

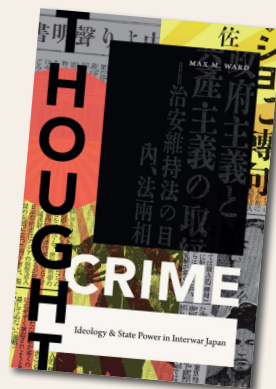
BOOK REVIEW

Thought Crime: Ideology and State Power in Interwar Japan

By Max M. Ward

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xviii + 294 pages.

Reviewed by Jason MORGAN



In *Thought Crime: Ideology and State Power in Interwar Japan*, Max M. Ward examines a key mechanism in maintaining the balance between the Japanese empire and imperial subjects: *tenkō*, or what Ward calls “ideological conversion” (p. 1). By means of *tenkō*—a conversion to the imperial cause employed by police, bureaucrats, and affiliated functionaries such as Buddhist prison chaplains—the Japanese government was able to preserve a degree of political continuity across the empire, as well as diachronically in the face of extraordinary changes in East Asia and the wider world during the 1920s and 1930s. Ward has produced an in-depth study of the *tenkō* phenomenon and, in the process, a fascinating intellectual history of prewar, wartime, and the early years of postwar Japan.

In his introduction, Ward explains that he will “engage with Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)” in analyzing the “Peace Preservation Law apparatus,” the set of laws and state practices which attempted to define and maintain the *kokutai*, or national character of Japan (p. 13). Ward also relies heavily on Michel Foucault’s “tripartite schema of sovereign-juridical power, disciplinary power, and governmentality” to understand how the central government instilled in subjects a conformity to the *kokutai* through “a single security complex” (p. 13). Ward incorporates insights from Nicos Poulantzas’ investigation of “Foucault’s theory of power,” and considers how Poulantzas’ reading of Foucault might fit “into a structural-Marxist theory of the state” (p. 11). But not all is theory. In the introduction we also meet Hirata Isao, director of the Tokyo Thought Criminal Protection and Supervision Center (Tokyo Shisōhan Hogo Kansatsu Sho), who helps show how the theories of Foucault, Althusser, and Poulantzas actually played out “on the ground” during the decades of *kokutai*-shaping and *tenkō*.

In chapter 1, Ward focuses on the 1925 Peace Preservation Law (Chian Ijihō). Central to Ward’s argument is the “ghost in the machine” metaphor, and how “this metaphysics [of the sovereign emperor, the imperial subject, and ‘the radiant Japanese spirit (*nihon seishin*)’] was produced through and animated the particular policies and practices of the Peace Preservation Law apparatus” (p. 9). “Kokutai,” Ward argues, “indexed the ghosts that animated an ever-expanding institutional apparatus to combat political crime in the interwar Japanese empire” (p. 22). Here Ward makes a significant departure from many prior studies by inquiring into “the constitutive ambiguity of sovereignty itself” (p. 25).

It is not just that the Japanese *kokutai* was notoriously difficult to define. More generally, “the deployment of *kokutai* indicates a problem immanent to sovereignty” (p. 25), Ward writes. His remit is thus twofold: to understand how *kokutai* “was inflected in the particular imperial form of the prewar Japanese state,” as well as how sovereignty more universally is manifested in and transmitted through politics (p. 25). Ward tracks the debates around the Peace Preservation Law to find that *seitai* and *kokutai* began appearing as “an inseparable categorical dyad—wherein *kokutai* signified the location of sovereignty, and *seitai* designated the means or form through which that sovereignty was expressed” (p. 39).

Chapter 2 explores how the ideological framework of the Peace Preservation Law guided the work of state agents during the early stages of anti-communist activities. Ward cites the work of Mizuno Naoki, who argues that “the first application of the Peace Preservation Law was actually against suspected communists in Korea” predating the arrests of members of the Marxist-Leninist group Gakuren during the winter of 1925–1926 (p. 57). Mizuno notes, as Ward points out, that *kokutai* discourse “was not used during the initial incorporation of Korea into the Japanese Empire” in 1910, but was used to prosecute suspected thought criminals and Korean independence activists as part of the Peace Preservation Law regime (p. 63). Special leniency was a common tool in Japan to coax thought offenders back into society, but “Korean colonial procurators emphasized prosecution over reform,” Ward finds (p. 73).

In chapter 3, Ward combines a Foucauldian analysis of the criminal and the reformable delinquent with Althusser’s theories of how ideology is perpetuated through “institutions and the practices specific to them” (p. 77). This theoretical blending helps us understand how the Imperial Renovation Society (Teikoku Kōshinkai) “became a laboratory for experimenting with and developing the procedures that would come to define the state’s policy of ideological conversion (*tenkō*)” (p. 78). One of Ward’s foci here is the sensational(-ized) *tenkō* of two incarcerated Japan Communist Party leaders, Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika in the summer of 1933 (p. 79). Sano and Nabeyama’s conversion showed that the thought-policing apparatus could be used by the state proactively as a thought-reforming catalyst. Ward contrasts Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses (pp. 86–89) with the early postwar work of Japanese intellectual and Harvard graduate “Tsurumi Shunsuke and the Shisō no Kagaku Kenkyūkai (Science of Thought [Research Organization]),” which “between 1959 and 1962 ... published a three-volume study of *tenkō*, [thus establishing] a methodological framework for many later studies” (pp. 84–85). Ward argues that spontaneous conversions, such as Nabeyama’s (p. 85), were actually embedded in an Althusserian ideological network continually reproducing ideological totality and control. The entire point of *tenkō*, on this reading, becomes the preservation of the “productive capacity” of the convert to the social order. Ward argues that, “in the process of eliminating the ideological threat against the imperial state, the Imperial Renovation Society and groups like it served to also relink individual subjects to their labor capacities in specific social stations” (p. 89). Ward highlights the work of the head of the Imperial Renovation Society’s Thought Section, Kobayashi Morito—himself a convert from communism—in setting up a more precise working model for encouraging *tenkō* in thought criminals (pp. 89–103).

Chapter 4 is a continuation of chapter 3. Here, Ward extends his investigation of the burgeoning *tenkō* apparatus: within the Japanese metropole and on the Korean Peninsula,

where Kobayashi and the Imperial Renovation Society were rehabilitating former thought-criminals like “reformed Korean communist, Sim Kil-bok” (p. 126), and others still struggling with *tenkō*. Across time, they were seeing the changes in practice through to the “passage of the Thought Criminal Protection and Supervision Law in 1936” (p. 142).

In chapter 5, Ward examines the Tokyo Thought Criminal Protection and Supervision Center (Shisōhan Hogo Kansatsu Sho) (pp. 145, 149). An early 1938 “Thought War Symposium (Shisōsen kōshūkai)” organized by the Cabinet Information Division and held at the prime minister’s residence (p. 161), and a simultaneous “public Thought War Exhibition (Shisōsen tenrankai) in Takashimaya Department Store in downtown Tokyo” (p. 166), show the dual nature of the *tenkō* apparatus. It was coordinated during massive bureaucratic meetings and also sold to the general population as preparation for total war. Kobayashi’s “mobilizing his fellow *tenkōsha* in a wartime factory” (p. 178) symbolizes, for Ward, the vicissitudes of the thought reform movement, and the ways in which converts to the *kokutai* were co-opted into service to the wartime state. The Althusserian thread remains prominent throughout Ward’s investigation into the history and intellectual significance of *tenkō*.

Thought Crime: Ideology and State Power in Interwar Japan is a theoretically and archivally rich intervention into discourse surrounding *tenkō* and the *kokutai*, two of the most ubiquitous and contentious topics for scholars of prewar and wartime Japan. Max Ward’s incorporation of theory into the body of literature on thought crime in Japan yields an important rethinking of politics and ideology during this most fraught of historical periods. Reading Ward’s portrayal of the *tenkō* apparatus in Japan, one sees both the state’s overweening interest in, and the human faces of, the attempt to indoctrinate subjects into an imperial gestalt constantly changing in response to outside events. Ward’s Althusserian reading thus accommodates the person-to-person exchanges which modulated the *tenkō* regime.

By the same token, reading Ward in concert with Etō Jun, Takahashi Shirō, and other scholars of American censorship and reeducation campaigns during the postwar Occupation, it becomes clear that constructing thought-conformity is the business of states in general, and not specifically of Japan, confirming Ward’s important point about the Althusserian replication of ideology. The Japanese *kokutai* was largely defined by external factors, and conversion to harmony with the *kokutai* was thus ever a work in progress. Ward has pulled back the curtains to show how states form subjects, and how the Japanese empire, in particular, tried to find the balance that all empires must seek between near and abroad, belonging and incorporation, benefit and sacrifice, and the realities and promises of the political imagination.