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Séminaire collectif du Centre de
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Histoire du Japon moderne et contemporain : permanences et ruptures

« Ennobling the Savage Northeast: Popular Visions of Tōhoku, 1980-2011 »

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Abstract

Northeast Japan (Tōhoku) became the subject of world attention six years ago, with the triple disaster of March 2011. However, Tōhoku's history and significance to emic understandings of Japanese self and nationhood remain poorly understood. This lecture explores the region's place in postwar Japanese thought, focusing on the period 1980-2011. After 1945, a group of mostly local intellectuals attempted to overcome this image and rehabilitate the Northeast as a source of new national values. In the 1980s, this early postwar Tōhoku recuperation movement became a critical source for antimodern, anti-Western, neoconservative valorization of native Japanese identity. Reconceived as a repository of unspoiled and authentic Japanese national roots and traditions, the Northeast was drafted into the culture wars to support the idea that Japanese culture enjoyed a special destiny as the panacea for modernity's ills.