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SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS

Kamikaze Ethos:

The Rise, Fall and Revitalization of a Modern Japanese Hero-system

Candidate: Mordecai George Sheftall

4th Year PhD Candidate (4005S01580)

Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies

Waseda University

Chair: Professor Shinohara Hatsue

Cultural worldviews are the master frameworks of social discourse that make possible the evolutionarily beneficial illusion of meaningful human existence in integral communities. In Ernest Becker's seminal formulation of cultural worldviews (cf. 1971; 1973), he identified their primary ideological function as being performed by what he termed "hero-systems." The idea that hero-systems and the concomitant heroic scripts by which they are codified are primarily created and sustained through the production and consumption of rhetoric within a given integral community/culture is the main theoretical premise of the present study.

Throughout history, hero-systems have had a particularly dynamic dialectic relationship with the respective orientations of integral communities toward warfare as both site and means of intergroup competition, and the experience of modern Japan in this regard that is the subject of this study has been no exception. During its Imperial Era (1895-1945), the Japanese establishment actively disseminated a combat death-valorizing hero-system I have termed "kamikaze ethos" toward the mass mobilization of the Japanese populace for the waging of industrialized "total war" in the defense and/or pursuit of national interests, as well as toward facilitating and validating the overall modernization of Japanese society and the concomitant stresses and problematic aspects of the unprecedented speed and comprehensiveness of that paradigmatic shift in Japanese cultural worldview. Over the course of the five decades of the Imperial Era, this hero-system eventually went on to affect virtually every aspect of life in Japanese society – a development most dramatically demonstrated by both official approval and enthusiastic public support for the use of suicide tactics by the Japanese military during the last year of the Asia-Pacific War.

Japan's defeat in the war, however, resulted in the traumatically sudden and near total vitiation of the kamikaze ethos and its distinctive formulation of Japanese ethno-national subjectivity in popular Japanese consciousness – an ontological watershed that resonates in the Japanese psyche to this day. The present study is a discourse analysis examining the form and function of rhetorical texts in historical and cultural context throughout the evolutionary lifespan of the kamikaze ethos hero-system, from its Imperial Era origins, up to and including postwar contestation over its historical legacy. In terms of structure, this dissertation consists of eight chapters in total: one introductory chapter providing a thematic overview for the study; a methodological chapter explaining the theoretical and analytical basis for the study and modeling the shifting location of the kamikaze ethos in Japanese discourse throughout the modern era; five main body or “content” chapters focusing on specific kamikaze ethos texts and related rhetorical/symbolic activities; and a conclusion.

Based on analysis of primary source material in the form of contemporary textual artifacts and eyewitness testimony, Chapters III-VII examine in detail the discursive trajectory of the kamikaze ethos hero-system through three main stages: 1) the evolution of early Meiji mass *bushidō* indoctrination into an ideology capable of sustaining officially-sanctioned and publicly-approved military suicide tactic operations; 2) the dramatic delegitimization of the kamikaze ethos in public discourse immediately after Japan's defeat in the Asia-Pacific War of 1931-1945; and 3) the surprisingly successful rhetorical campaign undertaken roughly from the early 1950s to the present day with the stated goal of salvaging and restoring the kamikaze ethos toward a more heroically satisfying and culturally authentic formulation of Japanese national subjectivity cleansed of both the opprobrium of defeat and the taint of post-defeat Japanese accommodation of the culturally alien worldview and political legacies of its postwar American occupiers.

This study is the first of its kind either in Japanese or English language scholarship to identify the kamikaze ethos as such and to examine the legitimization and employment of suicide tactics by Japanese forces during the Asia-Pacific War as rhetorical and communicative phenomena. It is also the first dissertation/book-length study in the English language analyzing postwar Japanese interpretations of the kamikaze ethos legacy as discourse. It is hoped that this study will lead to greater scholarly appreciation of the historical significance of this modern Japanese hero-system, as well as of its lasting influence upon competing postwar formulations of ethno-national subjectivity both in Japanese political discourse and in popular historical and cultural consciousness.