

# SEBASTIAN RODRIGUES' CHARACTER CHANGES DUE TO JAPANESE SOCIAL POWER IN THE SILENCE MOVIE

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## SEBASTIAN RODRIGUES' CHARACTER CHANGES DUE TO JAPANESE SOCIAL POWER IN THE *SILENCE* MOVIE

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### Abstract

The present study investigates the changes of the characteristics of Sebastian Rodrigues, a Catholic priest, before and after experiencing the social power in Japan. It also investigates the influences of the Japanese social power on the changes of Sebastian Rodrigues' characteristics in the *Silence* movie. The setting of the movie is the seventeenth century in Japan, on which Christianity was banned. Sociocultural-historical approach was employed to analyze the movie. The results of the analysis shows that Sebastian Rodrigues' characteristics before he experiences Japanese social power include being compassionate, faithful, optimistic, and unconfident. After he experiences the social power, his characteristics change into helpless, despair, oppressed and senseless. The Japanese social power influences Rodrigues' characteristics in five ways, namely forcing him to find the unfairness and violence, catching him, mocking him, making him witness the murder, and forcing him to apostatize. Hence, the power changes Rodrigues' characteristics.

Keywords: Silence movie, social power, characteristics

### Introduction

3 People in society are influenced by social power, which refers to an asymmetric control over valued resources in the social reactions (Galinsky, Gruenfeld & Magee, 2003). The power forces people to obey orders without giving their agreement. It happens because the value in the society supports the social power to exist. The social power fundamentally shapes societies, organizations, and individuals (Fiske and Markus, 2012; Wrong, 1996). As a result, it influences how individuals act according to the value of the society, influencing and changing the characteristics of people in the society. The issue of power and the changes of characteristics due to the power are reflected in literary works.

As one of literary works, movie represents the life of people in society (Spiker, 2012). According to Kellner and Ryan (1988), Hollywood movies from 1960s to present are usually connected to the political movements. Besides, a movie can also reflect the influences of social power on someone's characteristics.

The present study discusses a movie entitled *Silence*. The setting of the movie takes place in the seventeenth century in Japan, a time when Christianity was prohibited. According to Brunce (1955), Christianity arrived at the country in 1549, in the middle of civil war known as the Sengoku period. The first missionaries were Portuguese Jesuits, who were supported by the emerging supreme ruler, namely Oda Nobunaga, and several Christian daimyos, such as Otomo Sorin and Omura Sumitaka. They supported Christianity because of two reasons, namely their needs of a new spiritual authority for rising leaders and countering the Buddhist and Shinto sanctions and their needs in making use the Christian missionaries from Spain and Portugal to furnish them with advance in trading. Brunce (1955) also adds that the missionaries became both the lower and high classes of society. They could adapt easily to Japanese people through charity and medical care. However, the supreme powers did not care about the new religion, but their needs. After Nobunaga died, Protestant Christian organizations started appearing in Japan. They tried to replace the Catholic Jesuits position.

In July 1587, Oda Nobunaga's successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, ordered to banish the Christian missionaries (Urakawa, 1927; Watsuji, 1963). In September 1591, the decree of prohibiting Christianity was issued. The decree declared that Christianity failed to conform the syncretistic religious tradition that protected the order of the country. Since then, all of Japanese Christians had to stay hidden from governmental purges. They became the "hidden Christians" or kakure kirishitan of Japan and had to live their spiritual life underground (Brooke, 2003). Hideyoshi declared his edict that the Christians converted the whole population of Japan forcibly by eradiating the native culture and destroying Shinto shrines and relics. The Japanese hidden Christians or kakure kirishitan were isolated from the actual holy texts and the goods of Christianity. Their isolation made them blend Christianity, Shinto, and Buddhism together.

The *Silence* movie depicts that a character can be affected by social power. Power gives someone an ability to control society and to influence someone's traits, behavior and characteristics (Yang et al., 2015). Sebastian Rodrigues in the *Silence* movie is a victim of social power which existed in Japan at the persecution era (Montevecchio, 2017). This study aims to analyze the changes of Sebastian Rodrigues' characteristics before and after experiencing the Japanese social power. Furthermore, it seeks to investigate how the power influences his characteristics.

## **Method**

### ***The Silence Movie***

The *Silence* movie takes the setting of time in the seventeenth century, telling about two Portuguese Jesuit priests who visit Japan, namely Sebastian Rodrigues and Fransisco Garupe. Their mission is to find their lost spiritual teacher, i.e. Jesuit Father Ferreira. Ferreira is sent to Japan in order to spread Christianity. Father Rodrigues and Father Garupe are sent to the country to find the words of him. Unfortunately, they find the fact that Ferreira has renounced his faith in Japan after being tortured by the super power. That news provokes Rodrigues and Garupe to ask Father Valignano, the head priest in their college, to travel to Japan. They go to Japan by the guidance of Kichijiro. In Japan, Father Garupe and Father

Rodrigues find the unfairness and violence against Christians. Christianity is prohibited in Japan. There are thousands of Christians who pray in silence. People cannot pray and join the mass freely because there is no priest left. The Inquisitor usually checks the people's faith to make sure there is no Christians in Japan. Christian people who are caught by the Inquisitor will have a deadly torture.

Rodrigues and Garupe live in silence in the middle of forest. They come to villagers' house silently to celebrate a mass. They decide to separate in order to find Father Ferreira. In their separation, Rodrigues is caught by the Inquisitor because of the betrayal of Kichijiro. The Inquisitor forces Rodrigues to apostatize. However, his faith is very strong. One day, the Interpreter of Inoc-sama brings Rodrigues to see Garupe and some Christian prisoners at the beach. They decide to be drowned rather than to apostatize. The faith of Rodrigues starts to be decreased because of the silence of God.

The violence against Christians, most of whom are people from the low class, changes Rodrigues' characteristics. He gives up with the condition. He decides to apostatize because he does not want other people who helped him to be killed. After he apostatizes, Rodrigues and Ferreira work for the Inquisitor to check all the goods which come from other countries. All Christianity signs are prohibited. They work for the inquisitor until they are passed away. He does not talk about his faith to the world until he passes away. However, Rodrigues has a big faith to Jesus as God's son in his deepest heart.

#### **Approach of the Study**

The researchers employed sociocultural-historical approach to discover how Japanese social power which was portrayed in Silence movie influences Sebastian Rodrigues' characteristics. According to Rohrberger and Woods (1971), a sociocultural-historical approach is used in order to find an idea by emphasizing the culture which exists in civilization. Rohrberger and Woods (1971) mention that social and historical condition of an author can impact the literary works. The story, setting, and characters in a literary work can be influenced by the historical and social aspects.

#### **Findings and Discussion**

##### ***Sebastian Rodrigues' Characteristics before and after Experiencing Japanese Social Power***

Sebastian Rodrigues has five characteristics which appear quite often before he experiences Japanese social power, namely compassionate, faithful, optimistic, brave, but unconfident. However, his compassionate characteristic changes into the oppressed and helpless feelings after experiencing Japanese social power.

Rodrigues' compassionate characteristic enables him to feel others' suffers. However, the Japanese social power makes him lack of power. As a result, he feels oppressed and helpless. He cannot do anything in order to help others in suffers.

A scene which bears out the compassionate characteristic of Sebastian Rodrigues showing his helpless feeling is when he finds that the prisoners and Garupe are going to be drowned.

**Interpreter** : "I should tell you, these Christians already trampled and denied their faith at the Inquisitor's office."

**Rodrigues** : “If they did what you wanted, then let them go. Let them go. They did what you wanted. So let them go. Please. Please! Please! Please! Let them go!”  
(01:51:39-01:51:55)

The conversation shows his compassionate characteristic through his reaction in finding others' suffer. He focuses on the prisoners' life. This conversation shows Sebastian Rodrigues' helpless feeling to make the prisoners free.

The faithful characteristic of Sebastian Rodrigues turns into the senseless. Rodrigues has proved his loyalty to Father Ferreira through his speech, reaction, and thoughts. However, after he decides to apostatize because of his love to others, he does not show his loyalty to Father Ferreira, even to Jesus Christ as his God. His faithful characteristic contrasts with his senseless characteristic.

His optimistic and brave characteristics also turn into despair feeling. Despair feeling refers to the condition of someone who cannot bear the burden and suffer. The person who feels despair does not see any possibilities in solving the problems. His optimism changes into his desperate feeling.

#### *The Influence of Japanese Social Power on Sebastian Rodrigues' Characteristics*

*Inoe-sama* is the elite power in this movie. He has the power to rule society because he works in government. He is the governor of Chikugo (01:29:32-01:29:35) and also The Inquisitor (01:29:36-01:29:39) who orders the persecution of Christians. He has an unlimited power in this regency. There is no one who can deny his order. This reality is supported by the traditional social action in Japan which puts the highest power in the leaders. It relates to Japanese custom and tradition which believe in god of the sun. They believe their leaders have been chosen by the god.

*Inoe-sama's* order to do the persecution towards Christians is also supported by many other people because of the value-rational social action. Most of Japanese are Buddhists and they believe that other religions are not appropriate with Buddhists' value. It is obvious in the conversation between The Interpreter and Rodrigues before Rodrigues is brought to the prison.

**The Interpreter** : “We have our own religion, Padre. Pity you did not know this yet.”

**Rodrigues** : “No. No, no. We just think a different way.”

**The Interpreter** : “True. You believe our Buddhists are only men. Just human beings.”

**Rodrigues** : “Even a Buddha dies. Like all men. He is not the Creator.”

**The Interpreter** : “You are ignorant, Padre, only a Christian would see Buddhists simply as men. Our Buddha is a being which men can become. Something greater than himself if he can overcome all his illusions. But you cling to your illusions and call them faith.”

(01:20:39-01:21:18)

From the conversation, the researchers find that Japanese people believe in Buddhism. This form of social action supports the regulation of *Inoe-sama*. Additionally, it gives *Inoe-sama* a high power to insist people to obey his order.

Power and authority becomes two different things. *Inoe-sama* can be regarded to have both of power and authority. For Japanese Christians, *Inoe-sama* is regarded to have the power to force them to apostatize and to deny their faith toward *Deus* as seen in the conversation among Jisama, Mokichi, Garupe, and Rodrigues. Jisama and Mokichi inform the power of The Inquistor to banish Christianity in Japan.

**Jisama** : “Other villages are so dangerous. You do not know who to trust. Everyone fears the Inquistor, Inoue-sama.”

**Mokichi**: “Inform on Christian, and they give you 100 pieces of silver.”

**Jisama** : “200 for a Christian brother. And for a priest, 300.”  
(00:19:55-00:20:20)

As the elite power, *Inoe-sama* can do everything in order to devastate Christianity and force the Christians to deny his faith by apostatizing. There is a routine test in every villages in order to find hidden Christians. People must step on Jesus' pictures and deny the faith of Christianity. The one who rejects or fails in the test will be punished. They will be killed in the cross like Jesus. This regulation of *Inoe-sama* is a coercive action. Hence, *Inoe-sama* is regarded to have the power to force people to do his commands. The violence also happens in order to banish Christianity in Japan.

However, in most of Japanese non-Christian people's opinion, *Inoe-sama* has the authority to do the persecution towards Japanese Christians and the priests. According to Weber (1968), *Inoe-sama* has the traditional authority. Most of Japanese people believe that as a leader of Chikago, *Inoe-sama* has a traditional and legitimate right to exercise an authority. It also relates to the social reaction towards the value that supports *Inoe-sama's* regulation.

Most of Japanese people also agree with *Inoe-sama*. They think that Christianity brings the danger to Japan. According to Brunce (1955), Christianity arrived in Japan in 1549 and it was supported by Oda Nobunaga at the first time. Oda Nobunaga supported Christianity because of the political reasons. He wanted to look for the new spiritual authority for rising leaders and also for countering the Buddhist and Shinto sanction of the traditional powers. The two reasons that were used by Oda Nobunaga succeed to change some people's mind and supported him in the political area. However, after the death of Oda Nobunaga, Hideyoshi ordered the Christian missionaries to be banished. He thought that Christianity was a danger. Not only that, the existence of Christian forced people to eradicate native culture and destroying Shinto shrines and relics. For that reason, the edict in 1614 was made. It stated that people were illegal to be a Christian or attempt to change people into Christian.

The letter from Father Ferreira is written in 1633. That letter provokes Rodrigues and Garupe to travel to Japan in 1640, almost 30 years after the edict exists. Therefore, the edict and the traditional authority of *Inoe-sama* support him to have a strong right to do the persecution towards Christians although it violates human rights. *Inoe-sama* also states his view about Christianity in Japan. There are thoughts that believe Christianity is danger. It is also mentioned in the movie.

It is mentioned in the conversation between *Inoe-sama* and Rodrigues with the help of The Interpreter.

***Inoe-sama:*** “In that case, the *daimyo*'s concubines were all jealous and they fought and fought without end. So the *daimyo* of Hirado drove them away from his castle, and peace came into his life again. Do you think this story has a lesson?”

**Rodrigues:** “Yes. That this was a very wise man.”

***Inoe-sama:*** “I'm glad. That means you understand the *daimyo* is like Japan, and these concubines are Spain, Portugal, Holland, England. Each trying to gain the advantage against the other and destroy the house in the process! Since you say this man is wise you will understand why we must outlaw the Christian.”

(01:43:08-01:44:06)

From the dialogue of *Inoe-sama*, the researchers find the similarity between *Inoe-sama*'s and Hideyoshi's thoughts. It shows the thoughts about Christianity as a danger is the value-rational form of social action among Japanese people. Moreover, the existence of the edict which is the regulation in Japan at that time improves the power and authority of *Inoe-sama*. As the result, the social power creates the lack of power for Christians. Thus, it influences the characteristic of Sebastian Rodrigues as the priest in the *Silence* movie.

#### ***The Influence of Japanese Social Power on Sebastian Rodrigues' Characteristics***

The characteristics of Sebastian Rodrigues before he experiences Japanese social power are compassionate, faithful, and optimistic. However, his unconfident characteristic frequently appears. The doctrines, pressures, and violence which are used by the Inquisitor change some characteristics of Rodrigues. He faces the change in his characteristics before and after experiencing Japanese social power. The social power influences Rodrigues' characteristics. It changes his characteristics by forcing him to find the unfairness and violence, catching him, mocking him, making him to witness the murders and forcing him to apostatize.

#### ***Forcing Him to Find the Unfairness and Violence***

During the mission in Japan, Rodrigues serves people in Tomogi and Goto. In Tomogi, he serves Christians with his partner, Garupe. However, he serves Christians by himself in Goto.

When Rodrigues serves in Goto, he is picked up to go back to Tomogi because The Inquisitor has already known that the priests came to Japan. The Inquisitor and the guards do the unfairness and violence toward the villagers in order to insist them to show they are not Christians. Three villagers of Tomogi are caught in order to do the test and they are failed. Then, they face the punishment which deliver them to the death.

Rodrigues sees the process of killing action and his unconfident characteristic appears. He cannot stand the suffer of others. The death of three villagers influences his characteristic. After the death of three villagers, Rodrigues and

Garupe decide to separate. Rodrigues goes back to Goto and finds no one there. His unconfident feeling appears and becomes stronger by reason of the Japanese social power that he faces.

The researchers find out that the unconfident characteristics of Sebastian Rodrigues becomes stronger through his thoughts. In his thoughts, he asks Father Valignano for giving him the support in order to face the reality.

**Rodrigues:** “Father Valignano, you will say that their death is not meaningless. Surely God heard their prayers as they died. But did He hear their screams?”

(01:01:03-01:01:14),

**Rodrigues:** “How can I explain His silence to these people who have endured so much? I need all my strength to understand it myself.”

(01:01:15-01:01:24)

The destroyed Goto also represents the Japanese social power to Sebastian Rodrigues. The strengths of social power in Japan gives a right to destroy a village and kill all of the villagers. His unconfident characteristic becomes worse. He thinks that he has brought the misery to the Christians in Goto. Sebastian Rodrigues’ thoughts deliver his guilty feeling directly.

**Rodrigues:** “I’m just a foreigner who brought disaster, and that’s what they think of me now.”

(01:03:38-01:03:44)

The unfairness and violence which he finds in Japan bring about his guilty feeling and trigger his unconfident characteristic becomes stronger. The influences of Japanese social power on his characteristics start from here.

### *Catching Him*

In his being desperate and lonely, Rodrigues meets Kichijiro in Goto. He feels afraid of Kichijiro since he has denied his faith in Tomogi. However, Kichijiro shows his hospitality and treats him well. He begins to trust Kichijiro anymore and they walk together until he feels thirsty. When Rodrigues drinks and washes his face at the river, the guards catch him.

He is brought to a place with some Christian villagers who are caught like him. There is a conversation between Rodrigues and Monica, one of the prisoners. In accordance with the conversation, the unconfident characteristic of him grows into the despair. The despair feeling appears in his reaction as shown below.

**Monica** : “He wanted his name to be like our priest, Juan. Who died in Unzen.”

**Rodrigues** : “There will be many more joining him. You understand? Why are you looking at me like that? Why are you so calm? We are all about to die. Like that.”

(01:13:49-01:14:20)

After being caught, Rodrigues shows his unconfident characteristic slowly turns into oppressed, helpless, and despair feelings.



*Mocking Him*

Sebastian Rodrigues is paraded through the villages in Nagasaki after he is caught. He is brought to the Inquisitor. In his way, a lot of people look angrily at him. He prays to God in his heart to give him spirit in facing the reality. One of villagers also throws the rock to him. Moreover, the guards who open the gate and prepare the prison also show their glower toward him and other prisoners. Sebastian Rodrigues realizes his powerless in Japan. It triggers him to feel helpless, oppressed, and despair.

*Making Him to Witness the Murders*

In the prison, Sebastian Rodrigues is treated well. The Inquisitor gives him and all of prisoners the foods three times a day. During his arrestment, the Inquisitor and all of his people attempt to insist Rodrigues to do apostasy. They attempt to have a discussion with him. However, his faithful characteristic makes him does not change his mind.

Since the discussion cannot change Sebastian Rodrigues' mind, *Inoe-sama* orders his people to do the other ways in order to insist Rodrigues. The executor kills one of prisoners in front of others. Juan's head is cut by the executor. This fact is shocking Rodrigues as well. He screams and tries to open the door (01:39:06-01:40:06).

After seeing the killing action in front of his eyes, he feels despair. It becomes worse after he is brought to a beach and finds Garupe and all of other prisoners are drowned to the sea. According to the Interpreter, they are drowned because Rodrigues rejects to apostatize. The main purpose of the Inquisitor is making the *Padres* to deny the faith. The Interpreter states it directly to Rodrigues.

**Interpreter:** "We want the Padre to deny, and be an example to them."

(01:52:03-01:52:07)

The struggle of *Inoe-sama* as the Inquisitor in forcing Rodrigues to apostatize does not finish there. The Inquisitor orders his people to bring him to meet Father Ferreira by the guidance of the Interpreter. Ferreira is not a priest anymore. He has apostatised and changes his identity becomes Sawano Chūan. *Inoe-sama* uses Sawano Chūan to insist Rodrigues to apostatize.

At the night when there are some prisoners are hung in the pit, Rodrigues is forced to apostatize. Sawano Chūan encourages Rodrigues to apostatize. He tells Rodrigues that the prisoners are hung because of Rodrigues' fault. The Inquisitor is going to free them as soon as Rodrigues apostatizes.

**Rodrigues** : "No."

**Father Ferreira** : "You can spare them. They call out for help just as you call to God. He is silent, but you do not have to be."

**Rodrigues** : "They should apostatize. Apostatize! God help me. Apostatize! Korobu! Korobu!"

**Father Ferreira** : "But they have apostatized. Many times over. They're here for you, Rodrigues. As long as you don't apostatize, they cannot be saved. A priest should act in imitation of Christ. If Christ were here... If Christ were

here, He would've acted. Apostatized for their sake.”

(02:15:12-02:16:04)

The power of *Inoe-sama* and the support from society is too strong to be opposed. Rodrigues' love to others is also very strong. Finally, Sebastian Rodrigues agrees to apostatize.

#### *Forcing Him to Apostatize*

The Japanese social power forces him to apostatize. After his apostasy, Sebastian Rodrigues' faithful characteristic changes into senseless. He cannot feel anything about faith anymore and does not give his loyalty to anyone else. He states it directly in his speech to Sawano Chūan. *Inoe-sama* also gives him a new identity. He becomes Okada San'emon, the man who has already passed away and left a wife and a son. In his new identity, Rodrigues or Okada San'emon does not say anything about his faith due to his being powerless in Japan. The Japanese social power has changed a good priest with compassionate, optimistic, and faithful characteristics into one with oppressed, helpless, despair and senseless characteristics. His unconfident characteristic before experiencing the Japanese social power also triggers him to be powerless

#### **Conclusion**

After analyzing movie, the researchers draw two conclusions. First, Sebastian Rodrigues is a dynamic character. Before he experiences the Japanese social power, he is compassionate, optimistic, faithful, and unconfident. After experiencing the Japanese social power, he becomes oppressed, despair, helpless, and senseless.

The way Rodrigues reacts to the violence and unfair conditions in the Japanese society proves that he has a strong compassion as a Jesuit priest. However, his unconfident characteristic usually appears when he finds the hard occasion. After he experiences Japanese social power, the characteristics of Sebastian Rodrigues turn into oppressed, helpless, despair, and senseless. His oppressed and despair feeling are getting worse when he has to confront the violence and others' suffer. His low position makes him feel helpless. He cannot do anything to defend. As a result, he becomes senseless. His faithful characteristic changes into the depriving of the feeling.

Second, Sebastian Rodrigues comes to Japan when the edict of extermination of Christianity occurs. The value-rational and traditional social action in Japanese society provoke Inoe-sama's power and authority as the Inquisitor and the governor of Chikugo become very strong. Some of his characteristics change because of the social action and social power in Japan. Sebastian Rodrigues feels oppressed, despair, unconfident, and helpless. The Japanese social power influences Sebastian Rodrigues' characteristics by making him find unfairness and violence, catching him, mocking him, forcing him to witness the murders, and finally forcing him to apostatize.

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