SCIENCE WITHOUT CONSCIENCE:
UNNO JÚZA AND TENKŌ OF CONVENIENCE

Sari Kawana

INTRODUCTION: TENKŌ OF A POPULAR WRITER

The word tenkō never appears in the writings of Unno Júza (1897–1949), one of the most popular writers of science fiction [kagaku shōsetsu] and detective fiction in the years leading up to World War II in Japan. Yet in the late 1930s he repeatedly mentions in his essays that he has undergone a kind of psychological, emotional, and philosophical reorientation. Like many leftists who publicly disavowed their former political beliefs and adopted new ideological identities, Unno’s activities during the war years indicate a new willingness to collaborate with the government. But unlike those who publicly asserted their new allegiances as they renounced their old ones, Unno’s ideological message remained largely consistent. Despite his adoption of patriotic fervor and nationalistic rhetoric before, during, and even after the war, he maintained his scathing criticism of the Japanese government’s policy toward scientific education. His wartime stories again and again warned that Japan would lose the war because it underestimated the importance of science and technology in modern warfare—warnings that would have seemed critical or even subversive if not for his self-declared ideological stance.

In conventional terms of ideological complicity and resistance, Unno’s career is full of such paradoxes. Sifting through these contradictions, however, we can delineate a different style of tenkō that is neither a renunciation of an old belief for an adoption of the new, nor a shameless selling-out to ensure bare personal survival and material comfort in times of uncertainty. Examining his life and works allows us to glimpse the motivations and consequences of a popular author posing as a reformed and willing collaborator during the war years and understand the cultural and political relevance of the act of conversion.

Whether Unno should be considered at all a genuine converted writer [tenkō sakka] in the sense of Hayashi Fusao (1903–1975) is already a matter of debate. Even without a proper declaration of tenkō, Unno seemed to Edogawa Ranpo (1894–1965), Unno’s colleague at the
magazine *Shinseinen* [literally, “New Youth”; the flagship magazine for modern youth culture in interwar Japan], to be the popular author with the closest ties with the military: “In contrast to Oguri [Mushitarō, a detective author who was Unno’s closest friend and by the late 1930s well-known for his anti-militarism and fascism], Unno voluntarily [susunde] contributed to the war effort. Because he wrote a work of war fiction called *Nichibei miraisen* [Future War Between Japan and US] in *Shinseinen*, he had many friends in the Navy, and won their confidence as a writer [bunshi].” However, considering the authorial interjections that appear rather inappropriately in the middle of Unno’s jingoistic propaganda stories, it is more reasonable to speculate that he was not a genuine believer in nationalism or militarism despite his official persona, but instead someone who sought to usurp these ideologies to make them serve another ideological system, namely, a new Japan-led scientism that would counter the dominance of Western science. Unno hoped to make science a new “religion” with the aid of nationalism. The cover of a willing collaborative author allowed him to continue writing and publishing during the war in order to warn his readers against the perils of science without conscience, a concern he had long held before Japan’s serious involvement in affairs on the continent and war against the United States.

In addition, by appealing to the presumed nationalistic spirit of his readers, and young readers in particular, Unno could give purpose to his project of keeping Japan abreast of scientific discoveries and advancements. He repeatedly suggested that without such training, Japan would not survive the impending assaults from foreign powers. From this vantage point, we can find in Unno’s “conversion” a case of tenkō for convenience—not necessarily to ensure physical freedom but to retain the relative intellectual freedom that writers had enjoyed before Japan entered the crisis period of the 1930s and 1940s.

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Jūza and the Amazing Technocratic Turncoats: Science Before World War II

Behind the emphasis on spiritualism and the call to awaken the Japanese spirit [yamato damashii] on the part of the state, the need for

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