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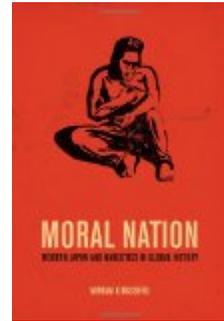
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Miriam Kingsberg. *Moral Nation: Modern Japan and Narcotics in Global History.* Asia: Local Studies/Global Themes Series. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013. 328 pp. \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-520-27673-4.

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Published on H-Diplo (December, 2014)

Commissioned by Seth Offenbach



Of Empires, Identities, and Drugs

In *Moral Nation*, Miriam Kingsberg calls attention to the role of identity discourse surrounding the drug trade and its suppression in modern Japan and Japan's prewar empire between the 1890s and the 1950s. Chiefly she analyzes the interplay between public figures, the drug trade, rehabilitation efforts, and perceptions of identity in Japanese holdings in Manchuria between 1905 and 1945, though bookending the work are chapters considering Japan proper in the Meiji (1868-1912) and immediate postwar eras. The result is a kind of social history of the drug trade in Imperial Japan (1868-1945) with an epilogue juxtaposing the experience of methamphetamine addiction in Japan following war's end.

Kingsberg's key actors are a group she labels "moral entrepreneurs," those who "arose to define and police national norms consonant with civilized statehood." This was a growing group, composed of "socially engaged government officials and professionals, including cultural producers, the media, businessmen (and women), law enforcement, scientists, doctors, and others" (p. 2). Kingsberg subsequently explores the actions and rationales of researchers, novelists, merchants, scientists, doctors, and those involved in law enforcement. Her approach sensibly follows a path well paved by other scholars of Japan that illustrates clearly how ideology was the product of many and not solely Japan's leaders.[1] Kingsberg contributes implicitly to a larger discussion of imperialist and war responsibility, joining a wealth of scholarship showing that more people were involved in Japanese

expansion than political and military elites.

For Kingsberg, the Japanese annexation of Taiwan in 1895 provided the model for opium policy in Manchuria. The 1897 opium monopoly enabled a measure of control and was in line with European practices in Southeast Asia. It did not, however, ultimately function in the same manner in southern Manchuria, as the port of Dairen (Dalian) in the 1920s harbored the highest rate of narcotics consumption in the world, and the second highest volume of trafficking, following Shanghai (p. 29). For Kingsberg, Dairen became the "epicenter" of not only the drug trade in Manchuria but also "the global narcotic economy" (p. 117). Many consumers were Japanese men and women—at higher rates than the Chinese—and both the Japanese and Koreans worked as dealers of opium and eventually more refined drugs. Kingsberg suggests that transitory migration patterns in a rapidly expanding urban setting contributed to "rates of drug use reach[ing] a globally unprecedented peak" (p. 44). Undergirding this were "early twentieth-century ideals of modernity [that] subordinated individuals, with their moral imperfections, to a rigid set of standards achieved through mechanical technology" that suggest the city was only the worst to suffer what was becoming an international issue (p. 47).

The subsequent six chapters explore how Japanese morality, venality, and willful ignorance also contributed to this growing trade. Some bemoaned it: researchers reported on work and living conditions while novel-

ists and poets appropriated those conditions for their work. Journalists reported scandals. In the 1920s, Christian reformers sought to establish treatment centers and Pan-Asian ideologues endeavored to rally people against drugs as a common enemy in the 1930s. However, many Japanese enabled the trade. Merchants who agreed to an eventual ban saw market potential and little regulation or threat of prosecution or punishment. Growing income from the monopoly proved useful for the state, and enhanced state control of opium production after 1932 resulted in increased consumption. People on the imperial margins, such as Koreans, found escape and/or personal income in peddling drugs. Ideologues provided exculpatory rationales by portraying the Chinese as inherently prone to drugs and erroneously assuming that the Japanese were inherently immune. Clinicians were apparently satisfied with the cures they devised and did not test for relapses, nor did they consider the addictive qualities of drugs used to combat addiction. And while addiction researchers gained a global standing in the 1920s, they were isolated in the following decade. The Kwantung Army even coopted some researchers to expand the trade, or worse, participate in questionable medical experimentation.[2] The growing domestic demand for drugs also occasionally drove military expansion (pp. 114-116). As a result, the fictive state of Manchukuo (1932-45) gained international notoriety as a “narco-state,” despite Japanese rhetoric of a utopia and wartime propaganda urging united Asian resistance to foreign threats, including against those who brought opium to Asia.

Kingsberg links many of these activities with a civilizational thread. The Japanese in early Meiji seeking to overturn unequal treaty arrangements viewed foreign opium with suspicion and eagerly banded together against its import. This contributed to a later sense of immunity and fostered an identity of superiority vis-à-vis other countries that succumbed to problems of addiction. Perceiving addicts in a moral light—characterizing addicts as degenerate—also provided Japanese justification to “civilize” backward peoples. Kingsberg thus accepts as genuine that many Japanese engaged in a moral crusade against addiction in Manchuria. It not only followed on the heels of a Japanese moral crusade at home after 1868 but also prefigured a third moral crusade in the 1950s dealing with Japanese addicted to methamphetamines, due to postwar chaos and because many soldiers and civilians returned home addicted. For Kingsberg, these crusades were significant because each helped define Japanese identities in these periods. Moreover, in

accepting that “nation building was ... a moral activity,” Kingsberg postulates that “the history of narcotics in Japan is not simply a domestic or even regional story, but a global account of the emergence of the nation as a moral category in the modern world” (p. 8).[3] Dealing with narcotics was part of nation building.

The bookending chapters necessarily do not explore Japanese society at home in as great a detail as Kingsberg considers Manchuria. Had she done so then likely she would have found some people operating according to more venal motives than out of concerns for national identity, as she found in Manchuria. The “moral” imperative at work here likely did not encompass all Japanese all the time, though arguably does describe generally held beliefs in these three eras. It perhaps also helps explain how the Japanese kept opium at bay in the late nineteenth century and quickly overcame large-scale addiction in the postwar years.

Two concerns might help bring issues raised here into sharper focus. One involves data. The drug trade is by nature a nebulous affair, but given the scale Kingsberg asserts, one wishes for more quantifiable data substantiating some of her assertions. This is likely futile of course, and Kingsberg has probably provided the only corroboration possible—observations by foreign consuls and journalists.[4] The scale, however, still gives cause to pause and reflect. By her own citation, some have estimated that 75 percent or more of the Japanese in southern Manchuria were involved in the opium trade in the 1920s (p. 117). Given high Japanese addiction rates, one wonders just how aware the Japanese in Manchuria were of the narcotics issues surrounding them. Do assertions of acting in a moral manner, no matter how diversely defined, suffice to explain this widespread complicity? Kingsberg would answer in the affirmative for the “moral entrepreneurs,” with the important proviso that some were unaware and not all concurred. Yet what about the Japanese public at large? Dissension was limited, and one wonders if many Japanese in prewar and wartime Manchuria were aware and judiciously opted to look the other way. Perhaps this was also true for some “moral entrepreneurs,” many of whom were in a better position to know what was going on. In other words, conceptions of morality may not have been their only motivating factor.

Setting this aside, *Moral Nation* is a nuanced exploration of an important issue and will be useful to help students consider the many kinds of issues posed by the Japanese imperialist project, if not others as well.

Kingsberg is to be commended for extensive research in Japanese and English, and for some in Chinese. In raising a host of practical and abstract issues for historical figures, she provides future historians with much to ponder.

Notes

[1]. Other examples in this tradition concerning Japan include Carol Gluck, *Japan's Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Barak Kushner, *The Thought War: Japanese Imperial Propaganda* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006).

[2]. The Kwantung Army (Guandong Army or Kantogun) was the Japanese garrison stationed in southern Manchuria after 1905. It was leaders of this force that organized the takeover of Manchuria in 1931 and guided Manchukuo's development until 1945 along with renovationist bureaucrats (*kakushin kanryo*) from Japan. One recent discussion of their role in Manchurian nar-

cotics is, in addition to Kingsberg, Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japanese Imperialism, 1895-1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 245-262.

[3]. Some postwar Japanese views of Manchuria would appear to support Kingsberg's argument. Although harsh critiques of prewar policies emerged, some upheld Japanese activities in prewar Manchuria in a positive light, sometimes invoking moral language. These public figures continued to perceive nation building in Manchukuo as a moral activity, or at least portray it that way so as to salvage those efforts.

[4]. Kingsberg has consulted the archives of the League of Nation and the U.S. State Department, but there are other useful references in the consular reports available in the British Foreign Office Files for Japan and the Far East (Public Record Office Class FO 262). Kingsberg also cites the secondary literature available on production in Japanese and English so those interested in this issue may consult them.

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Citation: Bill Sewell. Review of Kingsberg, Miriam, *Moral Nation: Modern Japan and Narcotics in Global History*. H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. December, 2014.

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