the most part they were reelecting incumbents. And while Mitchell uses comparison with England and the United States to good effect, the studies of China and Korea do not offer many significant insights into the causes or consequences of political bribery in Japan.

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Authenticating Culture in Imperial Japan: Kuki Shūzō and the Rise of National Aesthetics. By LESLIE PINCUS. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. xii, 271 pp. $45.00.

At its core a meditation on Kuki Shūzō's famous *"Iki" no kōzō* (the structure of *iki*) of 1930, Leslie Pincus's remarkable book ranges far beyond that text to provide a major reinterpretation of the role of "culture" in the formation and legitimation of the modern Japanese state. One could say that via a theory of cultural hegemony she breathes new life into prewar Marxist approaches to modern Japanese history. In the process, she provides a useful framework for Taishō and Shōwa period intellectual history and a plausible explanation for the stream of Japanese cultural nationalism known as Nihonjinron.

Pincus's argument—laid out most fully in the epilogue but anticipated throughout her exhaustive study of the context as well as the text of *"Iki" no kōzō*—relies on a creative adaptation of Neil Larsen's theory of aesthetic modernism's role in establishing civil hegemony in late-modernizing states on the periphery of world capitalism. In her view, the Meiji state, like many of the postcolonial regimes discussed by Larsen, was modeled after the modern European nation-state. Therefore, like them, it was haunted by the "specter of derivative beginnings;" it also suffered the "residual effects of European and American imperialism" in the form of unequal treaties and racial exclusion (p. 239). The Meiji state was also similar to postcolonial regimes in that its "bourgeois revolution . . . [began] without an effective, integrated base in civil society and without a unified class subject" (p. 237). Therefore, the Japanese state was also forced to create the revolutionary class subject after the fact. This it did, through education and other means, but the nascent bourgeoisie was, in any case, weak and dependent upon the old ruling class; that is, "the bourgeois conquest of civil society remained incomplete" (p. 241).

The completion of that conquest was the task undertaken by modernist producers of culture like Kuki Shūzō: "As if in belated compensation for the unfinished project of hegemony, an elite corps of writers and theorists—representatives of a compromised but dominant class—attempted to produce a missing unity in discursive terms" (p. 241). Like intellectuals in Larsen's postcolonial states, the Japanese writers sought to construct that unity by superimposing a modernist aesthetic directly onto "images of prerationalized native culture." The end product was an idealistic culturescape, "inhabited by a collectivity defined in ethnocultural rather than political terms, pure 'Japaneseness,' so to speak" (p. 235).

Kuki's *"Iki" no kōzō* was typical of such culturescapes, which claimed to express the essence of Japaneseness. Yet, like most Nihonjinron, it was largely European in provenance. Pincus traces Kuki's intellectual itinerary from Paris, where he first jotted down his musings on *"iki"*: from there to the philosophical quest through Germany which led him via phenomenology and hermeneutics to the dematerialized,

dehistoricized notion of culture as ethnic consciousness that he elaborated in *"Iki" no kōzō;* and finally to his later writings, such as "Nihonteki seikaku ni tsuite" (Concerning the Japanese Character), written in 1937, which placed culture entirely at the disposal of the state and thoroughly aestheticized politics.

One might wish that Pincus had paid more attention to the philosophical essays on contingency (*gūzensei*) that Kuki wrote beginning in 1929, although—or, indeed, because—one suspects that their inclusion might have complicated her explanation of his intellectual political trajectory. She also could have been more explicit regarding the politics of liberalism in the 1930s, which would have helped clear up the hint of ambivalence behind her dismissal of the "internationalism" and "individualism" in "Nihonteki seikaku ni tsuite" as mere gestures, seemingly incidental, or even contradictory, to his emphasis on the state. Yet, her conclusion rings true: "As in Germany, Japanese liberalism found its refuge and its defense in a hermeneutically elaborated realm of cultural freedom and expression, a realm that elicited a devotion almost religious in nature. It was this culturally distended form of liberalism . . . that so easily allied itself with the emerging idiom of Japanism" (p. 244).

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A Poisonous Cocktail? Aum Shinrikyō's Path to Violence. By IAN READER. Copenhagen: NIAS Books, 1996. 116 pp.

The Japanese religious group Aum Shinrikyō is now chiefly known for the sarin gas attack several of its leaders launched on the Tokyo subway system in March of 1995. That attack resulted in twelve deaths, injured over 5,000 and brought Aum world-wide attention. Less than a decade earlier, the group had begun as a small yoga-practitioners circle led by the partially blind Matsumoto Chizuo, later known as Asahara Shōkō. In this short study, Ian Reader aims at providing a historical overview of the group, with particular attention to "the question of why Aum Shinrikyō, a seemingly idealistic new religion which preached the virtues of asceticism and renunciation, became a murderous movement" (pp. 8–9). The book moves from a discussion of the gas attack and its aftermath, through four chapters which treat Aum's founder and the historical vicissitudes of the group, to a concluding chapter in which Reader sums up his argument concerning Aum's path to violence and compares Aum with two other groups that he sees as illustrating similar dynamics, the Rengō Sekigun, a faction of the Japanese Red Army, and the Rajneesh movement.

Reader's treatment of Aum has many strengths. The author uses media sources cautiously, characterizing their portrayals of Aum as containing "partial truths and partial misrepresentations" (p. 4). He points out, for example, that the media has often presented Asahara as "an embittered youth at war with Japanese society from early on" (p. 18), but reminds us that, to date, there have been no in-depth psychological studies of him. Reader is good at suggesting the attraction that Asahara and Aum might have held for some, especially young Japanese, taking note of Asahara's criticism of Japanese society as materialistic and corrupt, his call to the ascetic life, his promise of enlightenment and supernatural powers, his utopian visions, and his own unique appearance. The volume also provides detailed information about key moments in Aum's brief history and, in chapter 3, Reader presents brief summaries of three of Asahara's works published between 1992 and 1995. As regards the central