


## Power and Knowledge in United States of Japan by Peter Tieryas

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### ABSTRACT

Speculative fiction plays a crucial role as a medium for exploring the dynamics of power and control in society. This study examines the intersections of power and knowledge using a Foucauldian discourse analysis to uncover how the text construct and power within its dystopian framework. The analysis addresses the problem of how institutional authority and ideological constructs shape individual agency and social order. Employing Michel Foucault's theories on power and knowledge, a qualitative methodology is used to identify themes of authoritarian and technological control. The findings reveal how the novel critiques hegemonic systems by illustrating their reliance on discourse. While previous research has explored dystopian literature's critique of authoritarianism, fewer studies have examined how speculative history fiction within authoritarian regimes. This research could further explore how similar themes manifest across other alternate history narratives, highlighting their implications for contemporary socio-political contexts.

**Keywords:** *Foucauldian, Discourse, Power, Ideology, Speculative Fiction*

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## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between power and knowledge has intrigued scholars for decades, providing a rich domain for exploration in across sociology, philosophy, and literature. Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge reframes traditional notions of power as a purely repressive force, instead presenting it as productive and instrumental in shaping discourses, institutions, and identities (Poorghorban, 2023). Literature, represents societal structures, and critically engages with these dynamics, serving both as a representation of power systems and an instrument for resistance (Cilliers, 2014). Literature functions as a dynamic force, bridging the past and present, individual and society, imagination and reality. Through its reflective pages, it presents the socio-cultural tapestry that shapes it, transcending its physical form to carry experiences, emotions, and insights across time and space (Tamrin, 2023). In contemporary speculative fiction, Peter Tieryas' United States of Japan stands out as a groundbreaking narrative that reimagines historical events through an alternate lens. Set in a world where Japan emerged victorious in World War II, the novel explores themes of authoritarianism, technological dominance, and cultural identity. Tieryas, an acclaimed speculative fiction writer and video game artist, brings his unique perspective to the novel, blending historical revisionism with elements of cyberpunk to create a compelling critique of power/knowledge systems

Despite the extensive body of research on speculative fiction's critique of authoritarianism, there is a marked gap in studies applying Foucauldian theories to alternative histories. Scholars like Knight and Diken have examined dystopian classics such as Orwell's 1984 and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, emphasizing their warnings against authoritarian

control (Sharma, 2016). However, United States of Japan rooted in the cultural and historical tensions between Japan and the United States has received far less attention. As a narrative deeply entwined with themes of historical manipulation and technological control, the novel offers a rich field for Foucauldian analysis, particularly in its critique of how hegemonic power is sustained through discourse. As Foucault posits, understanding how discourses function within specific historical and cultural contexts is key to analyzing power/knowledge systems (Bazzul & Carter, 2017). This absence of focused analysis neglects an important opportunity to explore how speculative fiction from diverse cultural perspectives engages with Foucauldian theories, particularly in critiquing authoritarianism and the manipulation of knowledge.

Previous studies (Alkana, 2022) on United States of Japan has primarily addressed themes such as postcolonial identity and technological ethics. This study analyzes social conflict in Peter Tieryas' United States of Japan using Ralf Dahrendorf's social conflict theory, focusing on how conflict in the novel represents the social conflict in an alternative historical context. The results show that social conflicts arise due to changes in social structure made by the Japanese Empire after conquering the United States, which then triggered the emergence of resistance groups such as the George Washingtons, as well as how discourse is used by both the authorities and resistance groups to shape ideology and social consciousness, with conflict categories that are exogenous in United States of Japan and endogenous in Cyber Shogun Revolution.

Another previous study (Sukowati, 2018) highlighted the novel's exploration of digital authoritarianism, while (Basumatary, 2020) examined its commentary on propaganda and surveillance. The novel's narrative, which draws from both the historical tensions of Japanese-American relations and the speculative possibilities of a dystopian empire, enriches its literary significance. These studies, while insightful, largely overlook the novel's deeper engagement with Foucauldian frameworks, especially concerning how knowledge production and historical revisionism sustain authoritarian regimes. Foucault's argument that power shapes reality through discourse underscores the importance of examining how alternative histories critique real-world power structures by reimagining historical events (Hancock, 2018). United States of Japan was first published by the American publisher Angry Robot Books in 2016. Angry Robot is known for publishing science fiction and fantasy works originally written in English.

What remains unexplored is the extent to which United States of Japan utilizes Foucauldian concepts to address the manipulation of truth, the erasure of dissent, and the creation of docile bodies through mechanisms of surveillance and propaganda. The novel's unique narrative, blending cyberpunk aesthetics with alternate history, provides a valuable lens to explore Foucauldian power/knowledge dynamics. Its alignment with Foucault's assertion that power functions through discourse rather than overt repression highlights its potential contributions to understanding the power/knowledge dynamics in speculative fiction. Literature, as emphasized in Foucault's theories, serves as a counter-hegemonic tool, challenging dominant narratives and exposing mechanisms of power (Blanco, 2018)

Foucault's theories have been widely applied to various disciplines, offering critical tools for understanding the mechanisms of control and resistance within social frameworks. His concepts, such as disciplinary power, biopolitics, and the panopticon, provide a lens to examine how institutions regulate individual and collective behavior. In literature, these ideas reveal how narratives construct and contest hegemonic ideologies, often reflecting or challenging the socio-political contexts in which they emerge. Foucault posits that discourse is both a site and a mechanism of power, shaping what is considered truth within a given historical and cultural context. This interplay between power and discourse is especially pertinent in speculative fiction, a genre that inherently questions and reimagines societal norms. Foucault also argues that each society establishes its own regime of truth, or general politics of truth, which encompasses the types of discourses it accepts and validates as true, the mechanisms and institutions used to distinguish between true and false statements, the methods employed to legitimize them, the techniques and procedures valued in the pursuit of

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truth, and the status granted to those considered authoritative in conveying the truth (Foucault, 1980, p.131)

Foucault's concept of power as productive rather than merely repressive is evident in the novel's depiction of ideological control. The state's use of propaganda and surveillance to shape reality mirrors real-world authoritarian systems, illustrating the novel's relevance as a cultural artifact critiquing power structure. The alternative historical setting of United States of Japan amplifies these themes, inviting readers to consider how history can be weaponized to perpetuate domination.

Through a Foucauldian lens, this study seeks to uncover the depth of United States of Japan's engagement with power/knowledge. This study is guided by the research question of how United States of Japan employs mechanisms of surveillance, propaganda, and ideological control to critique authoritarian power through a Foucauldian analytical discourse. This study argues that Tieryas' novel provides a unique commentary on authoritarianism by illustrating how discourse sustains power and manipulates historical narratives. By analyzing its portrayal of surveillance, propaganda, and ideological control, this research contributes to a broader understanding of literature's role in critiquing and resisting authoritarianism. It positions the novel as a significant text within speculative fiction and Foucauldian studies.

## METHOD

This research adopts a constructivist paradigm to explore the themes of discourse within institutional power, identity, biopower in Peter Tieryas' *United States of Japan*. Constructivism asserts that reality is subjective and constructed through social interactions and cultural contexts (Lincoln et al., 1985). This paradigm is suitable for understanding how individuals within the dystopian society depicted in the novel interpret and respond to systemic control, making it an effective lens for analyzing power dynamics.

The study employs a qualitative approach, as defined by (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975), which focuses on descriptive data in the form of written text and observable behaviors. Descriptive qualitative research is the primary methodology, chosen for its ability to provide detailed accounts of themes within the novel. The study employs content analysis to systematically analyze textual elements, including narrative structures, dialogues, and descriptive passages. Data collection techniques include close reading, note-taking, thematic identification, and data classification. Close reading allows for a deep understanding of the novel's content, while note-taking captures key quotes, events, and dialogues related to the study's themes. Thematic identification traces patterns within the text, and data classification organizes these findings into systematic categories for analysis.

Foucauldian discourse analysis is applied to *United States of Japan* by examining how power operates through the surveillance system, based on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, language, based on *Power/Knowledge*, and biopower, based on *The History of Sexuality*, within the novel's dystopian setting. This approach focuses on the ways in which discourse, defined by Michel Foucault as systems of knowledge, language, and practices, constructs and sustains authority.

The data analysis in this study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) from Michel Foucault's perspective, following the framework outlined by (Alba-Juez Laura, 2009) and (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005), the analysis begins with the selection of topics relevant to the research question to identify the construction of knowledge and power relations in discourse. Next, data is explored in depth by analyzing language choices, rhetorical structures, and implicit assumptions within the text. Following this, dominant themes in the discourse are categorized to understand how meaning is constructed and maintained. The analysis also focuses on absent or hidden elements of discourse, including marginalized voices or aspects left unspoken, to reveal meanings concealed behind the text. Additionally, the relationships between different elements of discourse are examined to analyze how meaning is produced, reinforced, or contested within specific socio-historical contexts. Finally, the identified

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discursive elements are contextualized within broader power-knowledge networks to uncover how discourse not only reflects but also shapes and directs power structures in society. Through this approach, the study deconstructs how discourse operates as a mechanism of power, shaping social realities, subjectivities, and institutional practices.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Discourse operates as a tool to sustain hegemonic authority by normalizing power structures through propaganda, historical revisionism, and the manipulation of cultural memory. According to Michel Foucault, discourse refers to systems of thought, knowledge, and communication that are constructed through language and practices. For Foucault, discourse is not simply speech or text but a broader structure that shapes how knowledge is produced, organized, and maintained within a society. It determines what can be said, who can speak, and what is considered truth. (Foucault, 1980). By framing imperial domination as both necessary and morally justified, the regime effectively erases alternative perspectives and legitimizes authoritarian practices. This focus aligns with Foucault's theory that discourse is not only a medium for communication but also a strategic instrument of power. Through discourses that shape social norms and identities, the narrative demonstrates how control is enacted and perpetuated within society.

### Surveillance and Panopticism

Surveillance in the novel reflects Foucault's theory of panopticism, where individuals internalize discipline because they are never sure when they are being watched. Technologies show how surveillance is used not only to monitor but also create docile bodies. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Foucault, 1975), Foucault describes the panopticon as a symbol of modern power, illustrating how surveillance functions as a method of control. He argues that individuals, when aware of being watched, internalize the mechanisms of power and begin to regulate their own behavior, effectively becoming both the enforcer and the subject of power.

#### *Surveillance as a Symbol of Power*

*"As he passed a holographic image of the Emperor, he, like everyone else, bowed in deference. The Emperor was dressed in his ceremonial clothes, though he had on a crimson dragon mask that prevented commoners from seeing his face. Cameras recorded impatience or disrespect to relay it back to the proper authorities."* (Tieryas, 2016)

This depiction draws from both traditional Asian concepts of imperial authority and modern totalitarian surveillance states. The crimson dragon mask resonates with ancient Chinese and Japanese symbolism, where dragons represent divine authority, emphasizing the emperor's god-like status (Mao, 2024). Historically, the Japanese Emperor was considered a sacred figure, particularly during the militaristic era of Imperial Japan (1930s–1945s), when loyalty to the emperor was both a cultural and political mandate. The use of holograms and surveillance cameras mirrors modern authoritarian regimes, such as North Korea or the surveillance systems in China, where state technology monitors dissent. The fusion of ancient symbolism with futuristic technology shows the continuity of authoritarian practices, using cultural reverence as a mechanism for modern control.

The surveillance system described here highlights the intersection of technology, power, and societal control. By utilizing holographic images of the emperor and integrating technology such as surveillance cameras, the state not only maintains a physical presence but also exerts psychological control. The hologram of the emperor acts as a constant reminder that the ruler is omnipresent, even when absent, maintaining an aura of power and authority. Foucault's theory of the panopticon applies here, where the internalization of discipline occurs because individuals are never sure when they are being observed. This constant potential for surveillance forces individuals to regulate their own behavior, conforming to the norms dictated by the authority figure.



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The use of the crimson dragon mask serves to enhance the divine and untouchable nature of the emperor. By obscuring the emperor's face, the hologram symbolizes a figure that is beyond reach, echoing an ancient and almost mystical authority that cannot be directly confronted or questioned. This reinforces the discourse of absolute power, suggesting that the emperor is a transcendent entity whose authority extends beyond human interaction. The mask is a metaphor for the opacity of power, where the face of authority remains hidden, enigmatic, and therefore uncontestable.

Surveillance systems such as the cameras and the holographic representation of the emperor create a dual function of control and knowledge production. Surveillance doesn't just monitor actions; it produces knowledge about those actions about who is loyal and who is not, who conforms and who resists. The collected data is used to uphold and perpetuate the regime's dominance, as any deviation from the prescribed norms is reported and punished. This aligns with Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, where knowledge about individuals is crucial to maintaining control. The act of being observed becomes internalized, leading individuals to govern themselves according to the regime's expectations.

*Public Spectacle and Humiliation*

*"Thousands of American prisoners were paraded through the streets, all chained. Taunts and hisses were hurled their way. Ezekiel looked over at Ruth and noticed her cross necklace was missing." (Tieryas, 2016)*

Public parading of prisoners recalls historical practices of humiliation used to assert dominance. In ancient Rome, defeated leaders were paraded in triumphal processions, while in World War II, Japanese propaganda often depicted captured Allied soldiers to showcase imperial supremacy. Ruth's missing cross adds a layer of cultural erasure, reflecting Imperial Japan's suppression of Western influences during its occupation of regions like Korea and Manchuria. Christianity, often associated with Western colonizers, was suppressed in favor of Shinto and state-promoted nationalism (Shapiro & Michael, 2010). The removal of the cross symbolizes the forced rejection of Western cultural identity and spiritual freedom, aligning with imperial Japan's historical efforts to homogenize conquered populations under its ideological and cultural framework.

The parade of American prisoners is a public spectacle designed to humiliate and demoralize the defeated power. By chaining the prisoners and parading them through the streets, the regime creates a visual representation of its superiority and dominance over America. This act of humiliation reinforces the new social hierarchy, positioning the Japanese Empire at the top while relegating the former superpower to a position of weakness and inferiority.

The removal of Ruth's cross necklace symbolizes the stripping away of personal and spiritual identity in the face of state power. The cross, a symbol of individual faith and resistance, is removed, reflecting how the regime seeks to eliminate any symbols of personal autonomy. This act of erasure highlights the broader efforts of the state to control not just the physical bodies of its subjects, but their inner worlds replacing personal belief with collective allegiance to the Empire.

The display of defeated prisoners and the loss of individual symbols of resistance serves to create collective knowledge about the subjugation of the once-dominant American power. This knowledge reinforces the legitimacy of the new imperial order, positioning America's defeat as evidence of Japan's rightful dominance. The removal of individual symbols of resistance, such as the cross, is a deliberate effort by the regime to standardize belief systems and ensure complete submission to the state's ideological framework.

*Control and Knowledge Production*

*"Porticals had originally been devised as "portable calculators." In the decades since the War, they had grown to encompass a phone with visual display, an electronic interface to search information on the kikkai (the digital space where all information was stored), and more. The triangular glass*

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*monitor interfaced with the processor, which he navigated via tactile contact. The silver borders accented the sleek design." (Tieryas, 2016)*

This passage parallels the historical evolution of surveillance technology in authoritarian regimes, where tools initially developed for civilian use are co-opted for control. The mention of the Kempeitai (Imperial Japanese military police) and Tokko (Special Higher Police) draws directly from the history of Imperial Japan, where these organizations enforced loyalty, suppressed dissent, and monitored political subversives. The portical's transition from a benign tool to an instrument of surveillance mirrors how modern technologies like smartphones and social media platforms are exploited by states such as China and Russia to surveil and control citizens, demonstrating how technological progress is often appropriated for authoritarian ends.

The evolution of the portical from a simple portable calculator to a sophisticated surveillance tool reflects the state's increasing use of technology to control and monitor its citizens. Initially designed for convenience, porticals have become instruments of power, enabling the regime to track individuals' actions, communications, and even thoughts. The integration of surveillance into everyday technology underscores how power infiltrates even the most private aspects of individuals' lives. This development illustrates how technology, once a tool for personal convenience, is repurposed to serve the interests of the state, ensuring that individuals are constantly under surveillance.

While porticals are portrayed as tools for convenience, the underlying purpose of their development is to maintain control over the population. The use of technology to monitor individuals creates an illusion of progress and modernization, yet this advancement serves to tighten the grip of authoritarian control. The integration of technology into daily life masks the reality that it is a mechanism of constant surveillance. In this way, the regime uses the guise of progress and innovation to justify its expansion of control over individuals' private spaces, effectively turning personal devices into tools of state power.

Technology becomes not only a means of communication but also an instrument for producing knowledge about the population. The state can gather vast amounts of data on individuals, from their movements to their thoughts, through devices like porticals. This ability to monitor and manage individuals creates a more efficient form of control, as the state gains access to the intimate lives of its citizens. Foucault's theory of power and surveillance is clearly evident here: the power of the state is not merely in controlling bodies but in producing knowledge that enables it to govern more effectively, shaping not only public actions but private beliefs as well.

## Dominant Discourse

Michel Foucault stated that dominant discourse functions as a regime of truth, namely a set of practices that determine what is considered true in a society. This discourse includes propaganda, control of history, and manipulation of collective memory to maintain hegemonic power. In *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, Foucault explains that power operates not through centralized authority but is diffused across networks and social interactions. He highlights how discourse plays a critical role in shaping power by establishing boundaries on what can be expressed or done within a society (Foucault, 1976). Therefore, In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, Foucault explores the connection between knowledge and power, asserting that power produces knowledge and that knowledge reinforces power. He explains that knowledge systems are never neutral but are structured to maintain and strengthen power relations (Foucault, 1980).

## Suppression

*"Corporal Fukasaku raised his Nambu Type 18 semi-automatic pistol, pointed at her head, and fired. Her head exploded, brain and blood spraying the ground. 'No one is allowed to speak against the Emperor,' the corporal stated." (Tieryas, 2016)*

The brutal execution was not simply an act of violence; it was a symbolic demonstration of the lengths to which militaristic Japan in the early 20th century would go to enforce ideological orthodoxy. The execution was swift, ruthless, and laden with a purpose that went beyond punishing the individual, it was a message to all who dared question the sanctity of the emperor and the state.

This horrific act recalls the pervasive atmosphere of fear and suppression that defined Japan's militaristic regime. Under the influence of ultranationalist ideologies, dissent was treated not merely as disobedience but as treason a betrayal of the emperor, who was considered divine. In this setting, challenging the emperor or criticizing the state became tantamount to sacrilege, a crime for which the only suitable punishment was death. The regime's intolerance for dissent was institutionalized through brutal enforcement agencies like the Kempeitai, the military police force notorious for their violent crackdowns. Public punishments such as executions, torture, and disappearances were methods employed to instill terror in the populace and eradicate any opposition.

The corporal's statement, "No one is allowed to speak against the emperor," encapsulates the essence of Japan's ideological control during this period. The emperor was not just a political figure but a divine being, a symbol of national unity and purity, whose authority could not be questioned. This narrative of divine loyalty was deeply embedded in society through the fusion of Shinto ideology and Bushido, the samurai code of honor. These traditions, co-opted by the regime, were manipulated to justify militarism, expansionism, and acts of violence, both domestically and abroad. The Bushido code emphasized loyalty, self-sacrifice, and unquestioning obedience values that became tools for the regime to demand absolute subservience from its citizens and soldiers alike. Those who deviated from this enforced loyalty were branded as enemies of the state, deserving of the harshest retribution.

The execution can also be understood as a form of psychological warfare, extending far beyond the physical death of a single individual. By conducting such brutal acts in a public or widely known manner, the regime reinforced its omnipotence, using fear as a weapon to achieve social and ideological conformity. The violence was not just an act of punishment but a calculated display of power a demonstration that the emperor's authority was absolute and unchallengeable. The gruesome spectacle of a head exploding, brain and blood staining the ground, was meant to etch itself into the memories of onlookers, serving as a grim warning: any dissent, no matter how small, would be met with unrelenting violence.

This method of ideological enforcement mirrors the actions of other totalitarian regimes throughout history. The Stalinist purges of the Soviet Union, for instance, systematically eliminated perceived enemies of the state, instilling paranoia and obedience among the populace. Similarly, Nazi Germany's execution of political dissidents and marginalized groups served to consolidate power and suppress opposition. In all these cases, violence was wielded not just as a physical tool but as a psychological one, aimed at controlling thought and behavior. The message was clear: to question the regime, even in the most private or innocuous ways, was to invite death.

The institutionalized violence seen in militaristic Japan, exemplified by the corporal's actions, highlights the interplay between physical coercion and ideological control. It was not enough for the regime to punish individuals who opposed it; the violence needed to carry a symbolic weight that would resonate throughout society. By framing opposition to the emperor as an unforgivable sin, the regime created a narrative that eliminated any space for critique or dissent. The brutality of such acts ensured that the knowledge of the emperor's inviolability was internalized by all. Citizens came to understand that the emperor's authority was not to be questioned, not merely because of propaganda but because the consequences of disobedience were too horrific to bear.

In this context, the statement "No one is allowed to speak against the emperor" takes on a deeper significance. It is not just a declaration of authority but a reminder of the consequences of disobedience. The act of violence itself is a ritual, a deliberate performance designed to instill fear, submission, and reverence. By combining physical force with

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ideological messaging, the regime ensured that its authority remained unchallenged, its power unquestioned, and its vision for society uncontested.

The broader implications of this act reflect the dangers of totalitarianism and the mechanisms by which regimes maintain control. Whether through militaristic Japan's brutal enforcement of loyalty, Stalin's purges, or Nazi Germany's violent suppression of dissent, the pattern remains consistent: violence becomes both a method of punishment and a tool of psychological manipulation. The gruesome execution described here is not just an isolated event but a representation of a larger system of oppression—one that demands absolute conformity and eliminates any possibility of opposition.

The execution of the dissenting individual underscores the terrifying power of regimes that use violence to enforce ideological orthodoxy. The corporal's actions, though monstrous, are emblematic of a system designed to maintain control at all costs. The message is clear and haunting: loyalty is non-negotiable, and defiance will be met with brutal and unrelenting force. In this way, the act becomes more than a punishment; it is a tool of control, a method of shaping thought, and a reminder of the regime's absolute power. The knowledge of this power becomes internalized, ensuring that the emperor's authority remains unshaken, his divinity unquestioned, and his regime unchallenged.

### **Rituals of Loyalty and Militarization of Culture**

*"The twenty-three promoted were given special ceremonial knives. They made small cuts on their hands, let the blood drip into their cups and mix with the special sake, the tokutei meisho-shu. Blood toast, it was called, plasma mixing with fermented rice." (Tieryas, 2016)*

The ritualistic blood toast is steeped in Japanese militaristic traditions that glorify sacrifice and loyalty. During World War II, kamikaze pilots performed symbolic rituals before missions, including drinking sake or writing death poems. Bloodletting signifies an intense personal sacrifice for the collective, a cultural practice rooted in samurai loyalty to their feudal lords. The ceremonial knives evoke the tantō, used in seppuku (ritual suicide) to restore honor, reflecting the regime's romanticization of violence. This ritual's symbolic blending of ancient practices with modern state rituals underscores the militarization of culture, where loyalty to the emperor becomes sacred and sacrificial.

This ritual illustrates the method by which power structures normalize acts of violence through cultural and symbolic practices. The ceremony, which involves participants cutting their hands and mixing their blood with sake, frames violence as a sacred and necessary element of loyalty to the state. By associating such violent acts with ritualistic and ceremonial acts of devotion, the state effectively desensitizes individuals to violence, making it seem like a natural and expected part of their commitment to the emperor and the national cause. This ritual creates a collective understanding that physical harm or sacrifice is not only acceptable but essential for the promotion of the imperial agenda.

The blood toast creates deep emotional and spiritual associations between loyalty and violence. Blood, a powerful symbol of life and identity, is used here to solidify the bond between individuals and the state. The sacrifice of one's blood symbolizes complete submission and loyalty, reinforcing the idea that true devotion to the emperor requires not only symbolic obedience but also literal sacrifice. This association between physical sacrifice and moral duty constructs an ideology where acts of violence against oneself or others are justified by loyalty to the state.

The ritual is a key mechanism for creating collective knowledge that defines loyalty and obedience as forms of self-sacrifice, integral to the well-being of the state. It reinforces the ideological belief that devotion to the emperor and the empire comes at the cost of personal well-being and even life. The normalization of violence through such rituals shapes the social fabric by promoting a culture in which physical harm is internalized as a necessary, even virtuous, part of loyalty. Through this process, the regime ensures that violence is not only tolerated but expected and revered as a fundamental duty.

### **Propaganda**





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*"Above their section was a sign that read: 'Liberating our Fellow Asians and Freeing the World from Western Tyranny.'" (Tieryas, 2016)*

This statement reflects the propaganda of Imperial Japan during its "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" campaign, which sought to justify its expansion as a mission to liberate Asia from Western imperialism. In reality, this rhetoric masked the violent subjugation and exploitation of territories like Korea, China, and the Philippines. The slogan echoes historical imperial propaganda, such as Nazi Germany's *lebensraum* or the United States' Manifest Destiny, where conquest was reframed as a noble mission. By manipulating history, the regime consolidates power and promotes imperial dominance under the guise of liberation, illustrating Foucault's concept of power-knowledge.

This quote reveals how the regime uses historical narratives and propaganda to justify its imperial conquest and the exploitation of other nations. By framing the invasion of other countries as an act of liberation, the regime constructs a narrative that positions Japan as a benevolent power acting in the name of freedom, even as its actions may be violent and oppressive. This manipulation of history allows the imperial regime to reframe its aggressive actions as morally justified, obscuring the atrocities committed in the name of a supposed noble cause.

The rhetoric of liberation is used to mask the underlying violence and exploitation inherent in imperialism. By positioning Japan as a savior freeing other Asians from the tyranny of the West, the regime seeks to present itself not as an oppressor but as a liberator, a discourse that justifies domination and subjugation. This propaganda serves to manipulate public perception, creating a false narrative in which the imperialist expansion of Japan is seen as a righteous endeavor rather than an exercise of power for the sake of conquest.

By controlling and reshaping historical narratives, the regime creates a collective knowledge that supports its hegemonic ambitions. This knowledge is disseminated through signs, public declarations, and other media, ensuring that the ideological message reaches the masses and becomes ingrained in their worldview. The narrative of liberation becomes internalized as part of the collective consciousness, making it more difficult for dissenting voices to gain traction. In Foucault's terms, this manipulation of history represents the power of the state to not only control the present but to shape the past, thereby determining how reality is perceived and what is considered justifiable.

In the United States of Japan, propaganda such as the slogan "Liberating our Fellow Asians" reflects an attempt to frame imperialistic actions as morally justified. This is consistent with Foucault's argument that power produces and maintains truth through institutions such as media and education (Kaleta & Johanne, 2020).

## **Biopolitics and Identity Manipulation**

In Foucault's concept of biopolitics, the state regulates populations through control of bodies and identities. The novel shows how individual identities are changed to serve state ideology, such as through the renaming and erasure of western culture. This reflects the state's efforts to normalize certain ideologies and eliminate cultural diversity. In *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, Foucault introduces the concept of biopower, a form of power that targets populations rather than individuals. He describes how institutions such as public health and education use biopower to regulate human life, applying social norms to control bodies and behaviors (Foucault, 1976).

### *Biopolitics and Identity Manipulation*

*"Like you, I was imprisoned, falsely accused of espionage, and separated from my family. The IJA rescued me and gave me a new Japanese name and identity to cast off my false Western one." (Tieryas, 2016)*

The renaming process mirrors forced assimilation practices seen throughout history. During Japan's occupation of Korea, Koreans were compelled to adopt Japanese names and abandon their language and culture, reflecting the erasure of identity as a form of control.

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Similarly, colonized Indigenous peoples in North America and Australia were subjected to forced re-education and renaming to integrate them into colonial cultures. By erasing false Western identities, the regime frames Western culture as illegitimate, promoting an exclusionary national identity that aligns with historical patterns of imperial assimilation.

This passage exemplifies the use of biopolitics, a concept central to Foucault's work, wherein the state exerts control over the very identity of individuals, shaping them according to its ideological needs. The renaming of individuals and the stripping away of their former Western identities symbolize the forced assimilation into the regime's ideological framework. By replacing a false Western identity with a true Japanese one, the state imposes a new collective identity, erasing the individual's autonomy in defining themselves. This process is one of re-education and cultural reprogramming, aiming to create citizens who not only live according to state expectations but also internalize those expectations as their own identity.

The rejection of Western identity implies that anything not in alignment with the dominant Japanese imperial ideology is inherently incorrect or inadequate. In this case, Western identity is positioned as a symbol of cultural and moral failure, and the adoption of a Japanese identity is presented as a path to spiritual and societal redemption. However, the forced nature of this transformation reveals the coercive strategies used by power to eliminate resistance. While the rhetoric of liberation is employed, the reality is one of forced conformity and the eradication of any alternate worldview.

By controlling names and identities, the state shapes both the physical and mental realms of individuals. This process of renaming and reassigning identity is an attempt to control what Foucault refers to as subjectivity, the way in which individuals perceive themselves and their place in the world. The state replaces personal autonomy with the collective autonomy dictated by the regime, ensuring that the individual is subsumed under a homogenized national identity. Furthermore, the knowledge of Japanese culture and values becomes a tool for reinforcing this conformity, as individuals are indoctrinated to view these as the only valid form of cultural expression.

### **Collective Control**

*"Fukasaku shouted again, 'Tenno Heika Banzai!' which is Japanese for 'long live the Emperor.' This time, everyone followed in unison: 'Banzai!' Ruth yelled too, surprised that, for the first time in her life, she felt something like awe swell up in her." (Tieryas, 2016)*

The chant "Tenno Heika Banzai" was a common phrase during Imperial Japan, shouted during wartime rallies and military ceremonies. This ritualistic expression of loyalty reflects the deeply ingrained cultural practices tied to Emperor worship, particularly during the Meiji and Showa eras, when the emperor was positioned as a divine figure. Ruth's awe highlights the emotional power of such rituals, echoing the mass psychology utilized in Nazi rallies or Soviet propaganda events, where individuals were swept up in collective fervor despite personal doubts. The ritual aligns with Foucault's idea of power operating through societal practices that normalize authority (Pebriani, 2018)

The ritual of shouting "Banzai!" is a key tool of symbolic coercion used by the state to enforce loyalty. This ritual forces individuals to participate in an act of devotion, outwardly demonstrating allegiance to the emperor. Foucault's ideas on rituals and practices of power come to the forefront here, as these rituals function not just as acts of physical submission, but also as mechanisms that elicit emotional responses, further entrenching the power of the emperor in the hearts and minds of the population.

Initially, Ruth's reluctance to participate in the chant reflects her internal resistance. However, the unexpected feeling of awe that she experiences highlights the power of ritual to override personal will. This shift in Ruth's emotional state demonstrates how power, through rituals and repeated practices, can influence even the most skeptical individuals. It becomes clear that rituals are not only tools of compliance but also of psychological manipulation, subtly reshaping individuals' emotions to align with state ideologies.

Rituals such as “Banzai!” are essential in constructing a collective narrative that reinforces the divine and absolute nature of the emperor. By repeatedly performing these acts, individuals are not only forced to express loyalty but are also indoctrinated into the belief that the emperor deserves unquestioned respect and reverence. The ritual becomes a mechanism of knowledge production, reinforcing the truth that the emperor’s authority is inviolable. Through these practices, the state eliminates any potential dissent, ensuring that the collective consciousness aligns with imperial ideology.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights how *United States of Japan* by Peter Tieryas portrays the dynamics of power and discourse through a Foucauldian lens. Key findings illustrate that the novel employs propaganda, surveillance, historical revisionism, and biopolitical control to depict how authoritarian regimes sustain power. The use of panopticons enforces internalized discipline, while dominant discourse and rituals normalize state ideology. The manipulation of history and identity further reinforces hegemonic control, aligning with Foucault’s argument that knowledge production serves power structures. These findings underscore the significance of speculative fiction as a medium for critiquing authoritarianism and power dynamics. By reimagining history through an alternative lens, the novel challenges dominant narratives and exposes mechanisms of social control. The study suggests that speculative fiction can serve as an essential site for exploring power-discourse relationships, providing insights into contemporary socio-political structures. Future research could further compare similar themes across other speculative fiction works to deepen our understanding of how literature critiques and resists authoritarian ideologies.

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