

REVIEW ARTICLE

Spiritual thirdspace and silent faith: reading the parallax between Buddhism and Christianity in the movie *Silence* (2016)[†]

Mahesh Hapugoda¹ and Krishanthi Anandawansa^{2*}

¹ Department of Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences & Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka.

² Department of Languages, Faculty of Management, Social Sciences & Humanities, General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Ratmalana, Sri Lanka.

Abstract: Scorsese's movie *Silence* (2016) can be (re)contextualized to state that Jesuit priests Ferreira and Rodrigues found spiritual 'Thirdspace' when their missionary work was violently suppressed during Edo Japan. To survive the banal violence, suffering and pain and counter the psychological breakdown incurred by the Buddhist inquisitor, the priests seek an alternative, spiritual assimilation and dissimulation entity that paradoxically juxtaposes with the denouncement of faith (*fumi-e*) and identifies with God's silence that preserves it. At this point, a Heideggerian 'out-of-joint' situation is experienced, reaching Christianity's true meaning: God-forsaken man is left to decide in existential freewill how to continue his faith under challenging circumstances. The 'Thirdspace' identified here differs from Catholic and Christian beliefs, practices and Buddhist doctrinal rituals and occurs when Rodrigues silently preserves his faith, like his mentor Ferreira. This silent faith becomes the indestructibly true, epistemological element. There is higher semiotic significance when Rodrigues' suppressed Christian soul symbolically returns through his wife, who places the Cross in his hands, establishing a transcendental connection that traverses both religions' limits and boundaries. Despite the two religions' 'un-meeting' spiritual contradictions, the wife's act suggests man's ability to help each other towards mutual, spiritual destinies. When Europe sees Christianity as a missionary endeavour, and its experience of Japanese cruelty culminates, a 'shift in perspective against its background' occurs that never returns gaze; the priests never look back at European origin after their 'roots were cut'. This transposition of locations that prevents a returning gaze is the parallax that re-establishes true Christian faith in both priests.

Keywords: Silent faith, spiritual thirdspace, loss of origin, transcendental truth.

INTRODUCTION

Silence (2016) by Martin Scorsese seems not to be very popular in Japan though Japanese critics marginally talk about the new-wave film *Silence* (1971) by Masahiro Shinoda. However, Shusaku Endo's novel *Silence* (Endo, 1969) is the most known masterpiece in Japan and elsewhere from which the two movies are made. The novel focuses on the *kakure kiristians* (Endo, 1969) (hidden Christians) who underwent severe hardships and religious humiliation during Edo Japan. Endo was heavily critical of religious discrimination in Japan and successfully portrayed the 'silent God' who is believed to accompany a believer. At the same time, the darkest nature of violence that Edo Buddhism (not excluding Shinto or any other traditional derivations) employed towards outsiders during its domineering exclusionist project is revealed throughout the movie. Though Scorsese's account is not an excellent one, *Silence* (1971) provides profound evidence about religious violence, dehumanization, inner paradoxes of Buddhism of Edo Era Japan, the parallax between Christianity and Edo Buddhism, pain and awareness, and most importantly, the nature of the woman who finally stands for universalism in her way. Andrew Garfield, Adam Driver and Liam Neeson contributed significantly to bringing to life the fathomless misery of the devoted Jesuit missionaries from Portugal, who volunteered to spread the message of God in Japan. However, the movie takes an unexpected twist when the two priests, Ferreira and Rodrigues, respectively mentor and pupil, reach a profound awareness that God does not hear our voice, and in

* Corresponding author (anandawansa@kdu.ac.lk;  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5206-6800>)

[†]A working paper of this (an Abstract) was presented and published jointly by the authors at the 16th Asia Pacific Conference conducted by Ritsumeikan Centre for Asia Pacific Studies (RCAPS) held in Beppu, Japan on 1st December 2018. Original abstract published is available at http://en.apu.ac.jp/apconf/program/2018/AY2018_Proceedings.pdf



This article is published under the Creative Commons CC-BY-ND License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>). This license permits use, distribution and reproduction, commercial and non-commercial, provided that the original work is properly cited and is not changed in anyway.

this Heideggerian ‘thrown out’ situation, one has to make rational decisions through one’s freewill and responsibility: this is the ultimate message of Christ.

Shusaku Endo’s novel was reprinted in 2017 with a brief introduction by Scorsese. The difficulty or ‘the crisis of believing’ in describing it has attracted Scorsese to once more reflect on the same experience depicted by Endo. Especially the particular struggle that Endo, as a Christian, experiences in Japan is given global attention by Scorsese since, even today, an outsider feels the same strangeness, anxiety and difficulty of survival in Japan. ‘Endo himself had greater difficulty reconciling his Catholic faith with Japanese culture. So it is not historical research but his own experience that drew him to the stories of the Portuguese missionaries of the seventeenth century who were forced to apostatize’ (Johnston, 2004: p.263). The act of apostatizing is based on practical difficulties of experience enforced by the Buddhist Japanese, and there is a painful stage where the priests encounter the paradox of God’s voice and the reality that they happened to undergo in keeping with the voice. What suddenly occurs to Father Ferreira and Rodrigues is that the pain of their experience to keep with the voice is never heard by the Almighty, and the banality of experience psychologically forces them to alter their identity. Scorsese (2016) says that the Christian faith had to adapt repeatedly with great difficulty for it to flourish. Facing this paradox had always been an extremely painful one. However, the movie universally shows that the redemption of faith had always been possible through severe pain. Everyone hears clarity of God’s true message through a passage of pain and Endo carefully and beautifully portrays that in the novel.

Japan has still not fully recovered from its fundamental isolation and somewhat vaguely felt an unwelcoming attitude triggered by this isolation towards outsiders that is visible in present-day Japanese. Nish (2009b), in his chapter titled ‘The uncertainties of isolation: Japan between the wars’ (Bates *et al.*, 2009) explains that this isolation was initially a preferred political choice adopted by the rulers of Edo-era Japan, whose concept was that there was

“no reason to fear isolation because she [Japan] had been for over two centuries between the sixteen-thirties and 1853 a sealed country (*sakoku*) and had, despite her isolation, made abundant progress during that period. But recent scholarship suggests that it is a historical misconception to speak of this period as one of ‘isolation’”. (Nish in Bates *et al.*, 2009, p.252)

Following the economic progress Japan has shown after its eventual exit from isolation, marked by its signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936, despite the lack of enthusiasm at the time to do so by Japan’s army and other pillars of power in the country (Best in Bates *et al.*, 2009), Japan has risen as a highly developed Asiatic nation. Unsurprisingly, even in modern times, there still remains a hint of the isolation within which its people relate to other nations around the world. In short, the fact that Japan can stand alone proves that such isolationism should not be feared (Bates *et al.*, 2009). However, it is possible to state that military and emperor rule in Japan, with its vested authoritarian rule, combined with the country’s continued lack of fear of isolation, has had problems in the manner in which the country has handled international relations (Nish, 2009b).

One should also not forget Japan’s tendency in the years leading to the end of World War-II (WWII) to conquer Southeast Asia with its intention of expanding its empire; for instance, its invasion and occupation of Malaya (Malaysia) and Singapore (Beng-Lan, 2011a), which exemplify the nation’s “dominant source of intellectual influence in the region...the various colonial powers” (Beng-Lan, 2011b: p.21) and its mission as executing a colonizing project.

The movie *Silence* (2016) is politico-culturally significant today because it still pronounces the incapacity of the Japanese mind to open itself to the contingencies that can come with outsiders. Their protectionism, nationalism and psychological fear can be understood by tracing back to some of the most traumatic historical events that occurred during World War II, and they deserve great respect for their devotion towards disarmament

and global pacification (Nish, 2009b); Bates *et al.*, 2009). They have learnt much from their history, which, as Nishitani (1982) metaphorically believes, is like a river that ceaselessly flows through the present.

Yet, according to Nish's (2009a) study on Japan's isolation, it still seems that the nation's present, with its historical preference for enclosure and thriving prosperity within boundaries, continues to resist being (re)shaped by fearlessly welcoming outsiders as if the nation prefers the way it has been in the past. In this sense, the postcolonial cultural 'melting pot' that is quite a real and ordinary experience for those in nations like India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, or, most importantly, Singapore in modern times is almost a political deadlock for Japan (Hammond & Hein, 1992), since present-day issues that connect Japan "to the outside world- issues such as multiculturalism or foreign labourers or Japan's international contribution to global security – hark back to the same mammoth and unresolved question of national identity, creating a political deadlock in contemporary Japan" (Hammond & Hein, 1992: p.147).

The nation's inability to accept change or make way for the change that necessity instigates in the aftermath of WWII is ironically against the preaching of the inevitable 'impermanence of all matter' or 'change', one of the most fundamental principles of Buddhism. The dominant religion of Edo-era Japan should have emphasized to its subjects that even Japanese dominance is also subject to change. This paper examines the Parallax between Edo Buddhism and Christianity in the Movie *Silence* (2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Seitz (2016) explains that Scorsese's movie *Silence* (2016) "is a monumental work, and a punishing one. It puts you through hell with no promise of enlightenment, only a set of questions and propositions, sensations and experiences" (Seitz, 2016: p.1). The fact that he indicates that the movie leaves the viewer with no resolution but a mere set of unresolved feelings, emotions and questions is true insofar as the doctrines of Buddhism of the Edo Era in Japan and Christianity are severely kept on either side.

Yet, Seitz's (2016) proposition, in a way, assures that such destabilization of the boundaries of religious understanding is fundamentally possible; that there could be hope for an alternate discourse. If at all this is true, the evidence for this is that at the end of the movie, not only does Rodriguez, as a new apostatized priest has a Japanese wife, but is also, finally, cremated at the end of his natural life-span in Japan, with his wife in a transcendental moment of realization, secretly placing an image of Christ in the dead man's palm, amidst the overseeing guards, thereby leaving the viewer with a hitherto unforeseen sense of resolution.

As Harris (2017) claims, *Silence* (2016) "refers to God's silence while Rodrigues bears witness to all sorts of anguish and human suffering throughout the film" (Harris, 2017: p.1). He further reiterates that the movie also is a reflection of Director Scorsese's atheist stance as "a self-avowed "lapsed Catholic," [who] understands both the folly and the courage of unshakeable faith (Harris, 2017: p.1). Thus through *Silence* (2016), the audience is pulled away from mindlessly following the fundamental teachings of both religions to suggest that faith "is a personal journey" (Harris, 2017: p.1)

Coupled with the Director's position is the equally eccentric stance of Shusaku Endo (1969), author of the novel *Silence* (Endo, 1969), from which Scorsese (2016) draws inspiration and on which the movie *Silence* (2016) is made. Endo (1969) is described as "the Japanese Graham Greene [which] means that he is a Catholic novelist, that his books are problematic and controversial, that his writing is deeply psychological, that he depicts the anguish of faith and the mercy of God" (Translator's (Johnston's) Preface in Endo, 1969). Johnston (Endo, 1969) believes that Endo (1969) is "the first Catholic to put it forward with such force and to draw the clear-cut conclusion that Christianity must adapt itself radically if it is to take root in the 'swamp' of Japan" (Endo, 1969: p.ii). The notion of the 'swamp' as a description of Japan recurs in both the novel and the movie wherein the Japanese Inoue states that, " 'Father, you were not defeated by me,' says the victorious Inoue. 'You were defeated

by this swamp of Japan.’ It is precisely the swamp of Japan that cannot absorb the type of Christianity that has been propagated in these islands” (Endo, 1969: p.vi).

Not only does this refer to Endo’s (1969) preoccupation, since his early days of writing, with the conflict between the East and West (Endo, 1969), but also the fact that “Japan is a swamp because it sucks up all sorts of ideologies, transforming them into itself and distorting them in the process. It is the spider’s web that destroys the butterfly, leaving only the ugly skeleton” (Endo, 1969: p.vii). Johnston in Endo (1969) also terms the “mud swamp Japanese” (Endo, 1969: p.vii), were Buddhist and nihilistic to the extent that they had not allowed themselves to be taken into the depths of being the Christianity that was presented to them, and that had this Christianity been “less incorrigibly Western, things might have been different” (Endo, 1969: p.vii). Hence, not only does *Silence* (Endo, 1969; Scorsese, 2016) depict the immaculate desire for resistance to change (ironically an element that all Buddhists are fundamentally taught to believe and accept), but also stands testimony to the satirically absolute failure of 17th century Japanese to live up the notion of being called Buddhists.

THEORETICAL PREMISE

The parallax view

One of the fundamental understandings required for the present review of *Silence* (2016) is how the seemingly incompatible and polar opposite religions of Edo Era Buddhism and Christianity can be merged in the light of a parallax view. The standard definition of parallax is the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist to be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply “subjective” since the same object which exists “out there” is seen from two different stances or points of view (Žižek, 2006c: p.17).

In other words, a parallax arises out of the situation in which a subject and object are mediated so that an epistemological shift in the subject’s point of view always reflects an ontological shift in the object itself. Once this occurs, the subject’s gaze, which in the Lacanian (Žižek, 2006c) sense is “always-already inscribed into the perceived object itself” (Žižek, 2006c: p.17), and which is “more the object than the object itself” (Žižek, 2006c: p.17) (the ‘blind spot’) returns the subject’s gaze in a moment of realization that generates a transcendental shift of understanding that affects both the domain of the subject and its object. This parallax view ultimately brings forth a ‘meeting point’ of understanding that juxtaposes the boundaries of two seemingly unparallel domains. Since the movie *Silence* (2016) is a story of how two distinctively different faiths are in conflict with each other and ultimately posit some resolution at the end (possibly in the form of Rodrigues’ Japanese wife), it is an ideal theoretical premise for a review of the movie *Silence* (2016).

‘Thirdspace’ (Soja, 1996)

Edward Soja’s (1996) ‘Thirdspace’ is a radically inclusive concept that denies enacting a higher synthesis over the other. In contrast, ‘Thirdspace’ (Soja, 1996) theory argues to transcend and constantly expand to include an–Other. In the process, it contests and re-negotiates beyond dualisms. In doing so, the histories constituting the dualisms are displaced and new structures of authority and initiatives are set up (Soja, 1996). In light of the present review of *Silence* (2016), Soja’s (1996) ‘Thirdspace’ is adapted as a ‘spiritual Thirdspace’ where a valuable standpoint is created to understand the transcendental element that originates as a result of the parallax view of the polarities of Edo Buddhism and Christianity.

Foundations of Buddhism and Christianity

One of the fundamental differences between Buddhism and Christianity, relevant to the present review of the movie *Silence* (2016), is that in Christianity, the root of faith is in a creator God. In contrast, the Buddha “is

against accepting anyone or anything as an authority” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.2) except the person or subject him/herself. In this sense, a sense of ‘inward exploration’ pertains to Buddhism, which exemplifies “anti-authoritarian systems of thinking” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.2). The second most significant identification is that the “logic of salvation” (Smart, 1993: p.13) by the two central figures of Jesus and the Buddha differs. As Smart (1993) explains

The Buddha’s similes were instructional in purpose, and his teachings were built on a highly analytic scaffolding [...] Jesus saved humanity through his deeds and death - he was a sacrifice which restored the breach between human beings and the Divine, and the way of the Cross, however unlooked for, was nevertheless the path that the salvific plan of action took. The Buddha saves through his teaching above all (Smart, 1993: p.13).

In this sense, the two religions differ in their conception of the world and the universe, for in Buddhism there were two conceptions of the world; the external objective world and the other of the ‘personal world’ (Dharmasiri, 1998). The Buddha’s “understanding of the objective world took place in the context of the universe. Universe was understood in terms of a vast cosmic space” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.5). In contrast, in the faith of Christianity, “there is a God who has created all things and who himself gives his creation meaning. Further, we can know him” (Boice, 1986: p.7). This ‘higher order’ description of the formation of the universe and adherence to the ‘word of God’, lies in stark contrast to the Buddha’s teachings, where in particular he said, “his own teachings themselves should be subjected to careful scrutiny before acceptance” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.2).

The Buddha further maintained that “one must neither accept nor reject an idea because of one’s likes or dislikes, without proper investigation. Until the idea is verified, one must temporarily safeguard it (*saccānurakkhanā*), because what one is going to reject might turn out, after all, to be true” (Dharmasiri, 1998: p.3). In contrast, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Boice, 1986: p.7). Fundamentally then, there is an ‘un-meeting’ of the premise, as Buddhism’s and Christianity’s conception of what constitutes knowledge and the way to wisdom are on either end of the spectrum.

The above theoretical premises are important in reviewing the movie *Silence* (2016), since the movie is about whether Christianity can be rooted in an Edo Buddhist land, which had an authoritarian rule in the Edo era, and what happens when it is attempted to be done. The essence of ritual practice in the theistic religions such as Christianity, where worship, i.e. “things such as hymns, prayers and adoration” (Smart, 1993: p.15) were some of the unacclimatized elements that were introduced into Japan’s Edo Era Buddhist ground, resulted in extreme and banal violence and resistance, since the foundations of the latter, in the strictest sense of Edo Buddhism, did not talk of the worship of Buddha in the Theravadin context. However, the offerings of flowers and such were considered meritorious acts that would bring about “the possibility of a better time in lives to come” (Smart, 1993: p.15).

Another ideological difference between Buddhism and Christianity that would pertain to a better understanding of the movie *Silence* (2016) is the absence of the ‘soul’ as the very essence of Buddhism, an “emptiness at the heart of the individual” (Smart, 1993: p.17), which heavily intercepts with the main emphasis in the Christian tradition with its “the sacramental participation of the faithful in the life of Christ, through the Eucharist” (Smart, 1993: p.15). This ‘soulful’ worship fundamentally brings about the movie’s eccentric violence against the Jesuit priests and the converts who attempted to plant Christianity on Japanese soil.

Although such polar-opposite ideological doctrine and its clash are seemingly at the base of the plot of the movie *Silence* (2016), as the story unfolds, there is a sense of possible merging that is suggested even after much bloodshed and chaos, which finally proposes a ‘peaceful exit’ from the polemics and polarities that enfold in the movie.

The Kyoto School of Thought and Nishida Kitaro (1991)

The Kyoto School, which constituted of a group of 20th-century Japanese thinkers, developed original philosophies and thoughts, led by its founder Nishida Kitaro (1990), by creatively drawing upon the intellectual and spiritual traditions of East Asia, particularly Buddhism, as well as on the methods and content of Western Philosophy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019). The exercise dawned out of the need for Japan to consider Western academic fields of inquiry, after being in national isolation for more than two centuries. Kitaro (1990) was the first prominent modern Japanese thinker who succeeded in traversing from the learning of the West and constructed his original system of thought, which resulted in the publication of his seminal work *An Inquiry into the Good* (Kitaro, 1990).

Following Kitaro's (1990) path-breaking work, the fundamental thought of the Kyoto school thinkers is that the foundations of wisdom lie not in abstract intellectual theory, but in pure, whole experience, which is the product of one's conscious reality (Drengson, 1993). Kitaro's (1990) premise is that when there is unity of consciousness and the character of pure experience, a system of wholeness manifests as a unifying reality (Kitaro, 1991). Another important demarcation is the notion of 'absolute nothingness' (Kitaro, 1990; Hapugoda & Rathnayake, 2021) as a matter of transcendental subjectivity of a being who succeeds in going beyond "the opposition between being and non-being" (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2019: p.1). Kitaro's perceptions of the potential possibilities of the transcendental are significant in the analysis of *Silence* (2016).

METHODOLOGY

In the scope of this study, the semiotic evidence in the movie *Silence* (2016) will be interpreted using critical hermeneutics and Žižekian tools (the parallax, the gaze- explained in the theoretical premise above) to investigate the parallax interplay between Christianity and Buddhism in Edo Japan. The use of parallax is an alternative perspective that can effectively be used to understand the transpositions of phenomena, i.e., Buddhism and Christianity in modern Japan, in which the polarities and differences make a transverse moment where antinomies finally make each other whole (Karatani, 2003). Hence, this study deviates from the usual Marxist dialectical position of one negating the other and generates something new out of that negation. Through given semiotic evidence, the study explores how Edo Buddhism justified banal violence against an alien religion, despite its original teaching of great compassion. It also shows how this violence becomes 'divine' when the priests understand that awareness is only possible when they deny the ritualistic belief in Christianity. Similarly, through cinematic evidence, the study also interprets, how Christianity becomes stronger and more universal through such violence. Hence, comparisons and contrasts across phenomena are integral to the analysis.

DISCUSSION

Man's action in God's absence

Silence (2016), the motion picture by Martin Scorsese, triggers certain philosophical standpoints, especially the teachings of Martin Heidegger from which the Kyoto School of Philosophy learnt their fundamentals. The movie reminds us of the popular Heideggerian statement that God no longer looks at us (Heidegger in Smith, 2011) and, therefore, man is fully free in this organic world. Following Heideggerian (Smith, 2011) thought, it is possible to state that the freedom from that celestial gaze, the condition that no superior authority is looking at us, can be the ultimate freedom that man can think of. In other words, there is no master who supervises our actions and man is free from the bondage of gaze. If God is forever silent, as was proved when Christ was on the cross, then it is up to man to decide what he must do in this organic reality in the absence of His voice. When Christ painfully uttered, "Father why did you forsake me?" in his last moment, he exemplified that there is nobody divine willing to intervene in this organic darkness that man encounters. Here, Christ proved that man is fully responsible for his action - the ultimate freedom of all - is his freewill. According to his conscience, man must decide what is right

and wrong and act accordingly. The film *Silence* (2016) gives us an opportunity to rethink this freewill and freedom of choice that has been granted to us by the highest sacrifice of a man - the pain of Christ.

After years of struggle and arguing with his conscience, and when God is dead silent, Father Ferreira decides to 'obey' the brutal Japanese Buddhist order and 'step on' the portrait of Jesus (*fumi-e*) to save his followers. He takes that decision in the absence of God's mediation. It seems God speaks in silence and man must be profound enough to listen to that silence and understand what must be done in a disaster. However, the simple understanding that Scorsese mentions in his introduction needs revision. He says that "God's love is more mysterious" (Scorsese, 2016) and has left much more for us to subtly understand through a passage of pain. It seems here that it is not that God's message is mysterious, but the human self is too egoistic and self-centred that one is too negligent to pay attention to the moment of dissolution of one's ego that enlightens the smallness and finitude of human existence. The obedience that Ferreira first follows is such a moment when he realizes that nature (the distorted image of God in Japan) is bigger than the missionary message. Ferreira points towards the rising sun and states that the Japanese only understand "the distorted image of God" (Scorsese, 2016) and nothing else. And whatever sacrifice that "these Japanese" (Ferreira in Scorsese, 2016) make is not for God but for the image of God (that is distorted). They die "for you Rodrigues" (Ferreira in Scorsese, 2016) means at this moment that in its deepest sense, they do not believe in any true origin (a beginning of a Messenger) but are in a present reflection of such image (that is distorted), represented by Ferreira or Rodrigues.

The local Japanese Buddhist model in Edo-Era

The Mahayana version of Buddhism in Japan has the same 'distortion' as the God's 'distorted' image in Japan in *Silence* (Scorsese, 2016). What was practiced then in Japan is not at all taught in the original teachings by Buddha, for instance how one of the Japanese unifying trio, Hideyoshi, who had a strict hand against 'foreign' intrusions in the country in the late Sengoku period, at one point in a fit of anger ordered the immediate execution of a group of 26 Japanese and European Jesuit missionaries. The fateful 26 were crucified in a place close to present-day Nagasaki station (Endo, 1969: p.iii). The element of Great Compassion (*mahakaruna*) is not seen in the brutal violence that was executed by the so called Buddhists in the then Edo era. Cultivation of great compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*muditha*) and equanimity (*upekkha*) is essential for a Buddhist, irrespective of the tradition. Even in the Mahayana tradition, both *karuna* and *pragna* (wisdom) are given priority in Buddhist existence. But it observed that the Japanese in *Silence* (Scorsese, 2016) were violating the true message of Buddha and could 'peacefully wait' till the Christians painfully bled to death; there is no sense of remorse for the pain inflicted on the Christians. As we see in *Silence* (Scorsese, 2016), there is no guilt or human conscience in what Inoue and his team were doing for the sake of doing it, and they are very much like Nazi officers who read *Bhagavath Geetha* at night, while they tortured Jews in gas chambers during the day. According to Žižek (2006b), Hollywood propagated the myth that "the torturers can retain their human dignity if the cause is right, is a profound lie" (Žižek, 2006b) and the Buddhist torturers who inflicted those barbaric crimes in the name of Buddhism of the Edo Era (if preserving Buddhism is the cause) cannot also be apologized. They knew what they were doing was wrong, but they performed those crimes by completely distancing themselves from the acts (maintaining a cynical distance) using a nationalistic ideology. It is not an illusion but a distorted content of social representation (Johnston, 2004). Hence, all the distortions that *Silence* (2016) refers to in Japan are perverted content of representation that preserves some degree of nationalistic 'jouissance'¹.

Japan historically adopted a local model of a 'pure' society during the Edo era by condemning Christians and treating them as second-class citizens. This example has continued even to today's modern society (a fantasy adapted by Lee Kuan Yew, who appropriated it to Singapore). On the one hand and to a far greater extent, it is possible to state that Japanese society is free from the 'evil content of modernity'; for example, cigarettes without nicotine, beer without alcohol or butter without fat, but is ironically not free from the "banality of evil" (Arendt in Allen, 1979: p.20), which is typical of modernity, where "cruelty has gone passionless, violence has become mechanized [and] suffering has become impersonal and dehumanized" (Arendt in Allen, 1979: p.20). But true

modernity is about accepting even the evil content, much like loving someone with his/her weakness. In this manner, one can develop a sense of inclusiveness even though an obvious evil accompanies a stranger. But the Japanese at that time were not courageous enough to accept the strangeness of its organic evil (metaphorically nicotine with the cigarette). But, interestingly, the Japanese Inoue summons Rodrigues and informs him that all these outsiders must be detached from their original roots to take new initiatives in this swamp of Japan. "Their roots must be cut" (*Silence*, 2016), the Inoue advocates, and to do so, a horrific de-humanization process takes place against the hidden Christians in Japan. Finally, they surrender against the face of violence, yet all show that their faith remains with them till their last breath, in a hidden manner.

The parallax between Buddhism and Christianity

The real parallax that becomes visible between Christianity and Edo Buddhism in *Silence* (2016) is the moment when Buddhism denies the existence of a big Other, an Almighty God who can help man in adversity. On the other hand, Buddhism believes in a human who has the potential within him/herself to become more than him/herself (more than God) if s/he strives to be so. Though paradoxical, both priests understand this phenomenon when they face suffering as Christ did. But the violence they face differs from that of Christ, since the priests do not physically suffer but are exposed to the unbearable reality that their followers are forced to undergo: brutal suffering unless the priests publicly renounce their faith. The denial of faith is essentially connected with the identity that they have developed when they became priests. Faith is part of their self or identity that they project to their followers as 'good priests' who are faithful to their belief or rather do not betray their faith. Hence, this identity formation as 'good priests' demands an amount of identification with what they believe in. However, the Japanese inquisitor demands the renunciation of this identification with the faith or executes a harsh method to "cut the roots" (*Silence*, 2016) of their faith. 'Roots' here mean the origin of their identity formation process in which they became faithful priests. Until they renounce their faith and step on a *fumi-e* they do not realize the fact that they are also expected to perform the same act that Jesus did if they ever want to save the Other. This self-denial needed great courage and, in doing so, finally freed them from their own identity.

Žižek (2007) mentions that man in the present cynical era can engage in any banal act because God is truly ignorant. He says, "we are all ready to indulge in utter skepticism, cynical distance, exploitation of others "without any illusions," violations of all ethical constraints, extreme sexual practices, etc." (Žižek, 2007) because we are protected by the silent awareness that the big Other is ignorant about it. The Japanese Buddhists also seemed to have a silent awareness that the God whom these Christians pray for is an impotent one - one who is deeply silent about the sufferings of his own creations, or He can also be someone who derives pervert pleasure from the sufferings of his faithful followers. Hence, Father Ferreira decides to covert his whole act in light of what Jesus did to save his followers. He gives up on the big Other and starts believing in the symbolic order established by Jesus. Within the mutation of God and before the fathomless sufferings of his subjects, Ferreira invokes his consciousness (awareness) rather than believing in the belief that some miracle would happen. He frees himself from the ritualistic element of worshipping and pleading with God to save others; he becomes Christ, an imitation of Christ. Father Ferreira realizes that the other can be saved only through his suffering (both mental and physical torture). Moreover, as far as Japanese cruelty is concerned, there was no other way. The problem lies in his consciousness, the moral and ethical doubt as to whether such denial is acceptable, which is addressed by a hallucinatory emergence of Jesus when he is about to take the action of *fumi-e*.

Žižek (2008) often uses the term 'divine violence' (2008) to demarcate the difference between progressive changes in humanity and the everlasting inertia in existence. In his book *On Practice and Contradiction* (Žižek, 2017) Žižek, also refers to Asia and her centuries-old melancholia towards human progress. The violence found in *Silence* (2016) cannot be termed as violence towards progression and change but rather violence that keeps existing Japanese feudalism intact to resist deeper changes. One can also argue that this violence is a nationalistic struggle against European colonialism. However, when it comes to the existing feudal structure and life conditions of ordinary masses, the narrow nationalistic violence, which aims at anti-universalistic pre-modern politics, can

be articulated as mere 'feminine' or 'weak' resistance to what is more plausibly the acceptable and democratic way of the future: universality. However, even from a textbook Buddhist point of view, it is not acceptable that the priests in *Silence* (2016) (or anyone) have to undergo this amount of banal violence to reach awareness. The Buddha has never advocated violence to change or covert a faith. Such change will not be sustainable. Buddhism is a religion of non-violence and compassion. A man should reach self-awareness through his means, by practice.

The parallax realized through woman

In the movie, eventually, it is Rodrigues' Japanese wife who attains the parallax between Edo Buddhism and Christianity. She steps out of her comfort zone into Rodrigues' awareness, and transcends the boundaries of perception between the two religions in her stone-pillar-like silence. Symbolically, this woman confirms the possibility of parallax theory, which claims an "apparent difference in the position or direction of an object caused when the observer's position is changed" (Thompson, 1993: p.645). Passed from Father Ferreira to Rodrigues' hands as a wife, this Japanese woman moves into a silence that is so profound in the movie in contrast to all others involved in the 'un-meeting' of the two religions and suffers in the conflict of their atrocities. She is the one who silently penetrates the bloodshed through her understanding and love and arrives at a 'parallax view' that makes us see things neither from a subjective viewpoint nor from the viewpoint of others, but in the face of reality that is exposed through difference (Karatani, 2003; Žižek, 2006c).

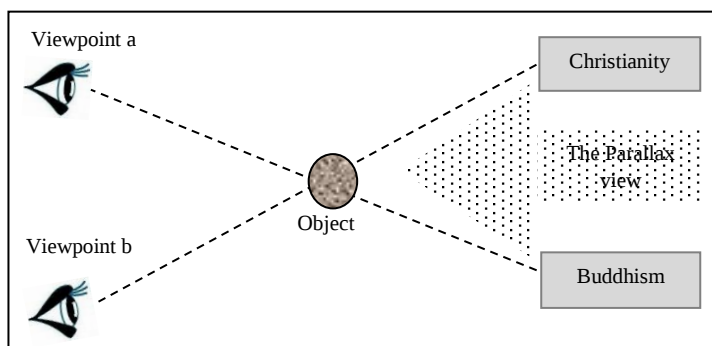


Figure 1: The parallax between Buddhism and Christianity in the movie *Silence* (2016)
Source: Authors

Unlike Rodrigues and other *kakure kiristians* (*Silence*, 2016), her emotions are not shown in the movie. Yet, her actions reach a higher order of things. For instance, when she secretly places the cross in Rodrigues's hands before cremation, she meets and transcends his faith in silence. In this silence, she arrives at a Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) parallax of the Christian her husband believed in. Ultimately, the contradiction is understood beyond dialectic reason and reaches a transcendental experience, that of a possible Thirdspace (Soja, 1996) in which the 'antinomies of tolerant reason' (Žižek, 2006a) are validated. In the face of this irreducible antinomy, an eternal harmony between Edo Buddhism and Christianity emerges a Thirdspace (Soja, 1996), which re-negotiates between the dualisms. Symbolically, it is the woman, then, who carries the transcendental phenomenon in a silent faith of the Other, which becomes the true epistemological element that Buddhism or any other religion cannot kill.

In this sense, the woman transcends the message of deeper universalism and love that can glue the whole civilization together despite the ideological divisions that man has made. In her hidden existence and eternal silence under contemporary power politics, she displays her inner potential to be universal without being hysterically outspoken about her desire or otherness. Her love, compassionate understanding and acceptance of the difference in her alien husband deconstruct the existing masculine polarization between Japanese politics and Christian missionary inflow into the 'swamp' (Figure 01). Though nothing grows in the swamp, she is the one who plants the seeds of true love, a matter that both religions were unable to do. The two polars are dissolved within her Buddhist compassionateness, in which Christian love also resides. Hence, her silent love represents

the Buddhist middle path that dissolves both egos i.e., the Christian missionary civilizing project and the Japanese resistance to preserve their religion. In this sense, silence deconstructs Jesus' ego-ideal Christian metaphor, whose true message was to 'step on me' and the Buddhist violence that wanted to keep the pure land ideal by excluding Otherness.

Understanding the parallax

As we know, after the Meiji Restorations, the Japanese allowed Western values to flourish in their land and embraced the Western way of life. After so much historical struggle they have allowed Western otherness to enter the Japanese geography and its life-world. They have further advanced Western science and technology to reach higher living standards: if we borrow a popular statement from Mao Tse-Tung, something that is more Western than Western (Žižek, 2007). In this context, to reach a higher existential state of mind and a pure consciousness (Kitaro, 1990), it is observed that both Japanese tradition and alien values started co-existing simultaneously in Japan. This means that the Japanese understood the Buddhist theory of dependent origination, that things exist not in a dialectical form but in a mutually depending and arising form. This is the theoretical basis for the parallax technique in which, in the context of the movie, Christianity and Buddhism practised in Edo Era Japan have met in a transverse moment to enrich each other and live together. In this sense, Edo Buddhism provides an existential space for the alienated Japanese mind that grows in an advanced industrial context, while Christian love and otherness provide a broader form of coexistence for the Japanese existential mind that prefers existential isolationism. The tolerant meeting point of these great traditions inspires the whole world to understand the possibility of deeper realisation, consciousness and coexistence between the East and the West.

The situational and swamp-like materialistic conditions of the Japanese land and its taught Buddhist ideology that compels its subjects to seek enlightenment from within not only negate/neglect considerations of the other and any form of other-inclusiveness but also deny Inoue san, the Inquisitor and his rule(rs) the infamous "luxury of the Sartrean blink" (Jameson, 1986: p.85), which offers the placeless individuality that the West (Jesuit priests) bring into Edo-era Japan. As Nishitani (1982) explains, what lies crucial at the heart of the man who belongs to Christian philosophy is that man remains lord-like in relation to the objects he perceives around him. In other words, his mind, soul and consciousness look 'out' at everything else as if they were a central citadel or viewpoint. Thus, Nishitani (1982) further argues, the Christian man (in this case, priests Ferreira and Rodrigues) can only observe a Cartesian reality of the world, where there can only exist reality as a division of immaterial subjective consciousness, or at the other end, material visible objectivity (Nishitani, 1982). This is the birth of Western dichotomy, which can only explicate the life-world it sees always as either A or B, and A cannot be B. This is why we see priests Ferreira and Rodrigues so stubborn in their need their Christian selves in the other Japanese.

Against this, Nishitani (1982) further argues lies the biological-organic model of conceiving the universe as of interdependent origin a matter in which part upon part and its internal relations constitute what is known as the universe or the whole. In this sense, the subjects from the West (priests Ferreira and Rodrigues) fail to realize the organism of Buddhism's great nothingness from which all individual beings flow in, in their diverse forms and return to upon dissolution. It is the most unlikely meeting of both these influxes that would be a solution to the crises in the movie. Furthermore, on the way to identify a parallax view and move into what is known as a way to 'higher unity' (Karatani, 1993), one needs to recapture the higher goal in the form of unitary foundation or the higher 'Good' (Karatani, 1993), which does not entirely do away with the Western way of logical thinking and assertion, but rather engages subjectively in a state of 'pure consciousness' that cannot be effaced.

When Buddhism offers enlightenment through an introverted journey to oneself, one has to forget the otherness which can rise as an obstacle to the attainment of Nirvana. That is why Buddha considered his son Rahula a "fetter" (Britannica.com, 2021), which could, in layman's language, be articulated as a chain or manacle that restrains. In short, Rahula is a 'bond' and thus an obstacle. However, once Buddha attained the highest stage of enlightenment, Nirvana, he too wanted to share that awareness with the other; even an enlightened soul is not

fully free from that otherness which suffers. The Jesuit priests in *Silence* (2016) believe in the ordinary Japanese otherness that suffers in this feudalistic land of oppression and tries very hard to 'save' them from the physical suffering in the objective world. They fail before a very domineering and oppressive feudal government. However, through that oppression and de-humanisation, the priests, too, realise that they can become Jesus-like and eliminate their deep Christian identity, the ego, by stepping on the image of Christ. This means 'the obstacle' to their salvation (realisation) was the over-identification in Jesus himself. Hence, ego and otherness always take turns in this movie and transpose the mirror through which personal narcissism is constructed and then deconstructed. The image of Christ constructs the ego of the priests, and by stepping on the image (*fumi-e*) they realize its limits and traverse it.

Rodrigues' Japanese wife silently takes a middle path of nothingness, realizes the futility of masculine violence towards exclusion and acknowledges the secret existence of Christian-ness in the Japanese mind. Similarly, there is a Buddhiness in every Christian heart. That is the true parallax in Japan and elsewhere, where two profound values are meaningfully combined. Hence, through this catastrophic historical event, Japan realized the need to accept the otherness in each other; the parallax in the land of nothingness emerged from within her Buddhist-dependent origination.

In present-day Japan, western science and technology have enhanced Japanese material life, while the Zen way of life and Shino have improved their existential life. In the meantime, Japanese Zen teachings, have penetrated the Western world and resided there strongly. However, the Japanese life-world is a completely different one as far as modern Marxist views are concerned since tradition too alternatively co-existed in its modern life without generating a clean break from one historical stage to another. Even for today's Japanese life, there should be a parallax view rather than a dialectical standpoint to understand the complexities in their life that have been generated due to the clash of two value systems functioning at the same time, each consisting of independent legitimacies. The deeper polarities in two great traditions are absorbed into a fathomless Japanese silence in which a new 'Thirdspace' (Soja, 1996) has been generated through the loss of ego and through the destruction of old mirrors.

CONCLUSION

The movie *Silence* (2016) provides evidence about the historical struggle of the Japanese Buddhist and incoming Christian missionaries in which a new modern 'Thirdspace' (Soja, 1996) has been generated in modern Japan. A parallax view would be more suitable to detect this new space than the popular dialectical method. The contingent meeting of two polarities has sought a new consciousness, where a profound exchange of ethico-political values has constructed a new form of communism² in Japan. Both polarities have deconstructed their hard kernels to meet each other, creating a space of tolerant antimonies. Hence, Buddhism and Christianity be used as critiques against each other and produce a new consciousness for modern-day humanity. In this sense, Japan has become an example which proves that an eternal harmony between Buddhism of the Edo Era in Japan and Christianity is possible. However, the movie *Silence* (2016) shows the historical difficulties that such a meeting encounters until they find a tolerant 'Thirdspace' (Soja, 1996) in which both systems do not lose their historical essence. However both histories will never be the same after this historical encounter.

END NOTES

1. 'Jouissance' is "enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle" (Lacan, 2006, p. 761) and can be defined as an excessive quantity of excitation which the pleasure principle attempts to prevent" (Evans, 1996, p. 150). The relationship between jouissance and the pleasure principle is such that "pleasure is the safeguard of a state of homeostasis and constancy which jouissance constantly threatens to disrupt and traumatize" (Evans, 1996,

- p. 150). A subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his 'enjoyment' and to go beyond the pleasure principle.
2. The reason why the authors believe it is a 'new form of communism' is because the parallax point reached at the end of *Silence* (2016) is suggestive that there is a possible shift from the authoritative Japanese Inoue rule and its severe hand of power, which is so used to taking into its hands 'God-like' power, denying any possible people's choice, to a theory or system of social organization in which the Japanese community has some ownership to the choices of individual interest, be it religion or any other matter. In short, the 'tolerance' of both polarities has transferred a vested amount of power to the Japanese individual.

REFERENCES

- Allen, J. S. (1979) Modernity and the Evil of Banality, *The Centennial Review*, 23(1), pp: 20-39 [Online] Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23739524> [Accessed: 21st June 2023].
- Bates, D., Wallis, J. & Winters, J. (Eds.) (2009) *The Creighton Century, 1907–2007*, London: University of London Press, Institute of Historical Research.
- Beng-Lang, G. (Ed.) (2011a) *Decentring and Diversifying Southeast Asian Studies: Perspectives from the Region*, Pasir Panjang: Institute of South Asian Studies.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814311984>
- Beng-Lang, G. (2011b) Disciplines and Area Studies in the Global Age: Southeast Asian Reflections, In G. Beng-Lan (Ed.), *Decentring and Diversifying Southeast Asian Studies: Perspectives from the Region*, Pasir Panjang: Institute of South Asian Studies.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814311984>
- Boice, J. M. (1996) *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology*, Leicester: Inter Varsity Press.
- Britannica.com. (2021) *Rahula*, Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Rahula> [Accessed: 01st August 2021].
- Dharmasiri, G. (1998) *Fundamentals of Buddhist Ethic*, Kadugannawa: Paramita International Buddhist Society Ltd.
- Drengson, A. R. (1993) An Inquiry into the Good by Kitaro Nishida, Masao Abe, Christopher Ives, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. 34(2), pp: 121-123 [Online] Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40036710> [Accessed: 21st June 2023].
- Endo, S. (1969) *Silence*, Trans. by W. Johnston, Tokyo: Monumenta Nipponica.
- Evans, D. (1996) *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London, UK: Routledge.
- Hammond, E. & Hein, L. E. (1992) Multiculturalism in Japanese Perspective, *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, 1(2), pp: 145-169 [Online] Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23613297> [Accessed: 21st June 2023].
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/187656192X00122>
- Hapugoda, M. & Anandawansa, K. (2018) The Spiritual Thirdspace and Silent Faith: Reading the Parallax between Buddhism and Christianity in the Movie "Silence" (2016) [Online] In: Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, 16th Asia Pacific Conference. Beppu, Japan, 1-2 December 2018. Beppu: Asia Pacific University. Available at: <http://en.apu.ac.jp/apconf/program/2018/AY2018_Proceedings.pdf> [Accessed: 30th May 2019].
- Hapugoda, M. & Ratnayake, I. (2021) Can the Western Tourist Gaze be Deconstructed through Buddhist Ontology?, *South Asian Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 1(1), pp: 102-116 [Online] Available from: <https://sajth.sljol.info/articles/10.4038/sajth.v1i1.29> [Accessed: 21st June 2023].
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4038/sajth.v1i1.29>

Harris, D. (2017) Silence, 5 January, *Spectrum Culture* [Online] Available from: <https://spectrumculture.com/2017/01/05/silence/> [Accessed: 31st July 2021].

Jameson, F. (1986) Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism, *Social Text*, 15, pp: 65-88.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/466493>

Johnston, A. (2004) The Cynic's Fetish: Slavoj Žižek and the Dynamics of Belief, *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, 9, pp: 259-283.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.pcs.2100014>

Karatani, K. (2003) *Transcritique- On Kant and Marx*. Trans. by S. Kohs, Cambridge: The MIT Press.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/6897.001.0001>

Kitarō, N. (1990) *An Inquiry into the Good*, Trans. by M. Abe & C. Ives, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Lacan, J. (2006) *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, Trans. B. Fink, New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Nish, I. (2009a) *Japan's Struggle with Internationalism: Japan, China and the League of Nations, 1931-3*, London and New York: Routledge.

Nish, I. (2009b) The uncertainties of isolation: Japan between the wars, In D. Bates, J. Wallis, & J. Winters (Eds.) *The Creighton Century, 1907-2007*, pp: 247-267, London: University of London Press, Institute of Historical Research.

Nishitani, K. (1982) *Religion and Nothingness*, Trans. by J. V. Bragt, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Scorsese, M. (2016) Extract- An Introduction to Shusaku Endo's Silence [Online] Available from: <https://www.peterowen.com/introduction-shusaku-endos-silence-martin-scorsese/> [Accessed: 02nd July 2019].

Seitz, M. Z. (2016) Reviews: Silence, *RogerEbert.com* [Online] Available from: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/silence-2016> [Accessed: 31st July 2021].

Silence (1971) Directed by Masahiro Shinoda, Tokyo: Toho Co., Ltd.

Silence (2016) Directed by Martin Scorsese, UK: SharpSword Films, UK: Ai Films.

Smart, N. (1993) *Buddhism and Christianity: Rivals and Allies*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Smith, P. C. (2011) Destraktion-Konstruktion: Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, In: J. Francis, Mootz III & G. H. Taylor (Eds.) *Gadamer and Ricoeur: Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics*, pp: 15-42, London: Continuum International Publishing Group.

Soja, E. W. (1996) *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2019) The Kyoto School [Online] Available from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kyoto-school/> [Accessed: 31st July 2021].

Thompson, D. (Ed.) (1993) *The Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 2nd Ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Žižek, S. (2006a) The Antinomies of Tolerant Reason: A Blood-Dimmed Tide is Loosed, *Lacan.com* [Online] Available from: <https://www.lacan.com/zizantinomies.htm> [Accessed: 02nd July 2019].

Žižek, S. (2006b) The depraved heroes of 24 are the Himmlers of Hollywood, *The Guardian* [Online] Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2006/jan/10/usnews.comment> [Accessed: 02nd July 2019].

Žižek, S. (2006c) *The Parallax View*, California, USA: The MIT Press.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/5231.001.0001>

Žižek, S. (2007) Only a Suffering God can Save Us: Section 2: Kierkegaard [Online] Available from: <https://www.lacan.com/zizmarqueemoon.html> [Accessed: 10th June 2019].

Žižek, S. (2008) *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, New York, NY: Picador.

Žižek, S. (2017) *On Practice and Contradiction*, London, UK: Verso.