandoah Valley, and the Piedmont—that is, the interior or upland portion of the South, lying between the Alleghanies [*sic*] and the head of navigation of the Atlantic rivers marked by the 'fall line.'"[94] The land beyond the Appalachians was the "new West," stretching all the way to the Pacific Coast. Tōhoku, in this schema, would be the "New East" 新東部, and Takahashi suggests (perhaps playfully) that Hokkaido be known as the "Far East" 極東部.[95]

Conclusion

In 1993, the centennial of Turner's seminal *Significance of the Frontier in American History*, Takahashi was president of Morioka College. That year, he composed an essay in the college's journal of comparative cultures following up on the issues he had addressed in *Henkyō*. Takahashi retraced his "trial and error" quest for a universal theory of frontier history, ending with Turner. Though Turner had intended his model as specific rather than general, Takahashi reiterated his belief that "Turner's thesis transcends… its historical limitations to stand as a universal structural theory of 'The Frontier'."[96] It is striking that he simultaneously concluded that the study of Tōhoku and the frontier was still disparaged. If Turner is right and the study of the frontier is the study of the American nation, what of the frontier in Japan? In *Henkyō*, Takahashi had declared that his vision was "not simply a theory that the frontier ought to be given greater weight" in history, but rather a claim that the frontier is constitutive of the state and the nation. "Therefore, without an understanding of the character, structure, and significance of the frontier, we cannot even begin to consider the state and the people, and therefore history and culture."[97] In 1993, he remarked that study of the frontier, and by extension of Tōhoku, remained a footnote: "Any field which deals in the frontier is [treated as] second or third class."[98] Though Takahashi's appropriation of the Turnerian frontier never gained traction, by the early 1990s, the situation for Tōhoku was markedly different from 1955, or even 1979. In 1993, the study of the Northeast was more than just a respectable "first class" venture. Tōhoku was in the midst of a renaissance

93 Turner 1920, p. 67.
94 Turner 1920, p. 68. The standard model for the taking of Tōhoku is one of gradualism in peacetime punctuated by aggressive warfare. Imaizumi 1994, pp. 201–207. This is similar to Turner's idea of multiple "fall lines" in the westward expansion of the United States. Turner 1920, p. 9.
95 Takahashi 1979, pp. 17–20.
96 Takahashi 1994, p. 1.
97 Takahashi 1979, p. 16.
98 Takahashi 1994, p. 2.

that would remake the Northeast as an indispensible piece of Japanese national history. The foundation of this paradigm shift owed much to Takahashi's work, but its proximal causes pulled the field in new directions and brought new faces and ideas to the forefront of Tōhoku studies.

In 1988, excavations in Hiraizumi had unearthed the northern polity's administrative center. This discovery, one of the richest Heian period archaeological finds in history, placed Hiraizumi in the spotlight and paved the way for its World Heritage inscription.[99] NHK's 1993 selection of Takahashi Katsuhiko's 高橋克彦 five-volume Hiraizumi saga, *Homura tatsu* 炎立つ, as its flagship, yearlong historical drama, was not coincidence. In 1992, the Sannai Maruyama 三内丸山 site in Aomori prefecture revolutionized public perception of the prehistoric Jōmon period preceding the introduction of rice from the mainland. This spectacular site fueled a "Jōmon boom" that drew hundreds of thousands of tourists from all corners of Japan.[100] The significance of the "Jōmon boom" for the national imaginary cannot be overstated. Nor, sadly, can it be fully explored here. Suffice it to say that for the first time ever Jōmon was admitted by the public into the narrative of national history. Additionally, a select group of intellectuals, Umehara Takeshi prominent among them, chose to see non-agrarian Jōmon as the true roots of Japanese culture.[101] Because Jōmon culture was richest in Tōhoku, the implication was that the roots of the Japanese nation were to be found in the Northeast.[102] This was nothing less than the very value inversion for which Takahashi had hoped and worked. Takahashi's continued pessimism is all the more remarkable when set against this background. True, this was only the beginning of the Jōmon boom, and the re-evaluation of Tōhoku with it, but the future should have looked rosy nonetheless.

Perhaps Takahashi was dismayed by his own fading influence. The 1988 Hiraizumi excavations had changed the playing field, and documentary history was rapidly being reduced to an amanuensis to archaeology. Takahashi's eminence even among historians was in jeopardy, as a new generation of scholars assumed leadership roles. Most of all, his success was proving his downfall: Takahashi was becoming the paradigm to be overcome rather than the iconoclast to overcome it. Indeed, Akasaka Norio, who succeeded Takahashi as the doyen of Tōhoku studies in the early 1990s, explicitly rejected the "frontier" historical model, arguing that his "Tōhoku-ology" (*Tōhokugaku* 東北学) sought first "to dismantle and overcome the view of Tōhoku as frontier (*henkyō shikan* 辺境史観)."[103] Nevertheless, though Akasaka denounced the frontier model, he did so in service of the same goal to which Takahashi had applied Turner's thesis: the valorization of Tōhoku's history and culture. In the end, despite Takahashi's dismay that his frontier thesis never gained popularity, his larger goal of recuperating the Northeast appears, for now, to have been remarkably successful.

99 Hiraizumi Bunka Kenkyūkai 1992, 1993.

100 Habu and Fawcett 1999; Hudson 2003.

101 See Umehara 1990, 1994, 2001. By the time of Sannai Maruyama's discovery, Umehara had already accepted that Japan was a synthesis of east-west opposing cultural modes. Sannai Maruyama only strengthened this conviction. It is notable, however, that Umehara's apostasy came in the 1980s. Umehara 1976. Okamoto Tarō was the first major postwar figure to "discover" Jōmon, and his work remains influential. Okamoto 1957, 1999; Sasaki 2006; Akasaka 2007.

102 Kataoka 1997.

103 Akasaka 1998, pp. 253–54.

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