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Daniel V. Botsman: Punishment and Power in the Making of Modern Japan

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Introduction

The explanation of the very recent in terms of the remotest past, naturally attractive to men who have made of this past their chief subject of research, has sometimes dominated our studies to the point of a hypnosis. In its most characteristic aspect, this idol of the historian tribe may be called the obsession with origins.

Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*

Historicism enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*

IF YOU WANDER AROUND the antiquarian bookstores of Tokyo's famous Jimbochō district looking for material on the history of punishment, you are bound to discover copies of an old picture book called *Tokugawa bakufu keiji zufu* (An Illustrated Guide to the Punishments of the Tokugawa Shogunate).¹ Compiled in 1893 by an artist named Fujita Shintarō, the guide contains some sixty color drawings, divided into three main sections. The first section depicts a range of crimes supposedly typical of the Tokugawa period (1603–1867). There are drawings of thieves and bandits, corrupt merchants and gamblers, and—in what undoubtedly constitutes evidence of the ongoing gender anxieties of the Meiji era (1868–1912)—an usually large number of “poison women”: beautiful entertainers who stole money from their customers, vicious concubines who plotted to kill their masters and tormented their heirs, conniving members of the shogun's harem who hatched political intrigues, and so on.² This first section ends with an illustration of one of the samurai “patriots” involved in the early stages of the struggle to overthrow the shogun's regime and “restore” the long-over-shadowed emperor to his rightful place as ruler of Japan. He sits alone with a grave look on his face, and in the pages that follow the reasons for his concern become increasingly clear.

After several drawings showing the rough methods of arrest used by samurai officials and the deep shame of suspects being led through the streets of the city in full public view, the second section of Fujita's guide moves on to present the full horrors of Tokugawa justice in graphic and gory detail. Suspected criminals (including several of the “poison women” depicted earlier) are shown being chained up and beaten during their initial interrogations, then thrown into a squalid, overcrowded jailhouse and tortured mercilessly in the presence of fearsome samurai magistrates until

confessing to the crimes they have been accused of. The guide reaches its climax with a long series of illustrations depicting the broad array of punishments used by the Tokugawa and the bloody, mutilated remains of those subjected to the harshest of them. Then, finally, in a stark and deliberate contrast to these gruesome images, it turns to the new “enlightened” system of justice that had been introduced in the decades following the Meiji Restoration of 1868. This section shows policemen in modern uniforms being carefully supervised by superiors as they conduct an arrest; criminal suspects now appear wearing special masks designed to protect their identities as they are escorted through the city streets. There are also illustrations of the spotless, well-ordered interiors of one of the new prisons and of public trials being conducted in grand-looking courthouses and courts of appeal. The two final pages of the guide show on one side a group of convicts diligently working away under the supervision of uniformed guards and on the other a modern gallows with two nooses hanging ready to inflict clean, bloodless sentences of death.

The Whiggish “before and after” narrative that Fujita’s guide outlines will, no doubt, strike readers as a familiar one. A dramatic shift away from brutal methods of interrogation and punishment to a more humane and rational system of justice has, after all, long been understood to constitute an important part of the birth of “modern” civilization, and the same story of sweeping penal reforms has often been told in the context of the emergence of the world’s first bourgeois societies. After the American Revolution, we know, leaders of the new republic proclaimed an end to all “cruel and unusual punishment,” dramatically curtailed the use of the death penalty, and eventually built the world’s first model penitentiaries, all as part of their efforts to create a virtuous, Christian society, distinct from the corrupt European monarchies with which they had so boldly broken.³ In France too, the great revolution of 1789 quickly led to the abandonment of the old regime’s expansive arsenal of punishments and (the excesses of the Terror notwithstanding) to the rise of a new penal system based primarily on fines, imprisonment, and that most scientific instrument of death, the guillotine.⁴ The reform process in England may not have taken place in the same context of domestic political revolution, but the changes implemented there in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were no less dramatic. Figures such as John Howard, the prison reformer, William Blackstone, the jurist, and Robert Peel, the reform-minded politician, have often been seen by historians as secular saints for the roles they played in eradicating the abuses of the old eighteenth-century system of justice and its infamous “Bloody Code.”⁵

The example of Meiji Japan as portrayed in Fujita’s guide seems to fit with this classic Western model, and it is not difficult to string together “hard facts” from the historical record to further support this view. Within



Figure 1. "Punishment by burning at the stake" from Fujita Shintarō, *Tokugawa bakuifu keiji zuyū* (An Illustrated Guide to the Punishments of the Tokugawa Shogunate) (1893). The Criminal Museum of Meiji University.

just a year of the Meiji Restoration, Japan's new government had already begun to abolish the harshest of the old Tokugawa punishments, and within a decade efforts to build a national network of modern courts and prisons were well underway. Although there is no denying the revolutionary speed of these changes, however, Fujita's guide also reminds us of one way in which the Japanese path to modernity differed profoundly from that of the Western nations just mentioned. Opening the front cover of the guide, the reader is immediately confronted by a "prefece" (*sic*) written in awkward but nevertheless clearly decipherable English. The illustrations in the book, moreover, all carry English captions alongside the Japanese. The guide was thus intended not just for a domestic Japanese market but also for sale among the foreign community in Japan and probably for export. Profit provides one possible explanation for this. Then (as now) Western audiences had a strong interest in the horrors of "Oriental despotism," and Fujita and his publisher were undoubtedly well aware that a book containing graphic illustrations of exotic tortures and punishments was likely to sell. There was more to it than this alone, however. After all, if a profit-hungry appeal to the "fascination of the abomination" was really the book's main purpose, why include a final section depicting the reforms that had been implemented since the Restoration? And why go to the trouble of composing an English-language preface emphasizing how the "revolution of the first year of Meidi [*sic*]" had ushered in an age of "wonderful Progress" and banished the "cruelties" of the Tokugawa shoguns to a chapter of history that, it claimed, was already a distant memory for most Japanese?

More than just a familiar tale of "progress" told in the context of a different national history, these sections of the guide reveal a deeply felt need to secure Western recognition of Japan's social and political transformation and of its commitment to the project of modern civilization. And it is no coincidence that the example of penal reform should have been taken up for this purpose. Practices of punishment and ideas about them had, from the very outset, played a crucial role in shaping Japan's relations with the Western powers. As we shall see in more detail in chapter 5, the primary objective of Commodore Perry's famous mission to "open" Japan in 1853 may have been to secure access to coaling stations and shipping supplies for transpacific trade, but at a moral level it was initially justified in terms of the need to ensure that shipwrecked American sailors were not thrown into squalid jails and subjected to the horrors of "Oriental" justice for having violated the "unreasonable" laws that kept the country "secluded" from the world.⁶ To use the language of today's global power politics, Japan in the 1850s was a "rogue state," and stories of the harsh treatment (i.e., human rights violations) of unfortunate American castaways provided a convenient pretext for using force, or the threat of it, to bring it into line with "international norms." Soon after the conclusion of the Perry treaty,

pressure also began being put on the Tokugawa regime to allow the establishment of permanent enclaves of Western traders, and in this context the specter of white men being subjected to Japan's "sanguinary codes" provided the necessary moral justification for imposing a series of "unequal treaties" that confirmed the right of all Westerners in Japan to be tried in special consular courts according to their own laws and practices.

Immunity from Japanese laws was not the only advantage secured under these treaties. They also established terms of trade that were strongly favorable to Western interests and denied Japanese officials the right to change tariff levels without permission from the Western powers. Overall, they established Japan's formal status as a backward, "semicivilized" country, well below the nations of the West on the great evolutionary tree that had rapidly grown to maturity in the soil of European empire. After the Restoration, treaty revision quickly became one of the central goals of the Meiji regime; but so long as the Western powers were able to raise doubts about the suitability of Japanese laws and punishments for citizens of the civilized countries, they would always have a reason to reject changes to the status quo. As a result, penal and judicial reforms in Meiji Japan were never simply matters of domestic concern. They were also intimately connected to larger issues concerning Japan's relations with the West and its place within the new world order that European imperialist expansion had built.

The experience of being categorized as backward and inferior and of having to come to terms abruptly with Western ideas and institutions under the threat of force clearly links Japan's modern history to that of most parts of the non-Western world.⁷ Yet this aspect of the Japanese past is often overlooked or forgotten. In large part, of course, this is because we have become so used to thinking of Japan as a unique "success." True, the nation may have been confronted by aggressive Western gunboat diplomacy and experienced the *threat* of colonial subjugation, but in the end, unlike other non-Western societies, it did not succumb to the imperialist aggression visited upon it. On the contrary, under the leadership of the Meiji government a massive effort was launched to unlock the secrets of Western power and use them to strengthen the country from within. By the time that Fujita published his guide in 1893 Japan could boast not only of its police, courts, and prisons but also of its national network of schools, its post offices and trains, its modern conscription army, and, most important, its new system of constitutional government—the first of its kind outside the West. Faced with all of this evidence of "progress," the Western powers, led by Great Britain, agreed in 1894 to accept a timetable for revision of the "unequal treaties" that had been imposed on Japan some forty years earlier. (The publication of Fujita's guide was clearly part of the final push toward the achievement of this "great goal.") Within just weeks of

concluding the new agreement with the Western powers, the Meiji leaders also led the country into its first modern war, against Qing dynasty China. Victory over the Qing the following year allowed Japan to claim its first major overseas colony, Taiwan, and a massive reparation payment, which, together with the war effort itself, helped stimulate a wave of industrialization in the decade that followed. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the country was thus already well on its way to becoming a “great power,” and in the decades that followed it steadily built up its own empire and influence in East Asia.

In terms of both timing and outcomes (not to mention the eventual slide into fascism), this history would clearly seem to link Japan more closely to the “latecomer” states of Europe (particularly Germany and Italy) than to other parts of the non-Western world, and historians have repeatedly made this comparison. Yet the fact remains that in 1850 Japan had been seen by the West as a backward, Oriental country, far removed from the dynamic achievements of European civilization. How was it then that this society managed not only to stave off colonization and subordination but also to grow into a modern nation with an expansive empire of its own? How was it able to become so powerful that by the middle of the twentieth century it would sweep away the old European empires from Asia and mount a serious military challenge to the United States, single-handedly pulling it into the greatest conflict of the modern age?

In the aftermath of Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War, questions like these became the central concern of a generation of historians in the English-speaking world whose own lives had been indelibly touched by both the war and the Allied occupation. Turning their attention to the period immediately preceding the arrival of Perry, scholars in the so-called modernization school suggested that perhaps the key to Japan’s subsequent “takeoff” and “development” lay in the fact that it had not been so backward in 1850 after all. A close look at Tokugawa society, they suggested, revealed trends that closely paralleled important developments in the West on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. The paradigmatic example of this approach is Robert N. Bellah’s famous 1957 study, *Tokugawa Religion*, which maintained that popular religious beliefs in the late Tokugawa period revealed a spirit remarkably similar to the “Protestant work ethic” that Max Weber had identified as an important factor in the emergence of capitalism in western Europe.⁸ Similarly, the pioneering social and economic historian Thomas C. Smith showed that Japan, like western Europe, had experienced significant “pre-modern economic growth” (now commonly referred to as “proto-industrialization”) and that peasants in the Tokugawa period had been forced to develop a sense of “work discipline” that prepared them well for the rigors of industrial capitalism.⁹ Ronald Dore’s *Education in Tokugawa Japan* emphasized the fact that literacy rates in Japan

were probably as high as anywhere in the preindustrial world, while John W. Hall's biography of the powerful grand chamberlain, Tanuma Okitsugu, suggested that by the second half of the eighteenth century there were already signs that some Tokugawa leaders had begun to explore a more "modern" approach to government and economic policy.¹⁰

In some important respects, the work of these scholars and others in the modernization school can be said to have had a liberating impact on the field of "Japanese studies." In contrast to classic forms of Orientalist scholarship, which could view Asians only as people trapped within an essentially unchanging world of "civilizations" and "traditions," the basic point of the modernization school's approach was always to highlight the dynamism and vitality of Tokugawa society.¹¹ In this sense, it posed an important challenge to the narrow, Eurocentric focus of the historical profession in places like the United States, by boldly asserting that a non-Western nation too could have a real history.¹² As the list of works mentioned earlier have already made clear, it also provided an extremely rich research paradigm, adding greatly to our awareness of many aspects of Japan's past. Yet, in the end, it was a paradigm that carried with it a range of serious problems and limitations.

As T. Fujitani has recently pointed out, the modernization school reached the height of its influence and popularity at more or less the same time that Japanese Americans were first being defined as a "model minority" within the United States.¹³ The two sets of ideas, he notes, not only were mutually reinforcing but also paralleled each other in key ways. Domestically, emphasis was placed on the way that the unique cultural heritage that Japanese Americans brought with them to the United States had enabled them to overcome the obstacles of racism and discrimination and "succeed" in mainstream (white) American society. The implication for other minority groups was that if they were unable to overcome such obstacles, ultimately it was not because of their specific situations or because of fundamental problems within U.S. society, but rather because they themselves lacked the right cultural attributes and values to "fit in" and "get ahead." Similarly, by establishing Japan as a "global model minority," which had been able to "succeed" as a nation because of its unique historical development during the Tokugawa period, the modernization school implied that if other non-Western nations were unable to "develop," it was not so much because of the legacies of colonial domination or present-day inequalities and problems within the global system but rather because they were not yet properly prepared as societies.¹⁴ To put it another way, rather than holding up Japan as the example that shattered the mystique of white supremacy and proved that people in other parts of the world could also become strong and powerful (as "third world" nationalists had often done), the work of the modernization school effectively positioned it as the

exception that proved the rule of European cultural and historical superiority. Japan had been able to succeed because its past was essentially (and uniquely) similar to that of the West. In this sense, far from being independent of the West, its history was inseparably bound to it. It was an “honorary white” nation with an “honorary white” past.

Eventually, of course, there was always the possibility that other non-Western nations might attain the same kind of attributes that set Japan apart, but, as Fujitani notes, the work of the modernization scholars clearly suggested that they would have to be patient. After all, if the roots of “development” in Japan could be traced back several centuries to the beginning of the Tokugawa period, then it would be unreasonable to expect real improvements and changes to occur elsewhere overnight.¹⁵ In this respect, the modernization school’s approach to Japanese history can be linked to precisely the same kind of historicist consciousness that Dipesh Chakrabarty has identified as lying at the heart of European imperialism. Historicism, Chakrabarty points out, was what allowed a classic liberal philosopher such as John Stuart Mill to proclaim, on the one hand, that democratic self-rule was the highest form of government and yet, on the other, to argue forcefully against extending it to Britain’s Indian and African subjects. Eventually they would be able to rule themselves, the argument went, but “some historical time of development and civilization (colonial rule and education, to be precise) had to elapse before they could be considered ready for such a task.”¹⁶ In response to the continual refrain of “not yet” from the colonial rulers, Chakrabarty notes, anticolonial nationalist movements in the twentieth century learned to “harp insistently on a ‘now’ as the temporal horizon of action.”¹⁷ If all people were born free and equal, as the great European thinkers taught, then it followed that Indian and African peasants were, from the outset, just as entitled to rule themselves as the cleverest of British intellectuals. This kind of insistence on “the urgency of the ‘now’” helped give rise to the great wave of decolonization that followed World War II, but in its wake the work of the modernization school allowed the example of Japan and its history to be used to support and reassert the old logic of “not yet.” Japan’s rapid “development” from the Meiji period on had been possible because the society had been properly prepared for it. Other nations, which were not ready but had rushed to claim their political independence, should not expect (or demand) too much too soon.¹⁸

In addition to these political considerations, there were also fundamental problems of historical interpretation and representation. To begin with, of course, the modernization school’s approach was deeply teleological, highlighting only those aspects of the past that seemed to fit with the notion of a society moving steadily toward “modernity” and downplaying those that did not. Leftist scholars in Japan, who in the aftermath of de-

ades of political repression and disastrous wars of aggression naturally found it difficult to see the nation's history in terms of unadulterated "success," were also quick to point out that the modernization school's approach reduced the complex issue of modernity to the single question of industrialization, thereby avoiding more difficult questions about social and political development. By emphasizing Japan's achievements *as a nation*, moreover, it tended to obscure any sense of internal social divisions, oppression, or struggle. Similar kinds of criticisms also began being articulated by a younger generation of scholars in the United States, particularly after the Vietnam War. In their work on the Tokugawa past, some of these scholars turned specifically to the question of what one important collection of essays called "the neglected tradition" of conflict in Japanese history, focusing on peasant protest and other forms of popular rebellion.¹⁹ Others examined areas of the past that had already been taken up by the modernization school (the history of thought, economic history) but strove to do so in ways that avoided the teleological pull of "the modern," the search for "equivalents" to European developments, and the tendency to celebrate the Tokugawa heritage uncritically.²⁰ As a result of these efforts, our understanding of the Tokugawa period and of Japanese history more generally is undoubtedly fuller and more sophisticated than ever before.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the field has managed to escape fully the kind of historicist assumptions that informed the modernization school's approach. At a superficial level it is striking to note the way in which many historians writing in English continue to fall back on the phrase "early modern Japan," a term that clearly implies both preparation for "the modern" and a sense of equivalency with early modern Europe. More substantively, in focusing so much attention on the Tokugawa past and the complex ways in which it may have shaped Japan's subsequent development (for better and for worse), we have continued to downplay or overlook the fact that modernity in Japan was ultimately *not* homegrown and must be understood, at least in the first instance, as a product of the mid-nineteenth-century encounter with Western imperialism.

One of this book's primary goals is to use the example of punishment and penal reform to restore some sense of the way that forces *external* to the history of "the nation" played a crucial role in its formation. It seeks, in other words, to puncture the neat, self-contained boundaries of national history, and to see the encounter with imperialism not just in terms of an aggressive Western challenge that helped trigger a dynamic Japanese response but rather as something that was itself integral to the making of modern Japan. The history of punishment is, in many ways, ideally suited for this purpose. As Fujita's guide suggests, the changes that were implemented in the decades following the Restoration were both visceral and

qualitative: no one in the 1890s had any doubt that a real break had been made with the penal and judicial traditions of the Tokugawa period. There was also no doubt that this break was intimately connected to the issue of the unequal treaties and, more generally, to the new notions of civilization that had been used to justify them.

Yet the history of punishment in Japan has hardly been immune to the logic of historicism. As the humiliation of the unequal treaties began to fade from living memory, and the Japanese state became increasingly conscious of its self-appointed role as “the leader of Asia” in the prewar period, Japanese scholars working in the then highly prestigious subfield of legal history had already begun to uncover “evidence” that some aspects of Tokugawa penal practice had shown clear signs of “progress” toward a more “civilized” approach.²¹ Japan in 1868 may not have been as advanced as the Western powers, they implied, but even in the Tokugawa period it had moved further along the path to “enlightenment” than the other peoples of East Asia, whom it was now attempting to “raise up” through its own project of colonial expansion. In the decades following the war this particular strand of nationalist discourse simultaneously fed into and was reinforced by the approach of the modernization school, and as a result legal historians in Japan continued to interpret the history of Tokugawa punishments primarily in terms of a steady movement toward modern forms of penalty. In general terms they argued that, although Tokugawa punishments were harsh, there was clear evidence of a gradual amelioration over time. They emphasized the significance of an institution called the Stockade for Laborers (*ninsoku yoseba*), which had been established in Edo in the late eighteenth century. The stockade, they noted, was used to confine people and put them to work for the sake of promoting “reform”—and from this they concluded that it was an indigenous forerunner of the “modern punishment of deprivation of liberty” (*kindai-teki jiyū kei*).²²

The first four chapters of this book lay out an alternative framework for understanding the history of Tokugawa punishment. Drawing inspiration from the methodological insights of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, as well as other works produced in the “crime wave” that has swept the Western historical profession since the 1970s, I argue that in order to understand Tokugawa punishments properly we must first suspend our concern with issues of barbarism and humanity (i.e., with “progress”) and see them instead as one part of a complex set of strategies for ordering society and exercising power.²³ The first chapter provides an overview of the general nature of punishment in the Tokugawa period, focusing particularly on the shogun’s capital, Edo (now Tokyo), which by the end of the seventeenth century had become the standard point of reference for penal and judicial practices all over the country. In addition to describing the particular kinds of punishment used by the warrior regime, it also explores some of the

basic principles according to which they were managed and applied. The punishments are, in other words, understood to have formed part of a system, and an attempt is made to show how that system worked.

The second chapter considers Tokugawa penal practices from the perspective of contemporary doctrines about good government and political legitimacy. It begins by asking how a system of unashamedly brutal capital and corporal punishments could have continued to function without undermining the credibility of a regime that claimed to govern in accordance with both Confucian principles of benevolence and Buddhist ideals of compassion. By way of an answer the chapter shows how customary practices, gaps in enforcement, and strategic acts of restraint helped temper the way in which the power to punish was exercised. It also explores the crucial role that outcast groups played in the operation of the Tokugawa penal system and considers how their presence infused acts of official punishment with an added layer of political meaning, protecting and bolstering the position of the warrior lords.

Though important for an understanding of how the punishment system worked, outcasts constituted, however, only one stratum of the complex hierarchy of formally recognized “estates” or status groups around which Tokugawa society was organized. Beginning with a detailed analysis of the internal organization of the shogunate’s main jailhouse at Kodenmachō in Edo, chapter 3 shows how the principles of the status system (*mibunsei*) permeated and shaped virtually every aspect of judicial decision making under the warrior state. In this it enhances not only our understanding of the nature of the penal system but also our awareness of the centrality of status to the structures of Tokugawa society and our sense of the ways in which that society was fundamentally unlike the one that emerged in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. In general, the first three chapters are all intended to bolster an awareness of the unsettling strangeness of the past. This, however, is not to suggest that we should lapse back into an Orientalist understanding of Tokugawa society as static and unchanging.

Chapter 4 examines how, from the beginning of the eighteenth century, concerns about the ability of the warrior state to maintain social order gave rise to a new scholarly discourse about penal reform and eventually prompted the decision to establish the Stockade for Laborers. Rather than seeing this new institution as evidence of a shift toward a new, more modern approach to punishment and social discipline, however, I argue that it should instead be seen as part of an effort to bolster and reinforce the basic structures of the status system and the mechanisms that it provided for enforcing order and stability. Its establishment shows, in other words, that the old system was changing, but not in any simple, linear manner.

Having examined in detail the basic principles of the Tokugawa punishment system and the broader social context within which it operated, the

book then turns to the question of how and why the old system was dismantled and radically remade in the wake of the Restoration. Chapter 5 begins by showing how, from around the time of Perry's arrival in Japan, idealized descriptions of America's recently established penitentiary system began to catch the attention of a small but influential group of activists and scholars who, confronted by a rising tide of domestic social unease and unrest, became fascinated by its twin promise of human mutability and perfect order. At the same time, the chapter also examines how, in the context of the encounter with the West, older penal practices that had for centuries been equated with warrior power, authority, and control were abruptly transformed into symbols of national backwardness and barbarity.

As already noted, the rupture of these established notions was closely connected to the imposition of the unequal treaties, and in the wake of the Restoration the new politics of civilization that they epitomized created a powerful stimulus for reform. Chapter 6 considers the remarkable speed with which major changes in the penal system were implemented in the first five or six years of the Meiji era and traces the process leading up to the establishment of Japan's first modern prison in 1874. Initially, the direction of reforms was greatly influenced by Chinese models that had first been studied in Japan during the debates over punishment in the early eighteenth century, but by the beginning of the 1870s efforts were already being made to learn more about the Western approach to punishment and criminal justice. Of particular importance in this regard was a mission dispatched to Hong Kong and Singapore in 1871 to study British colonial prisons and courts. Upon his return to Japan, the leader of this mission, a middle-level bureaucrat named Ohara Shigechika, effectively laid the foundations for the modern Japanese penal system, drafting a detailed set of prison rules and architectural plans and specifying a range of other reforms that would bring the country in line with contemporary Western practices.

In an important sense, the Japanese authorities' decision at this time to study the prisons and courts of Britain's Asian colonies (where they were told they would be able to observe fellow Orientals being punished according to Western laws and practices) provides another reminder of Japan's own semicolonial status in the years after the Restoration. The final chapter of the book focuses on the reforms implemented by the Meiji government that eventually convinced the Western powers to reconsider that status and give up the special judicial privileges granted them under the unequal treaties. It outlines the debates surrounding the abolition of judicial torture and the preparation of Japan's first Western-style criminal code; it then examines the proliferation of modern prisons and what might well be termed "the great confinement" of the Meiji era. Ultimately, the chapter suggests, the same ideas about civilization, progress, and punishment that had been used by the Western powers to justify the imposition

of the unequal treaties came to serve the Meiji regime's own domestic agenda and bolster its legitimacy and authority. The ideologies of nationalism and imperialism, in other words, had begun to mesh. If this was true in a domestic context, it was to become all the more obvious in Japan's own empire. For this reason, the book concludes with an examination of the way that modern ideas about civilization and progress came to affect penal practices in Taiwan during the first ten years of Japanese colonial rule and explores how this particular aspect of colonialism helped lay the foundations for the view that Japan should be seen as a special case, distinct from and superior to the rest of Asia.

Overall, then, this book covers similar ground to that of Fujita's 1893 guide. It also shares with Fujita the basic view that some aspects of the Tokugawa-Meiji transition must be seen in terms of a genuine *break* with the past. Yet, whereas Fujita presented the reforms of the Meiji period as a clear, unadulterated example of human progress, my aim is to show how that same idea of progress was intimately connected with the global project of empire, and how it has served to obscure certain aspects of the past and keep them hidden from our view.