

translatable ... A reserve of latent meaning” binds them to “Europe,” whose “essence is self-expansion” (pp. 264, 266) from the “nation” outward. No one, even the most acute analysts of empire, “could command a bird’s-eye view” of the phenomenon in its entirety; “it can be thought only in the midst of multiple voices” (p. 278). A short essay, again on the flag-and-anthem controversy, concludes the volume. Though no less polemic than Takahashi’s, Ukai’s is more subtle. He turns to members of the very wartime generation – among them the poet Tanigawa Gan – for whom the experience of the Hinomaru taught them “an absolutely indelible mistrust of aesthetic experience in general” (p. 284). Only those capable of mobilizing language to portray the wordless emblem of Japan as (for example) a “red Tupperware container” or “autistic ... demon child” (pp. 287, 288) will be able to resist the suave, naturalizing aesthetics that will lull “progressives” into accepting the contemporary version of political unconsciousness.

A few thoughts in conclusion. Putting together the title of this volume with its contents, one can see that “contemporary Japanese thought” is defined here as deconstructionist in principle of the postwar nation-state conception. This deconstruction entails a rupture in the “narrative of rupture” itself – that is, the view that 1945 marks a substantial break in the course of Japanese history – and the installation of an alternative “narrative of continuity” in which modern “Japan” began as and remains an empire at heart. I do not draw this conclusion from Calichman’s introduction, because he is silent on historical context, but rather from the contributors themselves. Though much that they say is persuasive, it would certainly have been more honest to title this collection something like “Is There an Intellectual Left in Japan Today?” Might not the reflexive denial of “nation” spring from a kind of historical sour grapes or (to be fairer) alienation? Personally, I doubt that a political force capable of rule would refuse in principle to recognize as substantial the collectivity whose fate has been entrusted to its hands.

The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda.

By Barak Kushner. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006. Pp. 242. ISBN 0-8248-2920-4.

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The question of the political and cultural makeup of wartime Japanese society has excited many and various accounts over the last several decades. One of the perennial questions has revolved around the issue of whether and to what extent there was widespread complicity in the rhetoric of Japanese imperialism, particularly during the 1930s and early 1940s, or whether this was merely the product of (and thus the responsibility of) a small, elite group of intellectuals or militarists. Until relatively recently, it has been the orthodox position that there was little (if any) dissent within Japan during this time. The vogue over the last ten years or so has been rather in the opposite direction – scholars have attempted to locate and explicate a number of instances of agents of resistance in the so-called “Dark Valley” of wartime Japan.

In his intriguing new book, Kushner appears to stand against this recent tide and makes the argument that Japanese civil society as a whole was responsible for the production as well as the consumption of imperialist propaganda. Indeed, Kushner is so convinced by this organic unity between the military elites and civil society more broadly that he speaks of the existence of “democratic fascism” during this period, by which he means to support the assertion (of Tsuganesawa and Satō) that the masses were “not solely a depository for information, but acted as soldiers within the ‘thought war’” (p. 26).

To support his position, Kushner marshals an impressively wide range of material under the general umbrella of “propaganda.” He includes in this category: advertisements, songs, drama troops, comedy storytellers (*rakugo*), and comedy duos (*manzai*). As partial justification for this broad inclusivity, Kushner notes that wartime Japan differed from Nazi Germany precisely because of the absence of a central organ that controlled public information. Hence, rather than restricting himself to the official propaganda produced by government agencies, Kushner is interested in a variety of cultural products produced within the public sphere. He explains that “censorship and terror alone did not characterize the war years. In actuality the people were not duped, nor were they passive ... the population itself helped create the propaganda environment” (p. 24).

The rich and diverse material presented by Kushner is both entertaining and illuminating: he provides numerous pictures of advertisements and posters, as well as transcriptions of a number of *manzai*. The picture he paints of wartime culture is vivid and valuable. In particular, Kushner manages to weave these myriad threads into a relatively coherent tapestry. He suggests that wartime Japanese propaganda (and he suggests Japanese imperialism as well) was not centrally focused on the person or symbol of the emperor. Rather, the primary concern was about modernity and modernization. This was more appealing to the masses than the quasi-mystical cult of the emperor because it appealed to their reason and to their pride in the evident material and technological accomplishments of Japan. This unifying theme, according to Kushner, was the key motif of Japanese imperial propaganda as well as being the key to its success. Indeed, in his closing chapter, Kushner goes further to suggest that the emphasis on modernity in wartime Japanese propaganda helped the postwar authorities to package the US Occupation of Japan as part of an ongoing, continuous program of modernization.

Kushner’s thesis is provocative, informative and interesting on a number of levels. However, it is not clear that it has been phrased in its most persuasive form. In particular, it is not self-evident that this book is about propaganda at all, or at least not *only* about propaganda. Whilst Kushner himself acknowledges the problems of translating *senden* as propaganda (rather than advertisement), he does little to attack this problem. The result is not merely a terminologically relaxed analysis; the result challenges the theoretical foundations of his project. At times, for example, it seems that Kushner is using the broadly inclusive term “propaganda” merely to refer to “culture”. That is, it refers to a set of norms and values shared (apparently) by the majority of the Japanese people during the imperial period. If it is really the case that the content of the so-called artefacts of propaganda are fundamentally uncontested within society (within “democratic fascism”), is it really possible to argue that these artefacts fulfil any of the ideological functions that we conventionally associate with propaganda? By clinging to this term, Kushner (perhaps inadvertently) implies a Marxian analysis, effectively positing that a national culture itself serves an ideological function and consequently that (all) cultural products are effectively propaganda engineered to sustain that culture.

The central problem caused by employing such an elasticized conception of propaganda is that it risks removing propaganda from the analysis altogether. If everything is propaganda, then nothing is. Kushner suggests that the ruling elites and the military had to make little use of censorship or persecution of dissidents because the masses were already on the same page – everybody “participated” in the propaganda campaigns in much the same way that we might expect them to participate in society or in cultural nationalism.

An associated issue concerns dissent and its various mechanisms. Whilst this is not Kushner’s focus, I think that he is not sufficiently attentive to the “censorship and terror” that helped to define the atmosphere of the war years. Neither the category of “thought crime” (*shisō hanzai*), nor the roles of the so-called “Thought Police” or of the Education Ministry’s Thought Inquisition (*shisō shingikai*) are considered. Kushner’s observation that artefacts of propaganda were produced as much (if not more) by the masses as by the military elites elides the question of what was *not* said by the masses and why it was not said. Focussing on cultural products that emphasized “propagandist” messages

cannot tell us anything about the silence of those who did not participate in this identity (or even about the actions and voices of those who stood against it). Indeed, a tighter conception of propaganda *relies* on the existence of the unconvinced masses – according to Kushner, it is supposed to be a weapon in an ideological “thought war”.

Finally, the title of the book, *The Thought War (shisōsen)*, is slightly misleading since it suggests that Kushner is interested in the history (and clash) of ideas in imperial Japan. However, Kushner’s thesis is concerned with relative domestic consensus (rather than a *war* of ideas), and is not concerned with the work of the intellectuals, political thinkers or philosophers who struggled to formulate a *Nippon ideogōji*. These were the targets of Tōjō Hideki when he wrote of the *shisōsen* as “thoughts becoming bullets and pens bayonets” (*Asahi shinbun*, 7 March 1943, evening edition).

The chapter that comes closest to matching the title is Chapter 5 (“The Japanese Propaganda Struggle on the Chinese Mainland”), in which Kushner moves away from the domestic scene and presents a fascinating, well-constructed, and more tightly focused argument about the ways in which Japanese imperial propaganda failed to win over the Chinese masses to the cause of Japanese imperialism.

In the final analysis, Barak Kushner has produced a valuable and interesting book which successfully defines some of the contours of the culture of Japanese imperialism. It is provocative and stimulating, and it raises a number of important questions about the parameters of propaganda and its relationship with complicity and dissent during the war years.

Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, The Kyoto School and Co-Prosperity.

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Ever since Takeuchi Yoshimi, in the early 1950s, identified the philosophy of the Kyoto School as one of the principal components of the symposium on overcoming modernity and Kato Shuichi compared one wing of the school with the Japan Romantics, there has been an ongoing effort in and out of Japan to re-situate the role of its philosophical discourse and rehabilitate its members from involvement in the Pacific War. If Takeuchi argued that the Kyoto School went furthest in providing the logic to explain the relationship between total war, eternal warfare and the ideal of nation foundation, Kato’s observations linked the “fascination with words” of Japanese Romantics (*Nihon romanha*), (recalling Kamei Katsuichiro’s resuscitation of the powers of *kotodama*), to Kyoto philosophy’s equal “fascination with theory.” “The Japanese romantics,” he wrote, “worked out a method which reaffirmed the war emotionally,” whereby the “philosophers of Kyoto offered a method that validated the same war theoretically and logically.”¹¹ If the romantics rejected the domination of foreign thought for a zealous nationalism, the philosophers of Kyoto teased out from foreign thought, which itself was separated from life, experience and tradition, a philosophy of world history, which, far from being insufficiently complete, was completely detailed.¹² Since the early postwar years, thinkers as different as Karatani Kojin and Hiromatsu Wataru have frequently revisited the scene of Kyoto philosophy, with the former discerning in it the figuration of fascism and the latter, avoiding such

11 Quoted from Hiromatsu Wataru, *Kindai no chōkokuron*. Tokyo: Asahi shuppansha, 1989, p. 196.

12 Hiromatsu 1989, p. 196.