

'Tenkō in Trans-War Japan: Culture, Politics, History': workshop held at the University of Leeds, 30 June–2 July 2017

This workshop brought together nineteen speakers from Japan, the UK, US and Europe, working in a variety of disciplines (history, literature, philosophy and musicology). The aim was to reconsider the important political and cultural trope of *tenkō* (whose meanings range from religious conversion to ideological and cultural realignment) both as an aspect of trans-war history and within the larger contexts of Japanese modernity. Despite its centrality to the political and cultural histories of trans-war Japan, *tenkō* has been largely absent from English-language scholarship and the objective of the workshop was to fill in that gap and bring together academics who have an interest in aspects of this important historical trope, but have been working in isolation. In particular, we wanted to begin an exchange of ideas and methodologies between Japanese and Western scholars, since previously there had been little interaction between the two parties.

The conference got off to an auspicious start with opening remarks from not one but two speakers: first was Professor Hai-Sui Yu, the University of Leeds' Pro-Vice-Chancellor: International, followed by Professor Nobuo Ueno, the Director of the London office of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), the main sponsor of the conference. Their comments about the University's international outreach efforts and the direction of future collaborative projects, respectively, helped set the tone for a truly international conference, with participants attending from Japan, Canada, the United States, Norway, France and the UK.

The presentations used *tenkō* to interrogate both personal and historiographical narratives and scrutinize the figures that structure our understanding of political and cultural practice during the trans-war years. Is not this master-concept too totalizing to account for very diverse political experiences? How do *tenkō* writings in the style of *shishōsetsu* (I-novel) deal with issues of language, subjectivity and psychic temporality? Our discussions revolved around these and other important research questions.

The conference was interdisciplinary in outlook. Papers covered such topics as the role of the press in turning *tenkō* into the issue of the day, the difficulty of disentangling the multiple ideological shifts of writers like Nakano Shigeharu, the psychological effects of imperial indoctrination, the effect of the Comintern's criticisms of Japan on conversions, and the literary strategies employed by *tenkō* writers in dramatising their own conversion experiences. This thematic variety prompted reflection throughout the conference on the competing ways that *tenkō* has been defined and understood in the scholarship.

There were six speakers from Japan at the workshop and four from the UK. They found the event stimulating and rewarding. It also made them conscious of the global dynamic of Japanese studies: they were impressed to witness discussions on *tenkō* between academics from France and the US, at a workshop held in the UK. As the UK organisers share an interest in trans-war Japanese literature and cultural history with the Japanese participants, it is anticipated that there will be future visits to each other's institutions and further scholarly exchanges.

There is a project website with outline, detailed project description, programme and abstracts. It features the logos of all sponsors (JSPS, the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, and the Japan Foundation Endowment Committee).

http://www.leeds.ac.uk/arts/homepage/562/tenk_in_trans-war_japan_politics_culture_history

The organisers would like to thank JSPS for their support, without which the conference would not have been possible.

- Dr Irena Hayter, University of Leeds.



Workshop attendees