

【論文】

Endo Shusaku's *Silence*: Novel, Film and Opera

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遠藤周作の「沈黙」 —小説、映画、オペラ—

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Abstract: Endo Shusaku's 1966 novel *Silence* was filmed in 1971 and adapted into an opera in 1993. The film and opera were generally faithful to Endo's novel while altering or compressing some of the details of the plot. Endo's two main questions are about how an individual copes with the state's demands to give up one's deepest beliefs and also about whether a foreign belief such as Christianity can take root in Japan with its unique society and culture.

Key words: ENDO Shusaku, *Silence*, *Chinmoku*, Hidden Christians, *Kakure Kirishitan*

Endo Shusaku's novel *Silence* deals with important issues of religious faith in an environment which is hostile to that faith: specifically, Japanese who adopted the Christian faith in spite of knowing that the Japanese authorities had banned this foreign religion. Endo looks at how believers reacted to the demand of the authorities to renounce their faith on penalty of death by torture. Endo also asked if Japanese people could in fact adopt a religion that came from outside their family. Lastly, Endo wrestles with the problem of forgiveness in the case of the believer's renunciation of faith through fear of torture and death.

Silence was published in 1966 and translated into English in 1969. The novel is based on Endo's research into the history of the introduction of Christianity in

the sixteenth century. Endo had discovered the story of a Portuguese missionary, Father Ferreira who had entered Japan after the Japanese authorities had banned the Christian religion and missionary work intended to propagate it. Ferreira knew that by entering Japan without the permission of the authorities that he was risking arrest, imprisonment and death. Ferreira was arrested and imprisoned but gave in to mental and physical torture and renounced his faith. Betraying his religion further, Ferreira helped the Japanese authorities fight the spread of Christianity through books and advice to government officials. Endo's novel asks the question: can a believer who recants his faith under pressure be redeemed and forgiven? Endo argues that God may appear to be silent on this question, but in fact the sacrifice of God's son Jesus insures that no believer will be abandoned.

Christianity had been introduced to the Japanese when the Spanish Jesuit priest Francis Xavier entered Japan at Kagoshima in 1549 and soon succeeded in converting many Japanese he came into contact with to Christianity. More European missionaries entered Japan over the following years and Christianity began to gain a measure of respectability, especially when some of the feudal lords of Kyushu became Christians. However, within fifty years Japanese authorities began to fear that Christianity was an arm of European colonialism. Hideyoshi and his successor Tokugawa Ieyasu reversed the welcome that Christianity had received, and foreign priests were expelled and Japanese Christians were forced to give up their religion on pain of torture and death. Some European priests braved torture and death to illegally enter Japan to do missionary work.

For a quick synopsis of the plot of Endo's novel, a look at an operatic adaptation that Endo produced with composer Matsumura Teizo gives us the essentials of the plot and the questions of faith that Endo wanted to address. This opera version of *Silence* was performed at Tokyo's Nissay Theater on November 4, 5, and 6 in 1993. The performance was filmed and televised on NHK's general

channel. A synopsis of the opera is presented here.

The two-hour performance is split into two acts. The first act consists of nine scenes.

Scene One: Japanese Christians are calling out for help on a stage shrouded in darkness.

Scene Two: The scene moves to a Catholic church in Macao where we see Father Sebastion Rodrigues and the Bishop of Macao discussing the situation in Japan. The massacre of Japanese Christians during the peasant revolt in Kyushu known as the Shimabara Rebellion of 1637-1638 is mentioned. Father Rodrigues says that the remaining Japanese Christians need spiritual help and guidance from European priests. In addition, there are rumors that Father Ferreira has been taken into custody by the Japanese authorities. Father Rodrigues pleads for permission to go to Japan regardless of the dangers he would face.

Scene Three: A musical interlude represents the journey from Macao to Kyushu.

Scene Four: Father Rodrigues comes ashore at night near the village of Tomogi. Rodrigues is accompanied by Father Francisco Garrpe and a Japanese guide named Kichijiro. They soon make contact with Japanese Christians. The priests minister to the people and ask if there is any information about Father Ferreira. No one admits to knowing anything about Ferreira.

Scene Five: Father Rodrigues contemplates the situation and prays for strength to deal with whatever may come.

Scene Six: A Japanese Christian woman warns Father Rodrigues to escape from the area before the Japanese authorities arrive at the village.

Scene Seven: An official accompanied by armed soldiers tells some villagers to step on a *fumie*, which is a metal engraving of the face of Jesus or a portrait of Mary and the baby Jesus, to prove that they are not Christians. The first man shows some hesitation to step on it and is quickly taken away by the soldiers.

The second man makes the sign of the cross and is taken away. The third man holds the *fumie* tenderly in his arms and is taken away. The fourth man, Kichijiro quickly steps on the *fumie*. He is then asked to spit on the *fumie*, which he quickly does and is allowed to leave the scene. Kichijiro slinks away filled with shame and guilt.

Scene Eight: The sound of many people praying is heard in the darkness.

Scene Nine: Rodrigues laments his ineffectiveness in helping the Japanese Christians. Kichijiro comes to Rodrigues and begs forgiveness. Suddenly they are surrounded by the authorities who have been led to Rodrigues by Kichijiro.

Act Two consists of scenes ten through sixteen.

Scene Ten: The scene moves to Nagasaki. The local magistrate Inoue questions Father Rodrigues. Inoue tells Rodrigues that Christianity is not suitable for Japan. Rodrigues replies that Christianity is universal. Inoue tells Rodrigues to apostatize as Father Ferreira and several other priests have done. We then see Rodrigues in prison where he can hear the suffering of Japanese Christians being tortured nearby. Kichijiro comes to Rodrigues and again begs forgiveness for his betrayal. Kichijiro tells the guards that he is a Christian too but they just shoo him away.

Scene Eleven: Rodrigues is told that more Christians will suffer because of his stubborn refusal to recant his faith. Rodrigues is forced to watch as some Christians are wrapped in straw mats and thrown into the sea to drown.

Scene Twelve: Ferreira is brought to meet Rodrigues. Ferreira justifies his behavior by saying that he is useful to Japan. Rodrigues asks him if he is happy. Ferreira avoids answering by saying that there are various conditions of happiness. Ferreira says that Japan is a swamp where Christianity cannot grow. Rodrigues says the roots only need careful tending, but Ferreira tells him that the Japanese twist Christianity into something else. They are worshipping new idols, not the Christian God.

Scene Thirteen: Rodrigues is tied to a cross and is being taken through jeering crowds in the streets of Nagasaki. Kichijiro again makes an appearance begging Rodrigues to forgive him.

Scene Fourteen: Rodrigues laments the silence of God while sitting in his prison. Kichijiro comes to him for confession. Ferreira comes to the prison and tells Rodrigues why he apostatized: he wanted to spare the Japanese Christians from the torture of being hung head down in pits filled with excrement.

Scene Fifteen: Rodrigues faces the *fumie*. He picks it up and studies it. He wonders what Jesus would say in this situation. Rodrigues decides that Jesus would tell him to go ahead and step on it. He would be forgiven.

Scene Sixteen: Rodrigues steps on the *fumie*. The curtain goes down as he collapses to the floor, crying as he puts his hands on the face of the *fumie*.

The NHK television program opens with Endo and Matsumura discussing the adaptation of the novel to the stage as an opera. Endo expresses his satisfaction with the opera and after the opera finishes, we see Endo appear out of the audience to step up on stage with director Matsumura to take a bow with the cast of the opera.

In 1971 the Toho film company released a film version of *Silence* directed by veteran film director Shinoda Masahiro. Endo and Shinoda are credited with the screenplay. However, Endo had no say in the final cut of the film and the director did not give much attention to Endo's thesis that God forgives the believer who recants his faith through pressure.

The film begins with a prologue showing an old sixteenth century European map centering on Japan with a voiceover giving the history of how Christianity was introduced into Japan. This information covers the basic information imparted by the Author's Introduction which Endo starts his novel with. While the novel stresses Kichijiro's unwillingness to admit to being a Christian on the voyage from Macao to Kyushu, the film version establishes Kichijiro's

untrustworthiness in a bit of dialog invented for the film where Kichijiro asks for payment for successfully leading the priests to the coast where the Japanese Christians can be found. The priests pay him and wonder aloud whether he is really a Christian. The film continues on for the next two hours and ten minutes following the main events of the novel until the very last scene. We know from the last section of the novel that Rodrigues was forced by the authorities to take the name and the wife of a Japanese Christian who was martyred and that Rodrigues lived to an advanced age. Shinoda chose to portray Rodrigues introducing himself to his new wife by tearing her kimono and virtually raping her as she lies on the tatami without resisting in any way. The film ends with a freeze frame of this scene. The viewer is left to conclude that Rodrigues has completely lost his spiritual faith and has let his animal nature take over his behavior. Are we to conclude that the individual cannot win in a battle to keep religious or ethical beliefs if the power of the state or society decrees that those beliefs are prohibited?

Endo was very disappointed at Shinoda's invented scene according to Mark Williams, Senior Lecturer in Japanese Studies at the University of Leeds who personally consulted with Endo on translations of later books.⁽¹⁾ The final section of Endo's novel tells us that Rodrigues never redeemed himself for his weak behavior, but Endo's thesis is that God forgives our weakness and even expects us to fail. Rodrigues continues to believe, just as Kichijiro continues to believe, no matter how often the state insists on public disavowal.

For her 1975 book on Japanese films and filmmakers, Joan Mellen interviewed Kawakita Kashiko, who was the managing director of the Towa Company, a major film distributor involved in introducing Japanese films overseas:

"Mellen: One wonders whether in *Silence* the subject of the treatment of the Christian missionaries and the Japanese response to Christian ideas might not

have been too complex for screen treatment. And perhaps the failure of the film comes from Shinoda's not being critical enough of the Catholics in Japan.

Kawakita: Yes. And he doesn't know enough about the Catholics.

Mellen: Shouldn't he have been much more hostile to the Catholics as foreign invaders coming to Japan? The film doesn't take a clear stand on this crucial question.

Kawakita: Yes, yes, that's right. Because the author [Shusaku Endo] of the original novel upon which the film was based is a Catholic. And so the film just stands in between. Shinoda tried, at least in the last scene, which was completely changed from the original story, and there was a big row between the author and Shinoda but finally Shinoda insisted."⁽²⁾

Did Shinoda care that the theme carried away by viewers would not necessarily match what Endo wanted to convey? Kawakita implies that the director did not know much about Christianity and had very little interest in Christianity as a religious faith. Mellen also interviewed Shinoda himself. She asked him about the theme of *Silence* but he seemed to evince no real interest in Endo's concerns and theme:

"Mellen: What is the attitude in *Silence* toward the two Jesuit priests? What is the point of view of the film toward the mission of these two men, and what is your point of view toward the capitulation of Rodrigues at the end when he steps on the idol and renounces his faith?

Shinoda: The first problem is what sort of reaction was caused by the transplantation of the Western profile onto the Japanese landscape.

Mellen: Is the film critical of the very fact of the Catholics coming to Japan and imposing an alien culture on the Japanese?

Shinoda: Japan is an island surrounded by the sea. Many cultures from outside

have come here. Japan could not refuse them. The sea current itself conveyed these foreigners to Japan's southern shores. Japan's culture thus consists of many, many foreign cultures in a mixture. Sometimes it caused us to lose our essential Japanese culture. I'm not even sure sometimes what Japanese culture is."⁽³⁾

Mellen then asked Shinoda if the Jesuits had the right to come to Japan and impose their religion on the Japanese. Shinoda's reply was that basically it didn't matter, because Christianity could never appeal to the Japanese:

"The Japanese people believed that Buddhism could easily marry with Shinto, and thus Japanese culture is a mixed breed of both religions. Then Christianity came, but by this time the native animism of Shinto and Buddhism were already coexisting in harmony. I think there was no room for an additional religion."⁽⁴⁾

Although the film version did not address Endo's contention that a believer will be forgiven by God, one of Endo's themes is presented in both the opera and the film: How does one face the challenge of persecution? There is a tradition in European Catholicism of honoring Christians who were martyred for their refusal to give up their faith. The first martyr's story, that of Stephen, is recorded in the New Testament of the Bible in Acts chapter 6 through 8. *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, published in 1563 by John Foxe and still popular reading today for some Christians, is representative of the steady stream of information about brave Christians who went to their deaths after suffering various gruesome tortures without recanting their faith. Rarely do Christians care to dwell on what happens to people who give in to pressure and renounce their faith. Certainly it is a theme well worth considering. When *Silence* was published it was met with anger and dismay by Catholics in Japan.

Professor Okada Sumie of Immaculate Heart University in Kagoshima

interviewed Father Inoue Yoji, a close friend of Endo's from the time they left Japan together to study in France in 1950 until Endo died:

"Japanese Catholic officials, along with various conservative and orthodox believers, took a stance firmly opposed to Endo's liberal views of the matter. They asserted that it is unthinkable for Christ to encourage even a tormented, young, immature and weak missionary priest to trample on his icon. They further added that Christ might have forgiven Rodrigues for his desertion after he had committed the act of trampling, but certainly would never allow him to comply with the dictates of the persecuting government."⁽⁵⁾

Professor Okada goes on to mention that Endo's book was included in the *Index of Prohibited Books* that the Catholic Church puts out from the Vatican to warn Catholics of books which go against Catholic doctrine:

"According to Father Inoue...it was not acceptable for the traditionalists in the Japanese Catholic population, clergy and congregation alike, to believe that all those who had bowed to the government during the time of persecution would be forgiven by God, saved and raised to Heaven alongside the glorious and officially approved martyrs. That was the reason why *Silence* was initially included in the list of books proscribed as unacceptable to ordinary Catholics."⁽⁶⁾

Endo was not a theological expert but a novelist expressing his own views. Endo makes it clear throughout *Silence* that Rodrigues and Kichijiro are to be compared with the apostle Peter who denied knowing Jesus on three occasions that are mentioned in the Bible. Peter was obviously forgiven because he went on to become the forerunner of the popes who lead Catholic Christianity today. Endo also compares his fallen Christians with Judas. Christians may argue about

whether Judas is eternally damned for his betrayal of Jesus, but the Bible is silent on where Judas would be spending the afterlife. It is perfectly reasonable to argue that Judas was forgiven too.

Furthermore, the message of Jesus in the Bible stresses that the weak and powerless will be ministered to by God. Endo also makes clear that Rodrigues, Kichijiro, and Ferreira are guilty of having given in to pressure to deny their faith, yet they continue to believe in the Christian God. They may not be able to stand up in public to state their faith, but in their hearts they continue to believe. They have not been brainwashed or cured of their obsession with Jesus and the Christian way of life.

Endo's other large theme is whether Japan can accept foreign ideas like Christianity. Endo describes Japan in *Silence* as a swamp where European Christianity cannot easily take root and survive without being adapted for Japanese culture. Endo became a Christian as a child to please his mother who had turned to Christianity after divorcing her husband. Endo grew up in pre-war Japan understanding that Christianity was looked on as a Western and therefore suspect religion, and during the Second World War as the religion of the enemy. After the war, Endo went to France to study and discovered that Europeans looked down on him as a member of an inferior race and being a fellow Christian did not reduce the racism he experienced.

Japan's Christians make up only about one percent of the population, yet Christianity has made major inroads everywhere else in the world except for the Islamic world and the few remaining Communist countries. Is Japan different from the rest of the world and incapable of accepting this religion because it is too foreign for them? This question seemed to be much on Endo's mind. In the late 1950's Endo became aware of the *Kakure Kirishitan* or Hidden Christians of Kyushu. He went to Nagasaki and made contact with some of these Christians and was surprised to learn how Japanese had handed down their Christian

beliefs from the time of their ancestors who became Christians as a result of the missionary work of the sixteenth century. Endo was also struck by the fact that the Hidden Christians had core beliefs that had changed significantly from current Christianity. The Hidden Christians intoned garbled Latin prayers which had become gibberish over the centuries. The Hidden Christians also had a propensity to pray to the Virgin Mary rather than God and Jesus. Professor Okada mentions Endo and Endo's good friend Father Inoue and their meetings with these Christians. They were surprised to learn that the Hidden Christians felt that they were true Christians and all the other Christians were wrong:

"In his research for his novels, Endo met the present-day surviving *kakure*; however, they do not acknowledge or approve of the present-day Japanese style of Christianity introduced since the end of the Meiji Era. Father Inoue also witnessed that they would stubbornly decline invitations to come to church, however hard some of the Catholic priests and believers tried to persuade them. They call the present-day Japanese Christianity the 'New Sect' (*shinkyō*), or use the term 'Protestant' in the sense of implying that Catholicism is the old religion (*kyūkyō*), and distinguishing their brand of the faith from the new and open church."⁽⁷⁾

Professor Stephen Turnbull of Leeds University went to Kyushu in 1992 to meet the Hidden Christians and did a study on some of the local communities and their beliefs. Professor Turnbull mentions various interpretations of the orthodoxy of the Hidden Christians. There are those who feel that the Hidden Christians successfully kept their true Christian faith while others think the Hidden Christians developed a new religion far removed from true Christianity. Endo's research and own ideas seem to have led him to think that the Hidden Christians were trying to blend European Christianity with Japanese ways of

thinking to create a Japanese style of Christianity. Endo further argues that doing such a thing is good. While Christianity is a universal religion there can and perhaps should be varieties that fit different cultures. Professor Turnbull explains why Endo thinks the Hidden Christians' emphasis on the Virgin Mary is acceptable:

"Endo argues that the mother figure is at the heart of Japanese religion, so that this notion of the caring mother was already cherished by them when the example of the Virgin Mary was introduced. The images of her thus struck a chord of familiarity, which was reinforced by the European priests' own devotion."⁽⁸⁾

Turnbull quotes from a book that Endo wrote in 1992 about the Hidden Christians:

"The Virgin Mary was to them not only the mother of Jesus, she became the mother of them as weaklings. For them, as formerly their own mothers had done, she would forgive and continually console them and in the end, she comforted their sorrows."⁽⁹⁾

Endo doesn't suggest that Christians transfer their allegiance from Jesus to the Virgin Mary, but understands why the Hidden Christians would have done that. Instead, Endo asks us to look at Jesus as he appears in the Bible helping all who came to him regardless of whether the supplicant was a thief or prostitute or other scorned person. Endo reminds us that Peter and the other apostles deserted Jesus, but were forgiven.

When *Silence* was published over forty years ago it was a best-seller in a country where Christianity does not have many adherents. Obviously the book made an impression on many people, and continues to be one of the best-selling

Japanese books in translation around the world. The novel, as well as the film and opera versions, gives us a riveting story of individuals who try to maintain their integrity and beliefs. Some of those individuals die for their beliefs, but some individuals give in to intense pressure to renounce their beliefs.

The struggle to maintain one's beliefs in societies which demand total obedience to other beliefs continues to be an issue of great importance. More than fifty years ago George Orwell's novel *1984* posited a future where an all-powerful state finally had the technological tools and scientific know-how to uproot unacceptable beliefs in individuals and remold their minds.

In the 1950s, novels and films took up the claim that people could be brainwashed by government officials. Richard Condon's 1959 novel *The Manchurian Candidate* (which was filmed in 1962 and again in 2004) suggested that the North Korean and Chinese Communists were able to brainwash American soldiers captured in the Korean War to give up their most deeply-held beliefs about their religion and their country.

In the novel, three captured American servicemen are subject to brainwashing and hypnosis in North Korea with orders to kill the president of the United States when the men receive their coded signals later when they return to America. While the premise of training killers through brainwashing seems rather fantastic, it is not at all unknown for people to change their political or religious beliefs as a result of prolonged physical and mental pressure. In fact, some Japanese Christians did do a complete turnabout in their beliefs, agreeing with the authorities that Christianity was a danger to Japanese society.

More recently, Japanese who were abducted to North Korea were subjected to psychological pressure to transfer their allegiance and beliefs to unquestioned obedience to the North Korean leader. Charles Jenkins, an American who defected to North Korea in 1963, revealed to news reporters in Japan after being subjected to North Korean efforts to brainwash him for over forty years, that he

and his fellow captives learned to mouth the words they were taught but in their hearts they never lost their original beliefs.

Endo's *Silence* reinforces our belief that though we may be weak and unable to resist mental and physical pressure, we cannot be forced to change the deepest beliefs in our hearts unwillingly.

Notes

- (1) Mark B. Williams, *Endo Shusaku: A Literature of Reconciliation*, Routledge, 1999, page 252.
- (2) Joan Mellen, *Voices From the Japanese Cinema*, Liveright, 1975, page 65.
- (3) Mellen, pages 240-242.
- (4) Mellen, page 242.
- (5) Sumie Okada, *Japanese Writers and the West*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, page 97.
- (6) Okada, page 123.
- (7) Okada, page 105.
- (8) Stephen Turnbull, *The Kakure Kirishitan of Japan*, Japan Library, 1998, page 105.
- (9) Turnbull, page 105.

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- Endo, Shusaku. *Silence*. Sophia University, Tokyo. 1969.
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