

## Connotation and the Discourse of the Shizangan Spirit

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### ABSTRACT

Roland Barthes' notion of connotation, that a derivative meaning is superimposed upon a sign, is applied to the analysis of an educational ideology, the Shizangan Spirit, introduced by Japanese in Taiwan during its colonial period, 1895~1945. The ideology, originated in the beheading of six Japanese teachers by Taiwanese at Shizangan of northern Taipei on the New Year Day of 1896, is found to be a reflection of the changes of the colonial policy in the three stages of Japanese rule. First, the Spirit was officially defined both as a drive to popularize the Japanese language and as a symbolic representation of the virtue of being loyal to the emperor (*chukunaikoku*). Second, when the colonial policy turned from coercion to limited openness, the Spirit was articulated either as an educational spirit of universalism (*isshidōjin*), as a heroic individualism, or as a synonym of the national spirit of Japanese, all according to the articulator's position in the power relation of colonialism. Finally, in the period of high Japanization (*kōminka*, 1937~45), the ideology was expanded as a general attitude toward newly conquered peoples, following the Japanese Army's inroad into Southeast Asia after the Pearl Harbor attack. The means by which the Shizangan Spirit reflected the changes of the colonial policy were, we argue, precisely the discursive practices which fell under the rubric of connotation.

But in the end of our analysis, we have in fact complicated the notion of connotation beyond Barthes' formulation. For one thing, in connoting the meaning of the "national spirit," the Shizangan discourse incorporated the term whose meaning was itself changeable within another Fascist discourse of "national essence" (*kokutai*). Hence, here was a double connotation which seemed to approximate Umberto Eco's idea of "unlimited semiosis," the forever circularity of using one sign to explain another. For another thing, when the "drive to popularize the Japanese language" reappeared in the discourse in the late 1930s, its meaning also changed from what it used to be in the discourse of the first stage of the colonial rule. All these instances, i.e., a new term connoting different meanings and an old term meaning differently in a new context, we suggest, are variants of connotation which go beyond Barthes' original theory.