

Massimiliano Tomasi:

Rhetoric in Modern Japan: Western Influences on the Development of Narrative and Oratorical Style

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In recent years there has been an increased interest in the rhetorical practice of non-Western cultures. However, very few works take into account Japanese rhetoric. Massimiliano Tomasi's new book, *Rhetoric in Modern Japan: Western Influences on the Development of Narrative and Oratorical Style* is the first publication to present a comprehensive overview of the great number of rhetorical works that were produced and published in Japan during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) eras.

Rhetoric in Modern Japan provides an in-depth analysis and a whole new interpretation of the role played by the Western rhetorical tradition in Japanese oratory, literary production, and literary criticism. It also emphasizes the influence of Western rhetoric on the development of a new written form of the Japanese language. In addition, Tomasi convincingly argues the existence of a Japanese tradition of rhetoric in the vernacular prior to the Western influence.

The book consists of three main parts, which are further subdivided into a total of nine chapters. As a preamble (pp. 1-7), Tomasi introduces the reader to the historical starting point of his study, namely the Meiji period, which began with a coup d'état, the so-called Meiji Restoration: The feudal Tokugawa regime was overthrown, a new political order was established, and Japan was now forced to interact with the West. At this time, Tomasi explains, written Japanese did not have much in common with spoken. For centuries the classical forms of both Chinese and Japanese had contributed to the conservation of the written language, and the spoken vernacular was considered unsuitable for any literary use.

The main parts of the book, then, emphasize (1) the schism between oral and written discourse; (2) the rise of the so-called *genbun itchi* movement towards a single spoken and written language; and (3) the role played by the discipline of rhetoric in the creation of a new written language.

The first part, "The Tradition of Rhetoric", is divided into two chapters. Chapter 1 (pp. 11-24) deals with the Western rhetorical tradition. Here Tomasi focuses first on classical Greek and Roman rhetoricians, and second on the parts of the British rhetorical tradition that proved especially important to the study of rhetoric in early Meiji Japan. Thus, for instance, Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), and Thomas Sheridan's *A Course of Lectures on Elocution* (1762) were all widely read and used as sources of inspiration for many scholarly publications on rhetoric (pp. 20-21).

In chapter 2 (pp. 25-42) Tomasi offers evidence for the existence of a pre-modern rhetorical tradition in Japan. With respect to written discourse, Tomasi chooses to concentrate on the use of rhetorical devices in literature. Early classical Japanese poetry, so Tomasi claims, made use

of a complex system of tropes and figures, and “shows a very refined linguistic and aesthetic awareness” (p. 27). When it comes to the pre-Meiji oral tradition, Tomasi calls attention to Buddhist sermon preaching, *rakugo* (comic storytelling), *kôdan* (lectures), and *rôkyoku* (chanting of ancient tales). On the basis of examples like these, and contrary to the view held by most Western and Japanese scholars, Tomasi proves his point that Japan did, in fact, have a rhetorical tradition of its own.

The second part of the book, “History of Rhetoric”, consists of four chapters, each of which presents one phase of what Tomasi considers to be the four-stage development of Meiji and Taishô rhetoric.

Chapter three focuses on early Meiji oratory. In this early phase rhetoric was identified with public speaking and linked specifically to the advocates of the Freedom and Popular Rights Movement, who made effective use of oratory to serve their propagandistic purpose. During the 1870s and 1880s, a great number of manuals on public speaking were published, many of which were translations of Western works. An example is the political activist Ozaki Yukio’s *Kôkai enzetsuhô* (A manual for public speaking). This work, which Tomasi describes as the first “to introduce rhetoric as a coherent system to Japan”, was actually a translation of an unknown Western work on rhetoric (p. 51).

Among the influential translations or adaptations of British rhetorical treatises, Tomasi mentions Kô Ryôji’s translation of Hugh Blair’s *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (*Taisei ronbengaku yôketsu*, Essential Principles of Western Rhetoric, 1880); Tomioka Masanori’s translation of Alexander Melville Bell’s *Standard Elocutionist* (*Benshi hitsudoki enzetsugaku*, The Study of Public Speaking: An Essential Guide for Orators, 1882); and Kuroiwa Dai’s adaptation of George Payn Quackenbos’s *Advanced Course of Composition and Rhetoric* (*Yûben bijihô*, Principles of Rhetoric and Oratory, 1882) (pp. 58-59).

One of the most prominent Japanese writers and educators of this period, Fukuzawa Yukichi, was a great advocate of Western ideas and regarded oratory as an important tool for propagating political views. Yukichi coined the word *enzetsu* as a translation for the English word ‘speech’, and in order to encourage public speaking he built a hall for holding speeches and debates, and established the so-called Mita Oratorical Society (pp. 48-49).

Tomasi interestingly points to the fact that, although it was, in general, a male-dominated scene, women did indeed take part in the nationwide call for political reform. Thus, among the celebrated female orators, Tomasi singles out Kishida Toshiko who “played a crucial role in the rise of Meiji feminist discourse and criticism” (p. 55).

Chapter four (pp. 65-81) covers the 1890s, and thus the second phase of the development of Meiji rhetoric. From being synonymous with public speaking, rhetoric now gradually turned into a discipline serving the concerns of belles-lettres and literary criticism. Tomasi describes in detail the period’s debate on how and whether Western rhetoric could be applied to issues peculiar to the Japanese language. There were two main factions in the debate, one of which, in Tomasi’s words, “maintained the superiority of classical styles or completely disregarded the possibility of employing contemporary linguistic features in writing”, whereas the other spoke in favor of a simplified written language (pp. 80-81). Tomasi provides the reader with useful information on the central figures in this debate and the contents of their work (pp. 75-80). Thus, several pages are devoted to Takada Sanae’s work, *Bijigaku* (1890), which, as Tomasi states, had great influence on later developments in the fields of rhetoric and literary criticism (pp. 67-72).

Chapter five (pp. 82-92), dealing with the third Meiji phase, provides a detailed analysis of the new direction in Japanese rhetoric as represented by Shimamura Hôgetsu's *Shin Bijigaku* (New Rhetoric), which was published in 1902, and Igarashi Chikara's *Shin bunshûkôwa* (New Lectures on Writing), dating from 1909. Tomasi gives a clear account of the two writers' efforts to pave the way for a new, simplified literary language and demonstrates how they both contributed new developments to Japanese rhetoric. Whereas Hôgetsu saw rhetoric as "a discipline concerned with the aesthetics of literary production" (p. 91), Igarashi advocated "accomplished writing" rather than "beautiful writing" (p. 89).

Chapter six (pp. 93-102) deals with the Taishô era, the final phase covered by the present study. According to Tomasi, in this period most scholars were inspired by Igarashi's work and tended to see rhetoric as providing an authoritative system of rules which were not only applicable to the field of aesthetics but could also contribute to making communication more effective. In the second and third decades of the 20th century Japan thus developed a simplified literary language and experienced renewed interest in oratory. However, as Tomasi points out, the influence of Western rhetoric was mainly felt "in regard to the formation of a modern written language" (p. 102).

The third and final part of the book, "Quest for a New Written Language", sheds light on various aspects of the creation of modern written Japanese.

Chapter seven (pp. 105-128) deals with the development of the *genbun itchi* movement towards a single spoken and written language from its earliest stage at the beginning of the Meiji era – when the movement was associated exclusively with political and social questions – until several decades later when the *genbun itchi* style was established as a standard mode of literary expression. A pivotal claim in Tomasi's study is that the *genbun itchi* movement was actually influenced by Western rhetoric and should be understood as a "product of the dialectical interaction between tradition and modernity, Eastern legacy, and Westernization" (p. 107).

In chapter eight (pp. 129-142) Tomasi further develops this idea on the basis of an academic debate concerning the role of rhetorical refinement in writing. This debate arose in the last decade of the Meiji era and continued throughout the Taishô era, when naturalism became a major literary trend in Japan. In Tomasi's analysis, the naturalists' call for a plain literary style should not be understood as an attack on rhetorical ornamentation, but rather as yet another expression that Japan was in need of a new style of writing.

The ninth chapter of the book (pp. 143-154) focuses on oratory in the late Meiji era with special emphasis on the manner in which public speaking contributed to the development of modern written Japanese. Despite the fact that, beginning in the 1890s, there was a decline in scholarly interest in oratory, according to Tomasi the art of public speaking continued to flourish throughout the Taishô era, especially among students and in the several university oratory clubs, but also in journals and magazines devoted to the subject of public speaking.

The Epilogue (pp. 155-169) offers a concluding discussion of the influence of Meiji and Taishô rhetoric on the development of the *genbun itchi* style.

This well-written and enlightening book will be welcomed by those readers who are primarily interested in the history of Japanese literature and oratory, and it also represents an eagerly awaited contribution to the field of comparative rhetoric. However, the reader who has no previous knowledge of the subject matter may have some trouble reading certain sections of the book. The third part, for example, may appear somewhat confusing on account of the fact that many of the events, scholars, and titles of works referred to here have already been discussed in

the second part, but from a different perspective. It might have been a good idea for Tomasi to provide his non-Japanese speaking readership with an appendix containing a chronological table as well as a glossary explaining the most difficult words and terms.

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