Max Ward. Thought Crime: Ideology and State Power in Interwar Japan. Duke University Press, 2019.

TSAI, CATHERINE
Harvard University : PhD. Candidate, History and East Asian Languages

Review

_____

Max Ward. *Thought Crime: Ideology and State Power in Interwar Japan*. Duke University Press, 2019.

BOOK REVIEW BY CATHERINE TSAI

Bᴇɢɪɴɴɪɴɢ in the late 1970s, English-language scholars turned their attention to the relationship between state power and the 1925 Peace Preservation Law. These scholars were particularly interested in relating the law to the mass conversion of leftist intellectuals and activists to fascism in the 1930s, a phenomenon known as *tenkō* 転向. Richard Mitchell's *Thought Control in Prewar Japan* (1976) focused on the legal and administrative practices used by the state to crack down on threats to imperial orthodoxy, noting that policies enacted to enforce the repressive law were not simply issues of policing criminality, but of symbolically uniting the polity around the emperor.[1] While Mitchell's view was a state-centered approach, Germaine Hoston's *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan* (1986) explored how leftist intellectuals grappled with the problem of *tenkō*. She argued that ideological conversion was not necessarily a capitulation to the state, but more often an effort by leftists to reconcile the contradictions between Marxist universalism and the proclaimed uniqueness of the Japanese polity, embodied by the concept of *kokutai* 国体.[2] An exact definition of *kokutai*, literally "national body," is difficult to pinpoint, but in the context of the 1920s and 1930s, it signified the unique Japanese cultural values centered around an "unbroken imperial line."[3] Patricia Steinhoff's *Tenkō: Ideology and Societal Integration in Prewar Japan* (1991) examined the backgrounds of ideological converts, suggesting that conversion was not primarily an intellectual but rather a personal endeavor, motivated by a desire to return to shared sociocultural ties to the family, the nation, or nativist spirituality.[4]

These three monographs focus on the institutional, intellectual, and individual ramifications of the Peace Preservation Law and *tenkō*. Nearly three decades later, Max Ward has furnished the fourth "i" in this discourse—ideology—in his theoretically rigorous and reinvigorating book *Thought Crime: Ideology and State Power in Interwar Japan*. Ward traces the ideologies that transformed the Police Preservation Law from a legal

_____

1 Mitchell, *Thought Control*, p. 184.

2 Hoston, *Marxism and the Crisis of Development*, p. 184. Hoston also wrote about *tenkō* as a solution to the ideological tensions between Marxism and nationalism. See Hoston, "Tenkō."

3 For more on the ideological uses and transformations of *kokutai*, see Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths*, pp. 138–45.

4 Steinhoff, *Tenkō: Ideology and Societal Integration*, p. 165. See also Steinhoff, "Tenkō and Thought Control."

instrument used to suppress communists and anti-co-lonial nationalists into a rehabilitative program that converted thousands of former subversives throughout the Japanese empire. His book marks a necessary inter-vention in reasserting the importance of state power, elucidating the fascist logic of the emperor system and *kokutai* embedded within imperial ideology, as well as the mechanisms used to articulate it in Japan and colo-nial Korea during the interwar and wartime periods.[5]

Ward's introduction, "The Ghost in the Machine: Emperor System Ideology and the Peace Preservation Law Apparatus," discusses the coproduction of the emperor system and the Peace Preservation Law. Es-tablishing Foucault, Althusser, and Poulantzas as his theoretical trinity, Ward pushes against characteriza-tions of the Peace Preservation Law and *tenkō* as merely external projections of state power. Using Gilbert Ryle's concept of the "ghost in the machine," Ward argues that the emperor system was the ideological specter that justified the creation of the Peace Preservation Law and enabled the insidious expansion of its powers over time. At the same time, because the emperor system was initially an ambiguous concept, the creation and expansion of repressive and ideological apparatuses gave sovereign form to the system itself. Thus, while the Peace Preservation Law and *tenkō* were visible manifes-tations of state power, because their fundamental goal was to unify the individual with state ideology, they must also be understood as projects of interiorization.

Chapter 1, "Kokutai and the Aporias of Imperial Sovereignty: The Passage of the Peace Preservation Law in 1925," examines the creation of ideology through the deployment of terms such as *kokutai* and *chōken* 朝憲 ("laws of the state") in the debates leading to the passage of the Peace Preservation Law. The rise of Bol-shevism, the agitation for universal male suffrage, and the increase in anti-colonial nationalist movements in Korea in the early 1920s created profound anxieties for Japanese officials. By invoking *kokutai* and *chōken*, Ward argues that the proponents of the law were inad-vertently forced to confront questions over the origins of Japan's sovereignty. The Meiji Constitution embod-ied a "zone of indistinction" (p. 28) because it both

established sovereignty through its promulgation and justified sovereignty as an inheritance from an unbro-ken lineage of the imperial household. By emphasizing the latter aspect, proponents of the law thus signified threats as foreign in nature, justifying the crackdown against anarchists and communists. However, while this native/foreign dichotomy clarified the categories of ideological threats, it also created a disjuncture, or aporia, in the applicability of *kokutai* between the inner and outer territories, or the Japanese and colonized Ko-rean population.

Chapter 2, "Transcriptions of Power: Repression and Rehabilitation in the Early Peace Preservation Law Apparatus, 1925–1933," traces the development of the rehabilitative arm of the law, or the ideological state apparatus. The late 1920s was the heyday of the repressive state apparatus against communists in the metropole and anti-colonial nationalists in Korea; this apparatus included legislation, police, courts, colonial administration, and prison networks. While crack-downs against communist movements continued into the 1930s, the work of district court procurators (*kenji* 検事), notably Hirata Isao 平田勲 (1888–1942), laid the groundwork for reform policies. Concerned over the possibility of ideological recidivism, officials began to create profiles of thought criminals. This archive iden-tified reasons for ideological deviance, which allowed the state to implement programs for rehabilitation and thus reintegration into the national body. In the Korean context, however, this logic did not apply. Anti-colonial nationalism was not a threat to the ideology of imperial sovereignty, but rather to the content—or the territo-ries—into which sovereignty extended.

Chapter 3, "Apparatuses of Subjection: The Rehabil-itation of Thought Criminals in the Early 1930s," ex-plores the utilization of media and religion in creating the conditions for the *tenkō* phenomenon, focusing on the roles of the Imperial Renovation Society and the fa-mous disavowals of the Japanese Communist Party by former leaders Sano Manabu 佐野学 (1892–1953) and Nabeyama Sadachika 鍋山貞親 (1901–1979) in 1933. Sano and Nabeyama did not use the term *tenkō* to ex-plain their renunciation of communism but explained their conversion as an intellectual exercise. The media used the word *tenkō* to describe this event as a demon-stration of loyalty to the emperor, creating a public nar-rative for ideological conversion. The other major event, though less famous, was the conversion of Kobayashi Morito 小林杜人 (1902–1984) under the guidance of a

<hr>

5   Although Ward is not concerned with questions on Japanese fascism, his use of Herbert Bix's conception of "emperor-system fascism" (p. 4) indicates that he sees ideological formation in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s as fascist and the emperor system as the vehicle that facilitated this situation.

Buddhist prison chaplain.[6] In his semiautobiographical book, *Up until Leaving the Communist Party* (共産党を脱するまで), Kobayashi described his conversion as a spiritual reawakening, as a move away from the universalist struggle against capitalist exploitation to the transcendent universalism of Buddhism (pp. 95–96). This newfound religiosity prompted Kobayshi to join and then head the Imperial Renovation Society, providing spiritual guidance and paternalistic support for imprisoned thought criminals.

Chapter 4, "Nurturing the Ideological Avowal: Toward the Codification of Tenkō in 1936," follows the expansion of the Thought Criminal Protection and Supervision Law (Hogo Kansatsu Seido 保護観察制度) and the establishment of Thought Criminal Protection and Supervision Centers (Shisōhan Hogo Kansatsusho 思想犯保護観察所) in the mid-1930s. Here, the focus turns to structures and ideologies implemented to prevent ideological recidivism. Successful, sustained conversion required the cooperation of various communities, ranging from the family to the wider community to the emperor himself, to ensure that the thought criminal was given proper guidance. Ward focuses on the case of Sim Kil-bok, a former Korean communist. For Japanese officials, ideological converts like Sim were considered examples of loyal colonial subjects, of people who realized that the path for Korea's development was not through national liberation, but through assimilation.

Chapter 5, "The Ideology of Conversion: Tenkō on the Eve of Total War," returns to the aporia explained in chapter 1, discussing the inevitable bifurcation in manifestations of *tenkō* between the Japanese home islands and the Korean Peninsula during the Second World War. The Japanese invasion of China in 1937 created an opportunity for former thought criminals to prove their conversion by supporting the war effort. This also led to a proliferation of "thought war" imagery in everyday spaces to tie the war front with the home front, such as linking the ideological envelopment of China by the Soviet Union and the West with a spiritual vigilance that must be maintained to defend the Japanese empire. In terms of demonstrating support for the war, government officials understood this process as rela-

tively straightforward in the Japanese home islands, involving the mobilization of men and materials to the war front. In Korea, however, because the communist movements were also tied to anti-colonial nationalism, the colonial officials recognized that *tenkō* did not mean the internal recuperation of a Japanese spirit, but the external recognition of the power of the Japanese imperial state.[7]

Ward concludes with a rumination on three transwar legacies of *tenkō*. First, even though the Peace Preservation Law was abolished during the Allied Occupation, anxieties over domestic political instability led the Japanese government to create laws and agencies that would police mass movements and encourage public safety. Second, *tenkō* was a major locus of discussion and study for postwar leftist intellectuals, who lauded those communists who resisted conversion but also confronted mass conversion as a failure of ideology.[8] Third, the enduring institution of the emperor raises questions about the nature of freedom in the postwar era. Although stripped of his divinity after World War II, the wartime logic of ideological conversion as a gift from the emperor was transposed in postwar discourse as criminal rehabilitation—a gift to the nation, whose unity and longevity is still symbolized by the emperor.

Although Ward states that the colonial condition is not a primary focus of his work, his explanation of *kokutai* and *tenkō* in the Korean context necessarily brings forth questions on this topic. Ward implies that a fundamental aspect of colonial difference was rooted in the ethnonationalist nature of *kokutai*, a point that has also been echoed by scholars of Korean history such as Keongil Kim and Chulwoo Lee.[9] While this explains why repression was emphasized over rehabilitation in Korea, the problem of *kokutai* should not solely be considered as a transposition from Japan into the colonies. Assimilation projects such as *dōka* 同化 and *kōminka* 皇民化 changed the parameters from which the col-

---

6   Adam Lyons has made a similar observation about the role of prison chaplains in promoting *tenkō*. He notes that prison chaplains understood *tenkō* to be a religious rather than ideological problem. Lyons, "From Marxism to Religion," p. 195.

7   This is echoed by Keongil Kim; see "Japanese Assimilation Policy."

8   Notably, *tenkō* was also appropriated by young college students of noted historian Tsurumi Shunsuke 鶴見俊輔 (1922–2015) who saw parallels between the conversion of leftist intellectuals to fascism in the 1930s and the demands to conform either to Communist Party orthodoxy or white-collar life in the 1950s. For more on this subject, see Bronson, *One Hundred Million Philosophers*.

9   Kim, "Japanese Assimilation Policy"; Lee, "Modernity, Legality, and Power."

onies were integrated into the metropolitan sphere as well as the responses of the colonized to colonial rule.[10]

A cursory examination of the situation in Taiwan, for example, reveals a rather different outcome from Korea. Fewer Taiwanese were arrested on the basis of the Peace Preservation Law than in Korea and only a quarter of those accused of thought crimes were prosecuted, suggesting that the law held less relevance.[11] Furthermore, Sayaka Chatani's recent monograph[12] argues that assimilation and war mobilization were complex processes, and that rural youth were more receptive to Japan's imperial project, motivated by aspirations of upward mobility. In these cases, *kokutai* and *tenkō* were not key components to the success or failure of ideological assimilation in the colonies. Rather, it was the social conditions of particular localities that determined whether or not individuals aligned with, if not wholly accepted, the imperial project.

Nevertheless, *Thought Crime* is an invaluable addition to the historiography of the Peace Preservation Law and a cogent articulation of ideological formation in the interwar and wartime period, revealing the gradual, panoptic dominance of the state as well as some of the constitutive elements of fascism in Japan. The book opens exciting new lines of inquiry regarding colonial governmentality as well as the transwar legacies of the *tenkō* phenomenon.

Reference List

Bronson, Adam. *One Hundred Million Philosophers: Science of Thought and the Culture of Democracy in Postwar Japan.* University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.

Caprio, Mark. *Japanese Assimilation Policies in Colonial Korea, 1910–1945.* University of Washington Press, 2009.

Chatani, Sayaka. *Nation-Empire: Ideology and Rural Youth Mobilization in Japan and its Colonies.* Cornell University Press, 2018.

Ching, Leo. *Becoming "Japanese": Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation.* University of California Press, 2001.

Gluck, Carol. *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period.* Princeton University Press, 1987.

Hoston, Germaine A. *Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan.* Princeton University Press, 1986.

Hoston, Germaine A. "Tenkō: Marxism and the National Question in Prewar Japan." *Polity* 16:1 (1983), pp. 96–118.

Kim, Keongil. "Japanese Assimilation Policy and Thought Conversion in Colonial Korea." In *Colonial Rule and Social Change in Korea, 1910–1945*, ed. Hong Yung Lee, pp. 206–33. University of Washington Press, 2013.

Lee, Chulwoo. "Modernity, Legality, and Power in Korea under Japanese Rule." In *Colonial Modernity in Korea*, ed. Gi-wook Shin and Michael Robinson, pp. 21–51. Harvard University Press, 1999.

Lyons, Adam. "From Marxism to Religion: Thought Crimes and Forced Conversions in Imperial Japan." *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 46:2 (2019), pp. 193–218.

Mitchell, Richard. *Thought Control in Prewar Japan.* Cornell University Press, 1976.

Steinhoff, Patricia. "Tenkō and Thought Control." In *Japan and the World: Essays on Japanese History and Politics in Honour of Ishida Takeshi*, ed. Gail Lee Bernstein and Haruhiro Fukui, pp. 78–94. London: MacMillan Press, 1988.

Steinhoff, Patricia. *Tenkō: Ideology and Societal Integration in Prewar Japan.* New York: Garland, 1991.

Wang, Tay-sheng. *Legal Reform in Taiwan under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1895–1945: The Reception of Western Law.* University of Washington Press, 2000.

---

10 *Dōka*, or assimilation, was not an entirely clear project, consisting of halting attempts at social, political, and cultural integration. On the other hand, *kōminka*, or "imperialization," has been understood as a more severe endeavor to make the colonized population become "Japanese" in order to mobilize for the war effort. There is debate over whether *dōka* and *kōminka* are part of the same ideological continuum or are radically different projects. For more on the ideologies and practices of assimilation in Korea and Taiwan, see Caprio, *Japanese Assimilation Policies*, and Ching, *Becoming "Japanese."*

11 Wang, *Legal Reform in Taiwan*, p. 116. Wang argues that the lack of relevance of the Peace Preservation Law can be explained by the end of violent anti-colonial resistance by the Han Chinese population after 1915 and the decline of the Communist Party movement by 1931.

12 See Chatani, *Nation-Empire*.