

〈論文〉

## **Politics of Identities: Narratives of Invisible Signifier in Japan (1)**

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I take criticism so seriously as to believe that, even in the very midst of a battle in which one is unmistakably on one side against another, there should be criticism, because there must be critical consciousness if there are to be issues, problems, values, even lives to be fought for.

Edward W. Said

The decline of modern society may be hastened by a lack of communication caused by an emphasis on artificial but rigid divisions between disciplines. Engaged in specialized professions, thinkers tend to neglect connection between their specializations and others. There are physicists who theorize only about nuclear power, engineers who deal only with programming in a nuclear power facility, and flight officers who sally forth to drop nuclear bombs by order... Imagine the possibly apocalyptic consequences of this situation in which little active communication is occurring—communication which fails to consider principles, concepts, consequences and their effect on human beings and on an environment.

All events, whether personal or public, internal or international, political, social, or financial, could be more skillfully woven into a continuously emerging pattern if one becomes aware of subtle undercurrents over which the interplay is taking place. A rhetorical perspective holds seemingly unrelated occurrences together, helping us to grasp the underlying meanings of an episode.

To join the fragments, to make associations between otherwise trivial matters, and to discover the cohesion between elements, one has to have an eye for rhetorical inquiry. Rather than employing certain laws and principles in their investigations, rhetorical critics employ *topoi*. what Hayden White calls “critical pathfinders.” This Greek term *topos* and its Latin equivalent, *locus*, are

often translated into English as “line of argument.”

Classical rhetoricians do not share consistent accounts of *topoi*. For instance, Aristotle offers the following in the *Topics*; first the list of definition, property, genus, and accident; then the subsequent list of ten categories (entity, quantity, quality, relation; place, time, position, state; activity, and passivity).<sup>1</sup> These categories have for society a kind of definitive quality of a disparate and seemingly unending occasion. But while Aristotle’s topics have continuing philosophical relevance, the account of topics given by Cicero and Quintilian is more applicable to our task of coming to grips with the rhetoric of the contemporary age. Cicero and Quintilian both emphasize the interrogative character of the topics. For example, in his consideration of judicial rhetoric in *De Inventione*. Cicero proposes that, when the advocate examines two competing narratives of an event, he should have topics (*loci*) stored up in his mind ready to be activated by the material. The topics come out as questions—such as “why, with what intention, and with what hope of success each thing was done; why it was done in this way rather than in that; why by this man rather than by that; with no helper or with this one.” The point is that nothing is determined in advance; if a question fits, it can be worked with; if not, not.<sup>2</sup> By holding in the mind sets of questions that can be posed when particular cases come up, the critic has a device for inventing the arguments for and against.

This notion of topics is open to everyone. For topics—understood as sets of questions ready to be activated where it seems appropriate to do so—are an enrichment of the understanding. They enable us to see the world more fully and to impart some sense of order—various senses of order—to what otherwise might remain confusion. They are the elements of a mind that is agile and well-stocked. They stand between, on the one hand, a consciousness that would seek to understand the world in terms of universal laws, and on the other, a consciousness so caught up in the particulars as to be unable to gain any intellectual critical understanding of them. The task of rhetoric is neither to articulate universal laws nor to privilege subjectivity, but to “lengthen the questionnaire”—that is, to increase the number of illuminating questions that we can ask about human society.

These elements of questions and their relations to others together depict human experience

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- 1 Aristotle, *Topica*, ed. Patricia P. Matsen, Philip Rollinson, and Marion Sousa, *Reading From Classical Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990) 210-235.
  - 2 Cicero, *De Inventione*. ed. Patricia P. Matsen, Philip Rollinson, and Marion Sousa, *Readings From Classical Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990) 180-194. and Quintilian, *Instituio Oratoria*. *ibid.* 210-235.

in a holistic frame of reference. Through topics, critics share generic, formal, and experiential methods of reading a text. Topics construct a dialogue between the text and the interpreter—what Geertz calls “genre mixing,” or what Gadamer calls the hermeneutic cycle. The study of rhetoric is thus a cross-disciplinary practice that can draw upon and illuminate any endeavor. If human life is created through symbols, a rhetorical perspective encourages critics to understand through a hermeneutic approach the formulation and organization of those symbols.

Topics may offer an unparalleled opportunity to discover and understand multifarious human identities.

Within a rhetorical perspective, the ways we think and the things we take for granted are brought into focus as they never might have been in the past. In celebrating the topics, I now open this paper with my hope to cast new light on the dilemmas of Japan’s rhetorical construction of its own social and political identity as a whole.

### **The Fantasy of Monoethnicity**

To the distant observer, Japan presents an image of cultural and social harmony. Policy makers have sought to reproduce some aspects of Japan’s cultural homogeneity within their own society. Both Japanese and non-Japanese alike tend to conceptualize Japan as a monoethnic, classless, and unproblematically patriarchal culture. Observing the social condition of Japan more closely and more critically, however, one finds little reason to characterize Japan as a unified nation. Rather, Japan has always designated people of special communities as “different”; the majority population has thus often treated them as outcasts or pariahs. For instance, there are the Ainu, a significant ethnic minority, living on a northern island of Japan, who are forced to adjust themselves to Japanese culture; there are Koreans who have been forced to establish their own community after World War II, and have been separated from Japanese society; there are women whose gender is always oppressed in their attempt to do what men do. However, unlike the Ainu, unlike the Koreans, and unlike women, there is a marginalized people that bears no visible physical differences from members of the majority society: the Buraku-min are social, and therefore cultural, outcasts. As a result of the ancient caste practice, the Buraku-min were ranked the lowest of citizens and forced to live in a certain area. Thus, the only distinguishing characteristic of people degradingly signified as the Buraku-min (“people of the community”) is now the geographical location within which they reside. Japan’s own Emancipation Declaration of 1871 was intended to abolish the class system; as a result of this legal measure, Japan today is not usually perceived by other parties as a hierarchical

society. Yet Japan's politically constructed "homogeneity" comes at the expense of isolating the Buraku-min, people who have failed to receive the benefit of political and social changes.<sup>3</sup>

By examining this example of social and cultural discrimination, this paper will cast into doubt the validity of any simple construction of political identity that presents a unified category of "Japanese-ness." I will explore the rhetorical construction of Japanese identity by exploring the ambiguous and veiled political rhetoric that gives that identity its life. Since Japanese discourse rarely directly addresses the status of its outcasts, the Buraku-min, the task of assessing the politics of identity in the discourse is uniquely challenging, for it is a politics of silence and of indirect reference. How, then, do we examine a discourse's production of political identity when the ethnicity, gender, and social class of those peripherally signified are rarely mentioned at all, or if mentioned, are treated ambiguously? In short, how do we examine silence as an element of discourse in the symbolic construction of political identity? In this study, I will argue that Japan's political and cultural narratives consistently maintain the Buraku-min's exclusion from public recognition—either through absolute silence or through veiled and ambiguous references—in order to construct a "Japanese Political Identity" that contributes to Japanese world prestige. In order to reveal how this paradoxical process of the reality-construction of identity helps politics to legitimize its power, I will introduce a contemporary novel, *The River with No Bridge*.<sup>4</sup> which addresses the intricacy of Japan's politics of identity through the Buraku children's observation of the reconstruction of "Japanese-ness." *The River with No Bridge* identifies a discrepancy between the way politics manipulates class hierarchy to establish an ideal image of Japan and the way this manipulation is socially practiced. I hope to argue in the upcoming paper(s) to contrast the literary presentation of political silence in *The River with No Bridge* with Japan's ordinary political discourse. In those papers, I will argue that Japanese political rhetoric ostensibly is committed to quasi-democratic equality, and that the point of this deception is the political struggle to maintain both cultures which otherwise stand in opposition to each other—Imperial culture on the one hand and a ladder-less society on the other.

We will see, especially, that the speech by Ex-Prime Minister Nakasone who has passed in 2019, to his Liberal Democratic party in 1986, provides us with a rare opportunity to penetrate Japan's otherwise oblique politics of identity. In this speech, entitled "Intellectual Standards,"

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3 Ian Neary, *Political Protest and Social Control in Pre-War Japan: The Origin of Buraku Liberation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

4 Sue Sumii, *The River with No Bridge*, trans. Susan Wilkinson, (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1989).

Nakasone remarked that Japanese literacy is higher than that of any other country because of its racial “purity”—that is, because Japan’s population consists of a single race.<sup>5</sup> Nakasone’s remarks are an example of a political rhetoric that perpetuates a useful legacy of “monoethnicity,” in which there is an apparent absence of other components of identity. The identity based on the class system, on outcasts, and in particular, on the exclusion of the Buraku-min, is one in which a group’s apparent absence is actually a part of their symbolic construction as outcasts. In effect, the Buraku-min are banished from political discourse, but their paradoxical “presence in the silences” is useful to the construction of Japanese political identity.

### Discourse on Politics of Identity in Japan

It is difficult to explore the silences of ideological discourses. Among a growing body of literature about Japan’s socio-political changes and cultural manifestation of identity, even the major cultural critique, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* by Ruth Benedict,<sup>6</sup> fails to discuss “invisible” sub-cultures and excludes minorities from one of the identity constituents that help produce a sense of united national identity. Moreover, as a mode of symbolic construction, investigating the politics of identity, accomplished at least in part by silence, must treat the public-political as only one “voice” in the larger cultural discourse. Japanese identity, especially, must be seen as an interactive complex of voices that contributes to the discourse. Multiple voices multiply the political context, which otherwise might remain a single, unspoken state of politics. The literary voices, functioning within a set of rhetorical topoi, thus enrich and disclose the political context by inventing and formulating appropriate questions. Accordingly, Joan W. Scott, for example, argues that identities are produced through multiple identifications—identifications with race, gender, history, social condition, and politics.<sup>7</sup> Because this multiplicity of components blurs the power relationships among the components themselves, such ambiguity of interaction often conceals who is articulating a certain discourse on identity and to whom it is addressed; who defines a particular knowledge that reflects a social view of identity, and how that knowledge of identity is produced.

The ambiguous formation of identity, however, should not discourage critics from challenging the social conception of identity. Crystallizing such ambiguity is, in one sense, the

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5 Yasuhiro Nakasone, “Zensairoku: Nakasone Shusho ‘Chiteki Suijun’ Koen” (“The Complete Text: Prime Minister Nakasone’s ‘Intellectual Standards’ Speech”), *Chuo Koron* (Central Review) 101 (1986): 152.

6 Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (London: Seeker and Warburg, 1947).

7 Joan W. Scott, “Multiculturalism and the Politics of Identity,” *October* 61 (1992):19.

task Philip Wander seems to assign the rhetorical critic of “ideology” in discourse.<sup>8</sup> Critics should challenge traditional boundaries of knowledge by opening meanings and concepts and crossing boundaries of historical periods and communities.<sup>9</sup> John Rajchman also affirms that critical thought should reexamine assumptions and formulate the danger of accepting conventional knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Without rethinking the problems coming from uncritically accepting the produced official identity, we may fail to recognize and confront an urgent situation that calls for reconsideration.

Focusing on class rather than race as one of the constituents of Japanese identity, this case study of the Buraku-min will demonstrate that the dominant culture in Japan itself privileges a very specific and narrow definition of “Japanese-ness.” The political rhetoric that achieves this is unique. The purpose of designating caste in this way is not to make foundationalist claims about who is or ought to be central and marginal to the modern society; rather, it is but to open up an analysis of the contingent character of the “imaginary forms of identification” in what Laclau refers to as “the democratic imaginary.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, I will investigate the way in which these socially and politically constructed forms of identification interact—forms that are employed in political and literary narratives. In the Japanese ideological rhetoric of silence, some identities are emphasized and some are occluded in order to reduce multiple identities to a “single” identity.

In this light, the paper begins by exploring one literary contribution to Japanese discourse that amplifies the multiplicity of literary and political voices in that culture. By drawing upon rhetorical and cultural perspectives from Kenneth Burke, Homi Bhabha and Martha Solomon, and by exploring the contemporary social thought of Jean-Francois Lyotard, I will explore the mutual interdependence of literary and political discourses in a politics of Japanese identity. Specifically, I will argue that three levels of discourse mutually interact: first, the silence about the Buraku-min is perpetuated to enforce and maintain Japan’s political identity and cultural belief in monoethnicity; second, when that silence is broken, a certain political consciousness is revealed by those rare remarks about monoethnicity (Nakasone); and third, the silence is deciphered by another cultural product—in this case by literature.

This interaction between political and literary narratives remains implicit unless the critic

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8 Philip Wander, “The Third Persona: An Ideological Turn in Rhetorical Theory,” *Central States Speech Journal* 35 (1984): 197-216.

9 Homi Bhabha, “Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt,” *Cultural Studies* ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (Routledge: Chapman and Hall, Inc., 1992) 57.

10 John Rajchman, “Introduction: The Question of Identity,” *October* 61 (1992): 5-7.

11 See, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985) Chapter 4.

examines the multiple functions of both discourses at the same time. We will see that Nakasone's political discourse, on the one hand, fails to articulate a comprehensive politics of identity because of his contradictory rhetoric, simultaneously disregarding and emphasizing identity issues in the context of the global and domestic communities. Literature, on the other hand, in the form of *The River with No Bridge*, for example, completes the process of identification which Nakasone's discourse avoids or preempts. It rearticulates the very existence and quality of other constituents of Japanese identity. In summary, then, I will inquire into this state of Japanese rhetoric, one in which cultural discourse supplies what is missing in the official politics of identity, by analyzing Japan's rhetorical interpretation of the Buraku-min as it antiphonally surfaces in Sue Sumii's first volume of *The River with No Bridge* and in Nakasone's remarks on Japanese superiority. Before describing in detail the procedure of my paper, at this point, I will present a context for the literature and its significance for the project.

*The River with No Bridge*, written in 1957 by Sue Sumii, describes the development of the Buraku-min's awareness of their rights and dignity as human beings. In the background are the actual events that took place during the years before and after the Meiji Restoration (1880-1924). In the middle of the nineteenth century, the country was divided into some three hundred semi-autonomous political units; the society split into four main classes: the Emperor, *kazoku* (the peerage), *shizoku* (descendants of former samurai), and commoners. Commoners were further subdivided in order of superiority into farmers, artisans, and merchants. Many of the class barriers began to break down, however, as feelings of national unity emerged only in the face of the threat of the West. Especially during the Meiji Restoration era, the government initiated a series of profound changes within Japanese society in order to alter the country's international image. In those days an important political task of government was to break down these class barriers in order to generate a consciousness of nationalism within the minds of the Japanese people; to form a strong, centralized nation; and to develop industrial capitalist institutions in order to catch up with Western nations. One major part of these reforms was the abolition of the formal status distinctions of the class hierarchy among commoners.

Reflecting the history of this period, the plot of Sumii's novel traces the experience of a Buraku child, Koji, as he sets out to question the system that maintains the philosophy of hierarchy. Koji's growing sense of injustice derives not only from the prejudicial treatment he suffers from other children and from the teachers at school but also from what he is taught. Children were constantly told that Japan was one family, that the Emperor was the father of the nation, and that

they had to behave with loyalty toward the father-Emperor. These principles were set out in the Imperial Rescript on Education, issued to every school.

*The River with No Bridge* is shaped by knowledge about unfavorable social perceptions of the Buraku-min and about the themes that articulate self-perpetuating political indoctrination toward modernization of Japan that presupposes its unification. Through Koji's critical observations, Sumii presents a variety of those themes of which politics makes use at every available occasion—education, war against other nations, the names of God and of the Emperor—in order to evoke and reinforce nationalistic sentiment. She articulates that, in theory, a sense of allied national identity both protects its people and asks them to sacrifice themselves for it. As a major work of recent years, *The River with No Bridge* is the best example of modern Japanese literature critical of identity politics. In its descriptions, it portrays the voice that keeps questioning the accepted belief in unified Japanese-ness and in the rational politics of such knowledge production.

Surveying the various conflicts with the political production of identity in *The River with No Bridge*, I will compare it and Nakasone's discourse to cast some light on the current social state by examining both its content and its style or articulation. Observing Japan's social state will allow the development of a framework that will help us to make sense both of the mutual interaction of two discourses and of their prominence at the particular (postmodern) moment.

In essence, my concern is to highlight the political faith that authorizes its somewhat inconsistent policy: how does Nakasone's narrative necessitate the form of discourse that pronounces a political legitimization of Japan's monoethnic identity production? How does Nakasone attempt to justify his educational policy by drawing from the example of Japan's high literacy rate and from the social condition made possible by capitalization and computerization? In addition, how does *The River with No Bridge* go beyond the political interpretation of cultural demand by reinterpreting the political interpretations?

I will argue that Nakasone's appeal to a "monoethnic narrative"<sup>12</sup> indicates his struggle to overturn Japan's sense of inferiority—an inferiority derived from the failure to take world leadership. This sense of world order that leaves Japan outside the leading nations encourages an urgent rationalization of his educational politics by emphasizing the benefits of standardized instruction and of a unified, monoethnic nation. As a consequence, however, he ignores the increasingly postmodern situation that discredits his ideology. Postmodern society is characterized

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12 Here, I use a "monoethnic narrative" of legitimization to refer to the state in which the productive consensus on identity is justified in a single identity or monoethnicity.



by a juxtaposition of diversities—"the diversities are brought into closer proximity" so as to produce "disjunctiveness"— "via contemporary modes of communication."<sup>13</sup> It thus emphasizes cultural diversity in every attempt. Therefore, Nakasone's warrant of cultural uniformity or single ethnic superiority goes against the direction of postmodernity. As Nakasone merges his interpretation of cultural trends with his national policy, his rhetoric invites *The River with No Bridge* to provide antithetical responses to political rhetoric. Of course, such an analysis depends heavily on current notions of intertextuality. Through the approach of Lyotard and Asada Akira, both of whom articulate that, in the modern world, identities and differences are constructed out of a common stock of symbols,<sup>14</sup> I will demonstrate that *The River with No Bridge* combines and substitutes a common stock of symbols, namely, that monoethnicity as a shared element that a postmodernist conception of the self would reject. The analysis of the discourses' topicality in the postmodern age will reveal the exigency of rhetoric that politics (Nakasone) needs to employ and that the counter-culture (*The River with No Bridge*) needs to deconstruct. To put it in reverse order, this intertextual analysis, or what Martha Solomon terms "intertextual interanimation" of political and literary discourses, embraces a particular rhetorical situation—a situation that reflects an attitude of postmodern community. By envisioning the postmodern condition in this way, the thesis explores both political and literary assessments of cultural trends and their rhetorical function of discourse construction, namely, "rhetorical exchange."<sup>15</sup> Under the rubric of "the postmodern condition," this project reflects and comments upon the disparate roles of political and cultural rhetoric. Politics disguises its sense of subordination in the world's political affairs. We will see that a political rhetoric of deception victimizes the Buraku-min, and that, as a consequence, this rhetoric purifies Japan of its sense of inferiority. By moving out of the mainstream categorization of identity as "monoethnic," the paper will designate the political "fitness" of its identity politics into our postmodern context. The combined literary-political discourse of contemporary Japan will be

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13 Allan Megill, "Grand Narrative and the Discipline of History" F. Ankersmit and H. Kellner (eds) *A New Philosophy of History*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 151-73, 263-7. )

14 Akira Asada, *Kozo to Chikara: Kigouron o Koete (Structure and Power: Beyond Semiotics)*, (Tokyo: Keiso-Shobo, 1983). Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* trans. Geoff Bennigton and Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1979] 1984).

15 I am drawing greatly on Martha Solomon's work about intertextual analysis which addresses how and where texts are created and how texts interact with each other. "The Things We Study: Texts and Their Interactions," *Communication Monographs* 60 (1993): 62-68.

approached chiefly through Kenneth Burke's cycle of terms for order.<sup>16</sup> My rhetorical approach will be supplemented by several cultural theories on colonialism, race, ethnicity, and identity politics—those of Bhabha and Hall, whose works serve as inquiries into the role of minorities as political and literary and rhetorical “others” in a culture.<sup>17</sup> Using these theoretical terms and concepts, I will illuminate the Japanese construction of identity that establishes, transfers, and redeems “guilt” and differentiates ethnicity as an ultimate identity. The emphasis of the analysis shall be not only on investigating and deconstructing the power play of identification and alienation, but also on rigorously analyzing the notion of purification: Where is the voice of the oppressed other in all this? Why should any group allow itself to be a “process” for another group? How does one transcend “inferiority”? Shouldn't the sense of inferiority itself be subject to critique? In light of these questions, I will try to show how these discursive processes, derived from cultural and political necessity, operate in the production of Japan's identity.

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16 Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society* ed. Joseph R. Gusfield, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989). *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press [1950] 1969). *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (New York: Vintage Books, [1941] 1957).

17 Homi Bhaba, “Freedom's Basis in the Indeterminate,” *October* 61 (1992): 46-57. “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October* 28 (1984): 126. Catherine Hall, “Missionary Stories: Gender and Ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s,” *Cultural Studies* 240-276.

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