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Tenkō: Cultures of Political Conversion in Transwar Japan

Edited by **Irena Hayter, George T. Sipos, and Mark Williams.**
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Reviewed by **Alex Bates**

This edited volume is a welcome addition to English language scholarship on *tenkō*. *Tenkō* is typically thought of as the public renunciation of leftist thought by leading intellectuals and writers of the proletarian movement in the 1930s. The most famous example, discussed at length in the introduction and a few chapters, is that of Sano Manabu and Nabeyama Sadachika, significant leaders of the movement who issued a joint

statement from prison in 1933 that they rejected Marx and embraced the emperor and Japan. Some thinkers had publicly rejected communism before this point, but many followed. (The introduction cites Takabatake Michitoshi who claimed that a third of those in prison for thought crimes issued similar statements in the month afterward (xx).) The phenomenon began to be labeled *tenkō* in the discourse following Sano and Nabeyama, even though they themselves did not use the word in their statement. *Tenkō* is defined in several nuanced ways throughout the collection, but the definition by one of Japan's premier scholars of *tenkō*, Tsurumi Shunsuke, is repeatedly cited: "a transformation of thought under the coercion of state power" (qtd. xxiii). This book approaches those transformations from a variety of angles.

Fifteen years after Japan's defeat in World War II, Tsurumi and his collaborators produced a three-volume collection of *tenkō* research (*Kyōdō kenkyū: tenkō*, 1959–1962) that brought together the latest Japanese researchers on the subject. The volume under review here provides a new look at the subject from a variety of perspectives from across the globe: Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Romania. Although there have been several articles, book chapters and dissertations (showcased helpfully in the bibliography), this is the first published, book-length work on the subject in English since Patricia Steinhoff's *Tenkō: Ideology and Societal Integration in Prewar Japan* in the early 1990s. It is a significant contribution that advances *tenkō* scholarship into the new millennium.

Two of the editors, Irena Hayter and Mark Williams, provide an informative introduction that situates the collection in scholarship from Japan and elsewhere. They identify the "common terrain" tread by all contributors: "an understanding of *tenkō* as a response to a global crisis of modernity (as opposed to an ahistorical and uniquely Japanese experience), inseparable from the politics of empire and deeply marked by an age of mechanical reproduction, mediatization, and manipulation of language" (xxii). This statement asserts the distance from the work of early postwar scholars, who, as the introduction points out, saw *tenkō* as a specifically Japanese phenomenon that provided evidence for Japan's supposed incomplete modernization. The present collection reflects developments in scholarship over the last thirty years that see Japan as a crucial player in the world of the 1930s. Furthermore, the book places *tenkō* squarely in the world historical milieu of colonialism, fascism, and the development of mass media. It calls attention to the "mass" in mass media, not in the

way of early postwar scholars such as Yoshimoto Takaaki who blamed *tenkō* on Marxist intellectuals' alienation from the masses, but rather how "the idea of the masses that was originally strongly associated with class gradually connects with ethnicity and race and becomes identical with Japaneseness" (xxviii).

The volume is divided into two parts. The first, "Conceptual Excursions," explores *tenkō* through tracing the complicated definitions of the term itself and the historical contexts, including *tenkō* in Korea. The second, and largest, section, "Literary Possibilities," includes nine essays on *tenkō* literature. Part I begins appropriately with Max Ward's essay considering the word "*tenkō*" as an example of "historical catachresis," highlighting its "semantic instability" (5). Ward looks beyond the imprisoned intellectuals to how state authorities and regular communist party members defined the term. He mines the archives uncovering legal definitions and classifications of *tenkō* at different points in time and provides insight into the underexplored accounts of *tenkō* by rank-and-file party members.

Brice Fauconnier's essay situates "*tenkō*" historically from its first use among Marxists (to discuss changes in direction linked to pronouncements of the Comintern) to its use by authorities engaged in thought control and finally to the broad media coverage of *tenkō* following Sano and Nabeyama. Fauconnier's thoughtful survey of primary sources shows the way the Sano and Nabeyama statement and the media coverage of it was manipulated by government authorities for their purposes.

Tenkō was not merely a concern in the metropole, and Hong Jong-wook's essay shows the different ways it appeared in colonial Korea, something often ignored in previous *tenkō* scholarship. Hong points out that ideological conversion in Korea was complicated by nationalism because "to 'convert' also meant to become pro-Japanese" (49). Hong shows that, for many Korean socialists, *tenkō* occurred later, after the start of fighting in China. Hong attributes this to the way ideologues shifted focus to a type of East Asian federalism that allowed for some Korean autonomy, a "grey area between independence and assimilation" (61).

Viren Murthy's essay explores Takeuchi Yoshimi's assertion that "*tenkō* occurs where there is...no desire to be oneself" to think transnationally by bringing Chinese communism and Lu Xun into the mix (65). Murthy shows that Takeuchi criticized Japanese *tenkō* as shifting to some new ideology, without a strong sense of self. In contrast, Takeuchi proposes *kaishin*, a term that he associates with China and Buddhism,

referring to a conversion that maintains a strong connection to the self.

Part II begins with an essay by Nakagawa Shigemi that emphasizes the affective vitality of proletarian literature before *tenkō* by focusing on Hayama Yoshiki, Hirabayashi Taiko, Matsuda Tokiko, and Satō Sachiko. Nakagawa carefully shows the way proletarian writers conceived of new gendered relationships through attention to the body and its sensations via Communist thought and provides innovative new readings of works both well-known and not.

George Sipos's essay outlines common tropes of *tenkō* literature and provides a solid framework for situating the rest of the section. Sipos shows the central role played by the family in *tenkō* literature as the wayward Marxist is integrated into both the family and the family state/nation. He also demonstrates that the form of these narratives often derives from the Japanese *shishōsetsu* (I-novel) genre.

Production literature, a sub-genre of "national policy" literature, is the topic of Wada Takashi's contribution. This genre resembles proletarian literature in its focus on labor, but rather showcases that labor in the service of national goals. Wada shows proletarian authors transitioning to support industrial policy through a close analysis of Mamiya Mosuke's novel *Aragane (Ore)* and its publication history, which shifts away from a critique of capitalism.

Naitō Yoshitada's essay calls attention to the differences between two of the most famous *tenkō* writers, Nakano Shigeharu and Hayashi Fusao. Hayashi was a more enthusiastic convert whereas Nakano displayed more ambivalence. Naitō showcases their differences through their conception of literary truth. For Hayashi, truth meant imperial ideology, but Nakano was searching for something beyond ideology, as a form of "resistance against post-truth politics" (146).

Takami Jun rejected the naturalistic *shishōsetsu*-inspired writing typical of other *tenkō* authors. Irena Hayter's thoughtful essay uses close reading to showcase Takami's narrative experimentation and the ways in which he uses literary techniques to illustrate the "dislocations of subjectivity" brought on by coerced ideological conversion (166). The fractured subjectivity in Takami's work reveals the lie of reintegration with the national family/body promised by *tenkō*.

Jeff Long's chapter examines Shimaki Kensaku's writing. Shimaki is in a category of his own in Sipos's overview of *tenkō* literature. He became a writer only after *tenkō*, and Long analyzes his first two short stories to showcase his search for an identity in a post-*tenkō* world. Shimaki, as a

protagonist in his story “Mōmoku” (Blindness), attempts to reintegrate into the nation but the vivid contrast with another character who stays faithful to Marx shows the allure of personal conviction, no matter the path.

Murata Hirokazu’s essay is devoted to anarchist poets, especially Hagiwara Kyōjirō and Okamoto Jun. Murata’s careful analysis shows a subtle shift in their work toward agrarianism, but an agrarianism inflected with anarchism, which neither officially disavows. Murata points out a similar trajectory in the work of Hagiwara Sakutarō, who is not typically considered an anarchist. None of the three released official *tenkō* statements, but their thinking changed nonetheless, defeated not by the police, Murata writes, but by the “politicized forces of visual expression in modern mass culture” (196).

Lee Juhee’s essay centers on Sata Ineko and her shift toward publication in mass market magazines. Lee’s attention to the paratexts of Sata’s story *Kurenai* (Crimson) is particularly illuminating. Lee shows how Sata refigures herself from a writer of the laboring masses to a writer of the consuming masses. This transformation is embodied in the juxtaposition of the Sata character and her husband’s mistress which fictionalizes “the power politics underlying [Sata’s] representation of the masses” (202).

Finally, David Stahl’s essay is an interesting look at the shifting ideology in Yoshida Mitsuru’s “The End of Battleship *Yamato*.” At first, this essay may seem not to fit as clearly into the *tenkō* theme, but Stahl shows how war experience broke the hold of imperial ideology for Yoshida and how his loss of faith is demonstrated in his account of the sinking of the *Yamato*. In some ways, Yoshida’s turn from indoctrination toward sensory reality imitates the shift away from the abstractions of Marxism in pre-war *tenkō* literature. In both cases, the family is supposedly beyond ideology, but prewar *tenkō* and the family = nation idea clearly shows that to be far from the case.

This collection brings *tenkō* scholarship in English up to date with strong essays covering a range of topics and texts. Some provide excellent close analysis of individual texts whereas others take broader perspectives on larger trends. It covers writers who were clear in their public conversions and others for whom the *tenkō* must be brought to light via analysis, as in Murata’s and Lee’s essays. A common theme is language, from Ward’s analysis of the term “*tenkō*” to Naitō’s look at the language of truth to the attention to language in close reading literature throughout. Several essays also highlight the role of affect and/or female actors in a

phenomenon that has often thought to be centered on abstract theories and male intellectuals. This is an encouraging development in *tenkō* studies and provides fruitful avenues for further study.

Each chapter functions well as a stand-alone essay and I imagine that many scholars will read only those that are deemed most relevant to their work. Nevertheless, the book holds together well if read as a whole, something that cannot be said of many edited volumes. This cohesion speaks to the thought put into organizing the chapters, and there is minimal overlap between them. Ward's exploration of the state definitions meshes with Fauconnier's essay and together they provide a substantial overview of thought control efforts and classification of leftist defectors, including some translations of primary sources such as regulations and state definitions. Naitō's chapter on Nakano Shigeharu and Hayashi Fusao follows Wada's on production literature and demonstrates Nakano's critique of production literature. Hayter's and Long's essays show different ways authors approached the identity crises of *tenkō*. The overall effect is one of synergy, which the introduction clearly emphasizes. Together, these essays make important contributions to scholarship on Japanese intellectual history and literature and will be shaping *tenkō* scholarship for decades to come.