



1996

Review of Germaine A. Hoston, *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan*

Christopher P. Atwood

University of Pennsylvania, catwood@sas.upenn.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.upenn.edu/ealc>

 Part of the [East Asian Languages and Societies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Atwood, Christopher P., "Review of Germaine A. Hoston, *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan*" (1996).
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. 26.
<https://repository.upenn.edu/ealc/26>

At the time of publication, author Christopher P. Atwood was affiliated with Indiana University. Currently, he is a faculty member in the East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department at the University of Pennsylvania.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. <https://repository.upenn.edu/ealc/26>
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Review of Germaine A. Hoston, *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan*

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | East Asian Languages and Societies

Comments

At the time of publication, author Christopher P. Atwood was affiliated with Indiana University. Currently, he is a faculty member in the East Asian Languages and Civilizations Department at the University of Pennsylvania.

Hoston, Germaine A.: *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan*. (Princeton: University Press, 1994), xii + 628 pp., \$ 24.95. ISBN 0-691-02334-4 (pbk.).

From the disintegration of the Second International in World War I to the Sino-Soviet split, the persistence of the nation-state has repeatedly undermined the internationalist claims of the Marxist revolutionary movement. In *The State, Identity, and the National Question in China and Japan*, Germaine Hoston explores how unavoidable dilemmas of national identity profoundly transformed the Communist movements of China and Japan during the first half of the twentieth century. The result is an ambitious and multi-stranded attempt to reexamine the contradictions within the Marxist theory of the state itself, contradictions revealed when the doctrine entered a non-European, late-developing *milieu*.

Hoston argues that Chinese and Japanese Marxists, due to their countries' vulnerability in the international arena, could not accept Marx's radical rejection of the state as purely a result of class conflict, and repeatedly turned to more positive evaluations both of the state's origins and its destiny in the revolutionary process. She also explores how pre-twentieth century political background influenced later understanding of the state's role in the revolutionary process. Thus Meiji ideology predisposed Japanese Marxists to a persistent heresy of national socialism which sought socialist reforms within the context of emperor-centered family state, and projected class struggle into the international arena as a struggle between colonizing Europe and colonized Asia. In China, however, the anarchist tendencies found in traditional Chinese political philosophy merged with the necessity to rebuild a powerful state out of the wreck of warlord China to condition Mao's deeply ambivalent attitude towards the state his party was so successfully building.

Although Hoston commands Chinese, Japanese, and Russian languages, her primary expertise clearly lies in the study of Japanese Marxism. Her discussions of Japanese Communist debates on the nature of the Imperial Japanese state and the mass recantations (*tenkō*) that destroyed the Communist movement in the 1930's exploit a wide familiarity with primary sources to go far beyond previous secondary accounts. Her understanding of the origins and significance of Maoism, vital for her overall argumentation, relies heavily on older English-language sources. She thus follows Benjamin Schwartz's outdated scheme that sees Chinese Communist history after 1927 as the story of Mao's single-handed struggle to emancipate the party from stultifying Comintern dogma. Accepting the Cultural Revolution conflict between Mao Zedong and Liu Shaoqi at face value as a purely doctrinal two-line struggle only adds to the musty Mao-centrism of her account of Chinese Communism.

The broadly comparative framework is both the strength and the weakness of the study. The comparisons between the tergiversations of Chinese and Japanese Marxist thought do highlight some instructive parallels. But Hoston attempts to cover every angle of argumentation, regardless of whether she has anything very original to say about the topic. As a result, while certain chapters, such as those on the conflicting instrumentalist and structuralist views embedded in Marx's understanding of the state or the comparison between the national socialism of

the *tenkô* Communists in Japan and the Maoist recasting of Marxism-Leninism in China, are sharply insightful, their impact is muffled by the long stretches of conventional summary that intervene. A more vigorous rewriting that highlighted Hoston's core of original argumentation would have given her analysis greater force. As it is, *The State, Identity, and the National Question* is often intriguing, occasionally fascinating, but diffuse and ultimately unsatisfying.

Indiana University

Christopher Atwood

Tanaka, Stefan: *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), xi + 305 pp., \$ 40.00. ISBN 0-520-07731-8.

A Japanese acquaintance who served in Manchuria recently asked me, not quite rhetorically, "Why can't we still call it *shina*? The West calls it China. What's wrong with *shina*?" This book answers that question, and others that illuminate the first half of this century, in glorious detail. Stefan Tanaka allows us to reimagine the relationship of Japan to the West along the fundamental axes of history and knowledge. Tanaka demonstrates that the modernization of Japan was not, as is often implied, a material success whose moral failure resulted in imperialism. Aggression against China was as much the product of modernization of Japan's knowledge structure as railroads were of advances in transportation. What Tanaka shows is that Japan reconfigured its knowledge by applying the West's logic to Japan's own intellectual problems. Not content to be orientalized by the West, Japan applied the orientalizing strategy to its Asian Other, China, very successfully. Through the creation of a discursive entity known as *shina* and a project to study the continent until its backwardness could be proven, the activity of *tōyōshi*, Japanese intellectuals displaced Western contempt for the underdeveloped onto the neighbor that had once provided enlightenment.

The first part of the book, "Finding Equivalence," traces the conversion of traditional Chinese textual study, *kangaku*, into the search for a new oriental history as part of an effort begun in the 1890s to uncover Japan's equality with the West. Japanese had to solve the paradox of accepting a positivistic view of history while rejecting the West's narrative, in which Japan was relegated to the moribund East. Tanaka plots the emergence of *tōyō* as a term to counter Occident, and the struggles of two groups – enlightenment historians who wished to secure Japan's parity in history, and nationalists, who came to dominate as it became clear that equality could not be figured within enlightenment views of the world. Shiratori Kurakichi (1865–1942) of Tokyo University, the focus of Tanaka's explication, realigned the world on a north-south axis, breaking the subordination of Orient to Occident, while granting Asia and Europe common origins in Central Asia.

The second part, "Creating Difference," traces the next step in giving Japan an ideology of nationhood, the differentiation of Japan from the rest of the Orient. Japanese needed their own Orient, their own backward past, so historians created *shina*, a China robbed of all capacity to govern or improve itself. Shiratori "murdered" the Chinese classics, revealing that China had originally been primitive and shamanistic, while Confucian ideas had originated outside China. Japa-