

ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Rhetoric As Ideological Pronouncement: An Analysis Of The Cardinal Principles Of The National Entity Of Japan



The concept of *kokutai* or ‘national structure’ derived from the fundamental insularity and isolation of the Japanese. The concept served as a powerful linguistic weapon both for attack and defense in the political arena of the period 1931-1945.... [A]fter the Meiji Restoration, ‘national structure’ was used to signify the uniqueness of the existing government of Japan. The word became a glorification of that order, a claim that the present had existed since time immemorial. Since the oldest book extant was the *Kojiki*, which recounted the descent from heaven of the ancestor of the Royal Family, the national structure was generally understood to centre on an unbroken line of emperors of heavenly origin. - *Tsurumi Shunsuke*

Over the past centuries, scholars of rhetorical communication have been grappling with a fundamental nature of argumentation that continues to shape and reshape social, political and religious structures of human society. Literature suggests that whereas most scholars acknowledge its critical or sometimes subversive effects, some have paid a considerable attention to enemies of argumentation such as ideology, myth, and propaganda. For instance, Marxists are concerned with ideology as the ruling ideas of the epoch in an attempt to investigate what might be termed the internal life of the ideological realm and to provide detailed and sophisticated accounts of how a society’s “ruling ideas” are produced. Religious scholars have argued that myth, as sacred tales concerned with the origins of natural or supernatural, or cultural phenomena, serve various roles available within the articulated social cosmos for community members to achieve a position of influence within the social hierarchies or to find ways of operating meaningfully as contributing members. Finally, the scholars of media studies have explored the tension between the principles of democracy and the

process of propaganda since the notion of a rational person, capable of thinking and living according to scientific patterns, of choosing freely between good and evil seems opposed to secret influences or appeals to the irrational.

Given that, it is surprising to know that there has been very little discussion about “ideological pronouncement,” which means a sort of rhetoric which undermines and limits the possibility of critical discussion among target audiences. In what follows, I will explore “ideological pronouncement” as an enemy of argumentation. First, I will contend that the nature of argumentation is primarily characterized as an engagement in critical/rational discourse. Second, I will define the nature of ideological pronouncement as an engagement in fascist/anti-realist discourse. Specifically, the essential constituents for such an enactment can be identified as anti-realism, a lack of critical space, and especially, one-sided communication.

Finally, I will investigate Japan’s wartime textbook, the *Kokutai no hongii*, or *Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan* (hereafter it will be referred to as *Cardinal Principles*) as a rhetoric of ideological pronouncement. In 1937, the *Cardinal Principles* was published by the Japanese government and became the most widely employed moral education textbook, an official attempt at indoctrination of its nationalist principles: “first printing of approximately 300,000 copies was distributed to the teaching staffs of both public and private schools from the university level to the lower cycle of elementary schools” (*Cardinal Principles* 10). As of 1943, the book is said to have sold approximately 1,900,000 copies. Given such enormous popularity, it seems appropriate to use the *Cardinal Principles* as a prime example of fascist discourse.

1. Argumentation as engagement in critical/rational discourse

Let me start the discussion by posing a question: Why is ideological pronouncement problematic or undesirable? To answer the question, I will define and examine the following three concepts: *argumentation*, *argument*, *argumentativeness*. First, argumentation is generally recognized as “the process of advancing, supporting, modifying, and criticizing claims so that appropriate decision makers may grant or deny adherence” (Rieke & Sillars 5). This audience-centered definition holds the assumptions that the participants must willingly engage in public debate and discussion, and that their arguments must function to open a critical space and keep it open. From this perspective, as Chaim Perelman has rightly pointed out, the aim of argumentation is to gain the adherence of others. Hence, argumentation should be viewed as an interactive

process between arguer and audience to determine the appropriateness of an advocated claim based upon data presented with reasoning given. Only the arguments that exceed a threshold for audience acceptance will survive or prevail, and others will disappear or fade away. This way, argumentation plays a chief role in the critical decision-making process.

Another important definition is concerned with the term “argument.” In his landmark article, “Rhetorical Criticism as Argument,” Wayne Brockriede maintains that “argument” means the process whereby a person reasons his/her way from one idea to the choice of another idea, and further argues that this concept of argument implies five generic characteristics:

1. an inferential leap from existing beliefs to the adoption of a new belief or the reinforcement of an old one;
2. a perceived rationale to justify that leap;
3. a choice among two or more competing claims;
4. a regulation of uncertainty in relation to the selected claim – since someone has made an inferential leap, certainty can be neither zero nor total; and
5. a willingness to risk a confrontation of that claim with one’s peers.

Thus, the second definition also assumes the arguers’ willingness to risk engaging in critical evaluation of claim selected, data presented, and reasoning provided. As Brockriede himself notes, the “last characteristic is especially important. By inviting confrontation, the critic-arguer tries to establish some degree of intersubjective reliability in his[/her] judgment and in his[/her] reasons for the judgment” (167). Thus, the establishment of intersubjectivity is one of the primary aims of engaging in argumentative discourse.

As a consequence, the arguer is necessarily required to cultivate his/her “argumentativeness,” or willingness to argue for what he/she believes, by treating disagreements as objectively as possible, reaffirming the other, stressing equality, expressing interest in the other’s position, and allowing the other person to save face (Devito). Thus, the arguer is forced to engage in critical/rational discourse, running a risk of being defeated by his/her opponents. When he is quoted by Jürgen Habermas, H. Neuendorf states: Anyone participating in argument shows his[/her] rationality or lack of it by the manner in which he[/she] handles and responds to the offering of reasons for or against claims. If he[/she] is “open to argument,” he[/she] will either acknowledge the force of those reasons or seek to reply to them, and either way he[/she] will deal with them in a “rational” manner.

If he[/she] is “deaf to argument,” by contrast, he[/she] may either ignore contrary reasons or reply to them with dogmatic assertions, and either way he[/she] fails to deal with the issues “rationally.” (Habermas 18)

Therefore, Habermas concludes that “[c]orresponding to the openness of rational expressions to being explained, there is, on the side of persons who behave rationally, a willingness to expose themselves to criticism and, if necessary, to participate properly in argumentation” (18). Thus, assurance of rationality is one of the chief purposes of argumentation.

In short, argumentation must help carry out critical decision-making, establish intersubjectivity, and save rationality in the act of speech. I believe that ideological pronouncement fails to meet all three of the fundamental characteristics of argumentation. Ideological pronouncement should be considered problematic and even undesirable in that it is designed to oppress free and critical discussion and promote controlled and uncritical thinking. In the following section, I will illustrate how ideological pronouncement is constructed by using Japan’s wartime rhetoric as a major paradigm case.

2. Ideological pronouncement as engagement in fascist/anti-realist discourse

Rhetorical reality is produced and maintained through symbolic interaction between and among people and rhetoric. Clearly, communication practice typically serves to reinforce the ongoing construction of rhetorical reality (Berger & Luckmann; Farrell & Goodnight). In this sense, reality is far from something we are given by others, but something we experience within the framework of rhetorical formation. As Berger and Luckmann argue, “Knowledge about society is thus a realization in the double sense of the word, in the sense of apprehending the objectivated social reality, and in the sense of ongoingly producing this reality” (66).

I argue that a rhetorical reality becomes ideological pronouncement when it possesses the three characteristics mentioned previously, and that such an anti-argumentative rhetoric is likely to proliferate in the period of fascist ideology, such as wartime. To begin with, the nature of ideological pronouncement can be defined as “anti-realism,” or symbolically constructed reality. For instance, the character of wartime Japanese rhetoric can be represented by the following: *respect for order, hierarchy, filial piety, and harmony*. As Kenneth Burke has argued, “a cycle or terms implicit in the idea of ‘order,’ in keeping with the fact that ‘order,’ being a polar term, implies a corresponding ideas of ‘disorder,’ while these terms in turn involve ideas of ‘obedience’ or ‘disobedience’ to the ‘authority’

implicit in 'order'" (450).

Specifically, the *Cardinal Principles* was exerted in order to construct Japan as the great family nation which has no parallel in history. The imperial Household is regarded as the head family, and the Japanese people as the Emperor's subjects and nucleus of national life. The book begins:

The unbroken line of Emperors, receiving the Oracle of the Founder of the Nation, reign eternally over the Japanese Empire. This is our eternal and immutable national entity. Thus, founded on this great principle, all the people, united as one great family nation in heart and obeying the Imperial Will, enhance indeed the beautiful virtues of loyalty and filial piety. This is the glory of our national entity. (emphasis added, 59)

Thus, filial piety is featured as "a Way of the highest importance" that "originates with one's family as its basis" (*Cardinal Principles* 87). The term "Way" is used in the technical and ethical sense to indicate a particular significance in placing the Imperial Ancestor and the Emperor in the relationship of parent and child. Thus, the Emperor-subject relationship is emphasized as not only that of sovereign and subject, but of father and child. In this way, the content of the *Cardinal Principles* is far from historical facts: rather, it is an ideological construction. Japanese historian Nagahara Keiji comments: The imperial view of history sought to reinforce itself as an ideology to rationalize the powers that be, rather than to cope with contemporary rationalism. The Imperial view of history was inherently non-scientific, since it started the Japanese history from the divine message, descent of the Sun Goddess's grandson to earth, and Emperor Jinmu. Further, it fundamentally blocked the academic recognition of Japanese history by ascribing everything to "manifestation of Kokutai" and describing Japanese aggression as dissemination of the "Imperial Will." (my translation, 27-28)

After all, it is impossible for State Shinto evolved from an indigenous religion of nature-worship to offer a solution to social problems caused by the rapid modernization of Japan. It was rather natural for militarists and imperialists to seek a means of escape into territorial aggrandizement in order to divert the attention of the public from real issues. This attempt to resolve the internal contradictions only created new contradictions, all doomed to end badly. The second essential constituent for ideological pronouncement is "a lack of critical space." Rather than promoting a space for critical thinking and reflection, it functions to undermine and limit the possibility of critical discussion among target audiences. For instance, the *Cardinal Principles* is said to serve the role of indoctrination, or "the teaching of what is known to be false as true, or more

widely the teaching of what is believed true in such a way as to preclude critical inquiry on the part of learners" (*Oxford Companion to Philosophy* 867). It was published for the purpose of easing the social tension caused by the impact of Westernization after the Meiji Restoration and Great Depression later, and of unifying the Japanese people for nationalistic ideas. Robert King Hall explains: Its avowed purpose was to combat the social unrest and intellectual conflicts which sprang from the "individualism" of the people and to substitute a devotion to the "national unity" which it identified with unswerving loyalty to the Imperial Family. ("Prefactory Note" in the *Cardinal Principles*)

Thus, the *Cardinal Principles* serves twin functions: the first is to divert the Japanese people's attention from internal disorder and dissatisfaction with political realities; and the second, to provide justification for Japan's wartime nationalism.

The final important characteristic of ideological pronouncement is "one-sided communication," or a sort of imperfect communication designed to ask the audience to stop thinking and accept the imposed cultural norm or social more blindly. In this frame of reference, no criticism or even questioning is called for, but all obedience and loyalty are required by the ruling class. A prime instance of this is the wartime Japan's "ideology of death." Tsurumi Kazuko argues that, in the army and the navy, the indoctrination was extended so as to serve as socialization for death:

Army indoctrination was a strictly one-way communication, in which only the socializer spoke and the socializee was expected to accept silently whatever was told him. It was an imperfect communication, since the socializee was not expected to understand precisely what these words meant but only to grasp vaguely what they were about. Their ambiguity created a halo of sanctity around the words of the Imperial dicta.... Thus imperfect communication, instead of complete discommunication or perfect communication, was function for military elites as a method of indoctrinating soldiers in the ideology of death. The use of imperfect communication as a vehicle of army socialization was related to the functional diffuseness of its ideological content. (121)

Thus, the Japan's army education provides what Tsurumi calls "imperfect communication" for indoctrinating young soldiers in the "ideology of death."

With the above defining characteristics in mind, let me now turn to an analysis of the *Cardinal Principles* in order to show how ideological pronouncement as a rhetoric serves a role of fascist/anti-realist discourse, in lieu of that of critical/rationalist discourse.

3. The cardinal principles of the national entity of Japan as an example of ideological pronouncement

The *Cardinal Principles* employs a variety of rhetorical strategy to distinguish Japanese from Western traditions. Assuming a nation to be an “imagined community” (Anderson), I will analyze its rhetorical strategies as an instrument of official nationalist education within the context of the three constituents of ideological pronouncement.

First of all, to prove the ground from which the claim that the Japanese people are a special race destined to rule the world is drawn, the *Cardinal Principles* argues that the “Emperor is a deity incarnate who rules our country in unison with the august Will of the Imperial Ancestors” (71). As the fascist regime came into power, the “sacred and inviolable” nature of the Emperor was transfigured to claim that he was the living representative of the imperial line unbroken for the age eternal. This is the existential dimension regarding Japan’s special status. The *Cardinal Principles* contends:

The Emperor is not merely a so-called sovereign, monarch, ruler, or administrator, such as is seen among foreign nations, but reigns over this century as a deity incarnate in keeping with the great principle that has come down to us since the founding of the Emperor; and the wording of Article III [of the Imperial Constitution] which reads, “The Emperor is sacred and inviolable,” clearly sets forth this truth. Similar provisions which one sees among foreign nations are certainly not founded on such deep truths, and are merely things that serve to ensure the position of a sovereign by means of legislation. (165)

Here Japanese mythology is used to generate a national ethos. Its citizens are told that Japan is a unique sacred nation which is ruled by a divine character. The *Cardinal Principles* goes on to argue the time dimension of Japan’s special status. Namely, it is argued that Imperial Japan possesses everlasting life and so flourishes endlessly in an eternal “now.” The *Cardinal Principles* states:

That our Imperial Throne is coeval with heaven and earth means indeed that the past and the future are united in the “now,” that our nation possesses everlasting life, and that it flourished endlessly. Our history is an evolution of the eternal “now,” and at the root of our history there always runs a stream of eternal “now.” (65)

The concept of an eternal “now,” of course, assumes that the Imperial rule is unchanging and resistant to historical pressures within and without the country. Clearly, the aim of the *Cardinal Principles* is to unify and elevate the nationalistic spirit of the Japanese. The authors themselves state:

We have compiled the [*Cardinal Principles*] to trace clearly the genesis of the nation's foundation, to set forth clearly at the same time the features the national entity has manifested in history, and to provide the present generation with an elucidation of the matter, and thus to awaken the people's consciousness and their efforts. (emphasis added, 55)

Like the Hegelian phenomenology, consciousness becomes a task in the sense that Spirit is a progressive and synthetic movement through various figures or stages in which the truth of one moment resides in that of the following moment.

In this way the *Cardinal Principles* constructs a convenient ideology for the ruling class (see, for instance, Ajisawa). Again Nagahara argues:

From the imperial view of history, the social and political actions of the masses, especially issues of class struggles and movements, were not only of no significance but also intolerable and something excluded. These problems could destabilize "harmony" of the great family nation whose head was the imperial family. This emotional and irrational concept of "harmony" was employed as a device to conceal the oppressing condition of the imperial state under the name of family nation. (my translation, 24)

Thus, the *Cardinal Principles* cannot but emphasize the spirit of harmony in order to inhibit liberal academism or politics.

The second defining characteristic of ideological pronouncement is one-sided communication, accepting no empirical evidence to prove the point, only to extend comparisons with and denials of "outsiders." At this point, the *Cardinal Principles* deploys the strategy hinged upon binary oppositions to, first, discredit the Western tradition, and, then, praise the Japanese tradition. They are based upon the assumption that the growing prosperity of the Imperial Line has "no parallel in foreign countries" (*Cardinal Principles* 67).

The book takes virtually any and every opportunity to argue the superiority of Japan over the West. The first example draws upon a purported relationship between "God" and men. Whereas the West posits a hierarchical relationship between God and people, in the East God is in eternal concord with the mutual harmony between them. Thus, the spirit of harmony is demonstrated even within the relationship of "God" and the Japanese people. Elsewhere, the same idea is also extended to the relationship between nature and human beings in which humankind and nature enjoy coalescent intimacy (*Cardinal Principles* 97). Political or moral philosophy is presented as another area of comparison (113). Whereas harmony provides moral character for the Japanese people, Westerners

are not thought to be capable of drawing on collective inner strength because individualism characterizes them. Finally, Japan is represented as superior to the West in the terms of its social institutions. The Imperial Constitution is featured as a major example (161). The Constitution is distinguished from that of foreign countries by the nature of the ruler, and it is considered an august message of the Emperor.

In short, Japan is both differentiated from the West, and the superiority of Japan is held to be demonstrated over the West throughout the *Cardinal Principles*. The keys to the comparison are the oppositions between Japanese “harmony” and Western “individualism,” and between Japanese “filial piety” and Western “liberalism.”

The final constituent for the enactment of ideological pronouncement can be viewed as a lack of critical space, thus, undermining and limiting the possibility of public argument or discussion. Specifically, the *Cardinal Principles* presents a “sub-universe” within which Japan is infused uniquely with the “spirit of harmony.” Not only is harmony the “foundation of our country” but there exists no true harmony in Western individualism. The *Cardinal Principles* maintains:

Harmony is a product of the great achievements of the founding of the nation, and is the power behind our historical growth; while it is also a humanitarian Way inseparable from our daily lives. The spirit of harmony is built on the concord of all things. When people determinedly count themselves as masters and assert their egos, there is nothing but contradictions and the setting of one against the other; and harmony is not begotten. In individualism it is possible to have cooperation, compromise, sacrifice, etc., so as to regulate and mitigate this contradiction and the setting of one against the other; but after all there exists no true harmony. (93)

The spirit of harmony is characterized as the key concept to national unity and contrasted with individualism, or self-autonomy, which is asserted to be the basis of Western socio-political theories. If harmony is a cultural ideal of the Japanese race, then everything that aims at harmony should be desirable. Even “war” can be regarded as a valid activity, as long as its ends are to achieve harmony and to bring about peace: “War, in this sense, is not by any means intended for the destruction, overpowering, or subjugation of others; and it should be a thing for the bringing about the great harmony, that is, peace, doing the work of creation by following the Way” (*Cardinal Principles* 95).

In the *Cardinal Principles*, there is a careful and predetermined plan of prefabricated symbol manipulation to communicate to an audience. The symbol manipulated is, of course, the Emperor and the imperial myth. The modern concept of equal partnership among autonomous people is replaced by the emotional concept of harmony that envelopes the sovereign and subjects within a hierarchical relationship. Potentially threatening praxis is inhibited or ruled out by the bond of intimate interaction between the Emperor and his “Good and Loyal” subjects. Real politics is, for instance, not valued since it might hurt the spirit of harmony.

Harmony is asserted to have practical benefits for other cultures, too. The *Cardinal Principles* maintains that saving the deadlock of Western individualism is Japan’s “cosmopolitan mission” (55). The *Cardinal Principles* even indicts Westernization for the cause of the social evils in Japan’s modernity:

The various ideological and social evils of present-day Japan are the fruits of ignoring the fundamentals and of running into the trivial, or lack in sound judgment, and of failure to digest things thoroughly; and this is due to the fact that since the days of Meiji so many aspects of European and American culture, systems, and learning have been imported, and that, too rapidly. (52)

The Imperial Forces, hence, are given the mission to spread the Japanese moral superiority over the world. Of course, territorial aggrandizement is the only way to fulfill the cosmopolitan mission. So the spirit of harmony is elaborately transformed into the justification for Japan’s war efforts and imperial acts.

4. Conclusion

I have so far argued that ideological pronouncement is fascist/anti-realist discourse, and should be discounted and criticized as such. The problem lies in the fact that when such a discourse proliferates and is accepted by the general public, it is often difficult to counter it by critical/rationalist discourse as Japan’s wartime experience indicates. The situation is, I believe, a cultural or even mythical domination of ideology over argumentation. In other words, the whole book can be regarded as a “mystification of social reality” insofar as the text represents the fascist regime’s attempt to indoctrinate the people by combining its own aims with Japan’s indigenous religion, Shinto. Japanese mythology is made into mythos of the state for the sake of rationalization.

The “mystification of social reality” is a process through which a grand narrative is logically rationalized by social agents depending upon, rather than opposing a mythos. By “mythos” I mean people’s appreciation of their cultural heritage or

membership in society. Here the rhetorical construction of mythic authority is used for the purpose of ordering the Japanese youth to serve the country. It is necessary to realize that the outcome of such a fascist/anti-realist discourse would be a disaster. Further efforts should be devoted by rhetorical communication scholars in order to attain freer and more reflective societies, and against the emergence of controlled and uncritical societies in the future.

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