

JAPAN IN EAST ASIA

LECTURE SERIES

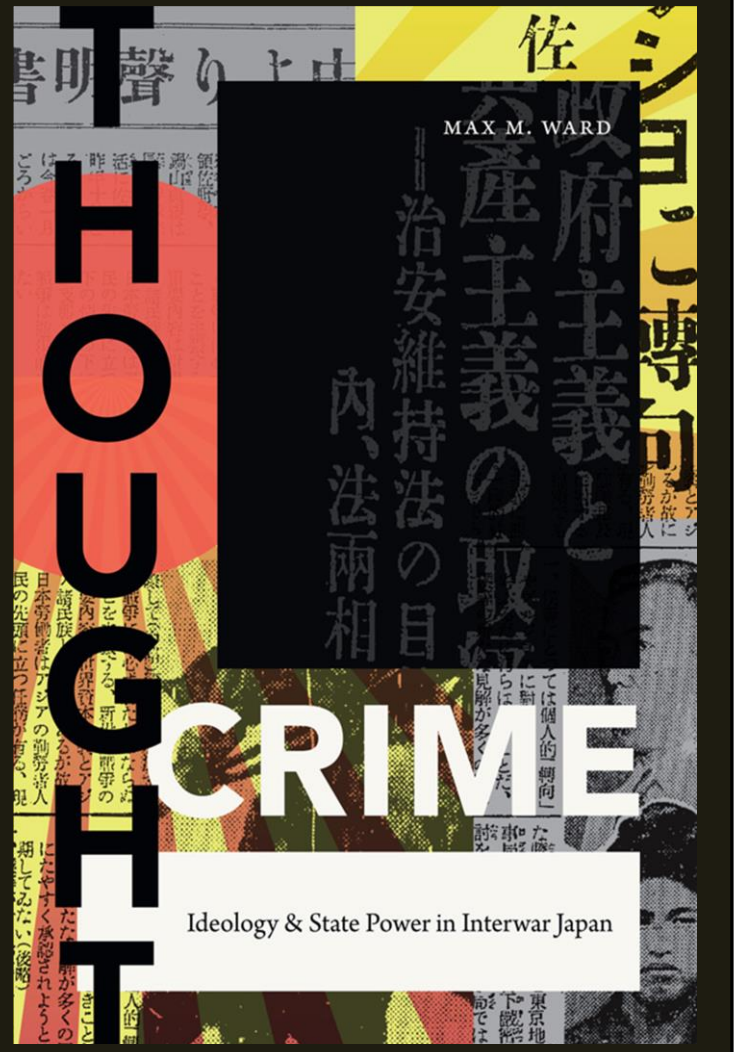
UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO

IDEOLOGICAL CONVERSION  
AS CATACHRESIS: TOWARDS A  
CONCEPTUAL HISTORY OF  
TENKŌ

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No other term has come to symbolize the vexed decades of interwar Japan—if not also the myriad contradictions of Japanese modernity— more than *tenkō*. As is well-known, in the 1930s the term was used by officials to refer to the “ideological conversion” of hundreds of detained political activists and intellectuals who either defected from political affiliations or began to proactively support the imperial state, although the state’s measure of the degree of “conversion” kept changing throughout the decade. Then, in the early postwar period, activists and intellectuals returned to the question of *tenkō* in order to consider a form of subjectivity adequate to the postwar political situation. In this paper, I begin by questioning the basic assumptions that have informed our received understanding of *tenkō*, and then propose a way for understanding the long conceptual history of *tenkō* that accounts for both the continuing centrality of the term as well as its shifting meanings across the prewar wartime and postwar periods.



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