

JAPAN'S ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS DURING MEIJI AND TAISHO PERIODS: OSHIN

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Abstrak: Studi ini didasarkan pada serial TV Oshin yang disiarkan perdana pada 1983. Oshin, tokoh utama, lahir di Jepang pada tahun 1900 pada periode Meiji dan menghabiskan masa remajanya pada periode Taisho. Kebanyakan penelitian mengenai Jepang sebelumnya belum memasukan Oshin dan Face-Threatening Acts sebagai landasan studi. Disinilah kekurangan yang akan diisi oleh studi ini dimana studi ini akan menunjukkan sisi gelap Jepang pada periode Meiji dan Taisho melalui Face-Threatening Acts yang terdapat dalam drama Oshin. Hasil studi menunjukkan bahwa Jepang mengalami masalah kemiskinan pada zaman Meiji serta permasalahan politik pada zaman Taisho. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa Face-Threatening Acts dapat merepresentasikan latar belakang tempat dan waktu dari sebuah cerita.

Kata kunci: Oshin, Face-Threatening Acts, periode Meiji, periode Taisho

Abstract: *This study is based on a Japanese TV series titled Oshin which was firstly aired in 1983. Oshin, the main character, was born in Japan in 1900 during Meiji period and spent her teenagehood in Taisho period. Previous studies examining Japan mostly do not include Oshin and Face Threatening Acts in the methods/materials used. These are the gaps the current study is fulfilling since this study aims to investigate Oshin's portrayal of Japan, by using Face Threatening Acts theory, which can reveal Japan's dark history to people outside Japan. Findings show that face threatening acts in the conversations amongst the characters reflect Japan's poverty in Meiji period. The face threatening acts also reveal the "underground" political movement emerged in Taisho period as well as laborers' bad working condition. This study shows how face threatening acts in a conversation can reflect the condition of the place and time when the conversation occurs. This study will also open the society's eyes on what happened in Japan during Meiji and Taisho periods so that more people can learn from the history.*

Keywords: *Oshin, Face-Threatening Acts, Meiji period, Taisho period*

INTRODUCTION

Oshin is a well-known TV series around the world and has been broadcast in 68 countries worldwide. However, there was a moment when the idea of broadcasting Oshin in other countries became a controversy in Japan since Japanese believed that the story could show foreign people the negative sides of Japan. This study aims to investigate Oshin's portrayal of Japan which can reveal Japan's dark history to people outside Japan. This study is important to increase the reader's awareness of any cultural value contained in a character's utterance in a TV drama. The two sub aims of this study are:

1. to investigate the face threatening acts contained in the conversations amongst the characters in Oshin, and
2. to analyze how the face threatening acts reflect Japan's economic, social, and political conditions during Meiji and Taisho periods

There are two research questions which are answered in this project, they are: (1) What are the face threatening acts contained in the conversations amongst the characters in Oshin? and (2) How do the face threatening acts reflect Japan's economic, social, and political conditions during Meiji and Taisho periods?

Some previous studies have been conducted to examine Japan's culture. One of these studies was conducted by Koichi Iwabuchi. Iwabuchi (2015) states that the involvement of internal cultural diversity is hindered by the diplomacy involving pop-culture done by Japan. Another similar study was conducted by Nolte (2011). According to Nolte (2011), Japanese journalism in Taisho Period had three values of individualism. As can be seen, these studies were conducted to scrutiny Japan's culture. However, they did not include Face Threatening Acts and Oshin TV series in the studies. These are the gaps fulfilled by the current study.

This study uses two approaches to analyze the data which are pragmatics and ideology. These two approaches are used since pragmatics and ideology approaches can reveal a hidden message implied in an

utterance. Pragmatics is taken to identify the face threatening acts (FTAs) contained in the conversations (aim and research question 1). FTAs is the category analyzed since any acts that threaten either the speaker or hearer's positive and negative faces can reflect the setting of place and time in which the conversations occur. The approach to ideology, which is focused on its foregrounding theory, is used to analyze how FTAs reflect Japan's conditions (aim and research question 2).

Below are further explanations on the theories used for answering the research questions in this essay.

1. Pragmatics

Paltridge (2012) states that the relationship between contexts and meanings is the area that is studied in pragmatics. One theory that is included in the study of pragmatics is Face Threatening Acts.

2. Face-Threatening Acts

FTAs refer to any acts that can cause someone to lose his/her face, either it is the speaker or the hearer. According to Brown and Levinson (as cited in Wagner, 2000), acts that can give threats to the hearer's positive face are the ones that show the speaker's disapproval towards the hearer's self-image such as complaining, criticizing, accusing, mentioning taboo topics, and interrupting. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (as cited in Wagner, 2000) mention that acts that can give threats to the hearer's negative face are the ones that force the hearer to accept the speaker's future action such as offering. Moreover, Brown and Levinson (as cited in Wagner, 2000) state that acts that can give threats to the speaker's positive face are apologizing, accepting a compliment, and confessing; while the acts that can give threats to the speaker's negative face are showing gratitude, accepting apologies or offers, and promising. Those are the four types of FTAs that are used to analyze the data in this study.

3. Ideology

According to Paltridge (2012), one feature that can be used to analyze ideology is framing which is the way the content of a discourse is demonstrated. Moreover, Paltridge (2012) states that analyzing framing can

increase people's awareness of social, political, and ideological issues that underlie a discourse. Framing is closely related to the theory of foregrounding. Huckin (as cited in Paltridge, 2012) mentions that foregrounding is the concepts and issues that become the focus of the text. Foregrounding theory will be used to analyze the issues represented in the conversations that reflect Japan's conditions.

4. Japan's History

a. Meiji Period (in Economic and Social Conditions)

Meiji period lasted from 1868 to 1912. At that time, Japan began to reconstruct several aspects of the country such as economy and education. Beasley (1972) mentions that one of the principles that represented Meiji period was the spirit to improve the nation's wealth and the army's strength, which was done by adopting the military technology from western countries and creating new economic actions to fund it. It can be said that the economic condition in Japan during Meiji period was still unstable since Japan just started the economic development.

The unstable economic condition led to several social issues such as poverty, which further led to famine. Canuel (2001) mentions that during Meiji period, famine became a serious issue in many places in Japan. This condition became worse for lower class citizens especially tenant farmers when the authority created a new policy. According to Beasley (1972), in 1873, there was a new financial regulation made in which tenant farmers would only get 32 per cent of the crop they produced instead of 40 per cent as they had used to get previously.

Another social issue that marked Meiji period was Japan's new education policy. According to Beasley (1972), Japan's new Education Law which was published in 1872 mentioned that Japan had been living with the wrong idea about education for a long time in which education was only for people who came from samurai society which caused others including farmers not to have the understanding of what learning

was like and kept thinking that education was not created for them. According to Sullivan and Schatz (2009), during Meiji period, there was an establishment of a new policy related to national education which had a huge difference to the previous system which had given education only to the people from the upper-class. It can be said that education in Japan just started to develop into more inclusive, indicating that the condition of Japan's education during Meiji period was still unstable since it just started its development in education.

b. Taisho period

(a) Economic and Social Conditions

The unstable economic condition happened in Meiji period continued until Taisho period. According to Taira (2008), in 1920, Japan's occupation sector was highly dominated by agriculture instead of modern sectors, leading into the number of laborers which outweighed the number of modern sectors as the occupation providers. Furthermore, Taira (2008) states that this condition led to the minimum salary a laborer could get in that period. The number of laborers that outweighed the number of occupation sectors led to a further issue. When the number of laborers outweighed the number of occupation sectors, employers tended not to appreciate the laborers by not treating them well.

(b) Political Condition

Taisho period lasted from 1912 to 1926. Taisho period is known for the emergence of a new political movement named Taisho Democracy. As stated by Takayoshi (1966), during Taisho period there was a movement called Taisho Democracy which emphasized on three points which were the assurance of freedom to talk, meet, and associate; the elimination of tax system which contained feudalism; and the refusal of power rules which contained imperialism. This movement was resulted from a new phenomenon

happened during Taisho period which was the growth of Marxism ideology. According to Delahoyde (2011), Karl Marx, who is the founder of Marxism, states that laborers will be poorer if the financial surplus gained from a business is reinvested to build new factories instead of reinvested to the laborers.

Besides Taisho Democracy, there were other political phenomena emerged during Taisho period which were inspired by the value of Marxism. Hoston (1984) states that Japan was highly influenced by Marxism and other views coming from Western countries, as it led to several movements such as minpon-shugi which means democracy for every individual and Plan for the Reorganization of Japan which emerged in 1919.

The data used in this study are four episodes of Oshin which are episodes 5 and 27 that tell about Oshin's childhood during Meiji period and episodes 40 and 47 which tell the story of Oshin's teenagehood during Taisho period. The episodes are taken from Dramanice website (see references).

To begin the analysis, two titles were created which were "Meiji Period" and "Taisho Period." Under Meiji period, one sub-title was made which was "Economic and Social Conditions." The transcription of relevant parts of conversations in episodes 5 and 27 were then written down. The next step was to analyze the FTAs contained in the conversations (aim and research question 1), followed by analyzing the issues that were foregrounded to find out Japan's conditions in Meiji period (aim and research question 2).

"Political Condition" and "Economic and Social Conditions" were created to be the sub titles for "Taisho Period". The transcription of relevant parts of conversations in episodes 40 and 47 were jotted down under these sub titles. The FTAs contained in the conversations were then analyzed (aim and research question 1), followed by the analysis of issues foregrounded to find out Japan's conditions in Taisho period (aim and research question 2).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to the study on this article, there are many results that have been obtained such as below.

1. Meiji period (in Economic and Social Conditions)

There are some of the characters' utterances in Oshin which contain FTAs, which reveal the economic and social conditions of Japan in Meiji period. Those are found in episodes 5 and 27.

Below are the data containing FTAs that reveal the unstable economic and social conditions during Meiji period.

Episode 5 (Transcription)

Context: Oshin was playing outside her house when suddenly her parents (her father's name is Sakuzo and her mother's name is Fuji) appeared with a man, which would be Oshin's employer.

01. Employer: Is this the girl?
 02. Employer: She seems bright!
 03. Employer: Are you Oshin?
 04. Employer: I'll be coming for you later on!
 05. Fuji: Thank you for coming. ((bow down))
 06. Employer: I'll take good care of her.
 07. Oshin: Who is that man?
 08. Sakuzo: Oshin!
 09. Sakuzo: Come here.
 10. Fuji: Sakuzo!
 11. Grandmother: You are doing this to Oshin too?
 12. Grandmother: Fuji!
 13. Fuji: Oshin...
 14. Grandmother: I'm against it!
 15. Grandmother: I don't care if I don't eat!
 16. Grandmother: I don't want her to go! ((cry))
 17. Sakuzo: Come in here!
 18. Fuji: I can't let her go! ((face threatening acts))
 19. Fuji: She is only seven!
 20. Sakuzo: They say it's alright. □
- *they refers to Oshin's future employers
21. Sakuzo: So let it be.
 22. Fuji: I feel sorry for Oshin.
 23. Sakuzo: You want us all to starve?

Sakuzo then told Oshin about his plan to send Oshin to work.

24. Sakuzo: Oshin.
25. Sakuzo: We have no more rice for you to eat...
26. Sakuzo: That's why you have to go. ((face threatening acts))
27. Sakuzo: Do you understand?

Oshin, who was born in a tenant-farmer family, had to face poverty since her early age. When Oshin was seven years old, her father planned to send her to work as a babysitter to help the family's finance. However, Oshin's mother was highly against this idea. One day, Oshin's parents had a conversation to discuss this issue, shown in lines 18-23. Here, Oshin's parents kept giving an act that threatened the hearer's positive face by disagreeing to each other. The issue of child laborer is foregrounded in these FTAs showing how tenant farmers lived under the poverty-line during Meiji period which forced Oshin's parents to send their child to work. Oshin's parents ended up with the decision to send Oshin to work as a babysitter. They then called Oshin to come to the room to have a talk with them, shown in line 24-27. The utterances show how Oshin's father gave an act that threatened the hearer's negative face by ordering Oshin to go to work. It limited Oshin's freedom of action since Oshin did not have any other choice besides going to work as a babysitter as her father ordered her to do. The issue of child laborer is foregrounded in the FTA, reflecting tenant farmers' poverty in Meiji period.

Episode 27 (Transcription)

Context: Oshin was once worked as a babysitter for Kagaya family.

One day, Oshin was having her lunch with another Kagaya worker.

28. Kagaya worker: Serve your own rice and soup.
29. Oshin: There's so much here!
30. Kagaya worker: Don't hold back.
31. Kagaya worker: The owners want us to eat a lot and they want us to work hard.
32. Kagaya worker: A business depends on its employees for success.
33. Kagaya worker: Go on and eat. ((laughter))
34. Oshin: Hah! This rice and barley mix is good!
35. Oshin: You get to eat like this every day?
36. Oshin: Rice and barley mix every day...

37. Oshin: At home, we only eat rice and daikon gruel. ((face threatening acts)).

After a few moments working as a baby sitter for her first employer, Oshin moved to another city, Sagata, to work for Kagaya family. Her job was to babysit Sayo, the family's youngest child. One day, after babysitting Sayo, Oshin had her breakfast with another Kagaya worker.

A bowl of rice and soup was her breakfast menu and Oshin highly enjoyed the breakfast, shown in line 34-37. Here, Oshin gave an act that threatened her own self-image by confessing that she had used to eat rice and daikon (radish) gruel at home which was the reason why the rice at Kagaya house tasted very good for her. At that time, people from lower-class families used to add rice with radish because they did not have enough rice to eat for the whole family. Oshin also mentioned that the rice and radish were cooked into gruel showing that they did not have enough rice to eat so that they had to cook it into gruel. The issue of food shortage is foregrounded in the FTA, showing the poverty faced by tenant farmers in Meiji period.

2. Taisho Period

Some of the characters' utterances in Oshin also show the economic and social conditions of Japan in Taisho period. Those can be found in episode 47.

(1) Economic and Social Conditions

Below are the data which contain FTAs that reveal the unstable economic and social conditions of Japan in Taisho period.

Episode 47 (Transcription)

Context: One day, Oshin got a phone call saying that her sister, Haru, was sick. Haru worked as a laborer in a factory. Oshin then came home to visit Haru. There, she met Haru's boss named Hirano who was also visiting Haru.

61. Oshin: Thank you for taking time off to come to see her. ((bow down))
62. Hirano: I had no idea that she was that bad off.
63. Oshin: We've given up on her...
64. Oshin: But we're glad to see her cheerful again.
65. Oshin: You were able to give her something to remember.
66. Hirano: I know that the working conditions are terrible at the factories... ((face threatening acts))
67. Hirano: So many women workers have been victimized...
68. Hirano: But there's nothing we can do...
69. Hirano: If we speak up for workers' rights, we'll all be fired

This episode still tells about Oshin's teenagehood during Taisho period. One day, Oshin received a message that Haru, her sister, was sick. Oshin decided to come home to see Haru who suffered from a heavy cough. Not long after, Hirano, who was Haru's boss at the factory, came to see Haru. Oshin and Hirano then had a conversation, shown in line 66-69. Hirano gave an act that threatened his own self-image by confessing that he had no power to help the laborers because the employers would have fired him if he had defended the laborers' rights. A social value is foregrounded in the FTAs, showing that laborers should have faced hardship during their work at the factory. This was caused by the number of laborers that outweighed the number of factories in Taisho period, so that employers had huge power over the laborers.

(2) Political Condition

The political condition during Taisho period is also the element which can be revealed from the utterances of some characters in Oshin. Those utterances are taken from episode 40.

Episode 40 (Transcription)

Context: When Oshin was a teenager, she met a guy named Yasuda. One day, Yasuda asked Oshin for a favor. He asked his parents to send him money but since he did not want his parents to know where he lived, he asked Oshin whether or not she minded if he asked his parents to send the money to Oshin's house. At first Oshin refused because she was suspicious of Yasuda.

38. Yasuda: You think I'm a suspicious character but I'm not!
39. Yasuda: And yes I'm being followed... ((face threatening acts))
40. Yasuda: But there's something I must do.
41. Yasuda: Do you know about farmers called sharecroppers?
42. Yasuda: They don't grow their own land and grow rice for others...
43. Yasuda: They pay half their crop to the landlord for rent...
44. Yasuda: The remaining half isn't enough to sustain them!
45. Yasuda: They must keep taking up loans from the landlord.
46. Yasuda: They have to pay this rice back with interest...
47. Yasuda: Life is hell for them.
48. Yasuda: They grow rice but they can't eat their fill...
49. Yasuda: They mix daikon turnips in with the rice for gruel.
50. Yasuda: They don't get even enough for that.
51. Yasuda: The landlords don't work.
52. Yasuda: They live off the sweat of their sharecroppers.
53. Yasuda: It's so unfair.
54. Yasuda: We want to get society right!
55. Yasuda: I guess you wouldn't understand.
56. Yasuda: I want sharecroppers to have a decent life.

Oshin then ended up by agreeing to help Yasuda. Days later, Oshin received the money sent by Yasuda's parents. She then went to meet Yasuda to give the money. Yasuda then made a confession.

57. Yasuda: My father is a big landowner. ((face threatening acts))
58. Yasuda: I can't even liberate our own sharecroppers.
59. Yasuda: And I get tainted money from my father.
60. Yasuda: It's pathetic!

Oshin spent her teenagehood during Taisho period and still worked for Kagaya family. One day, Oshin met a man named Yasuda who asked her for a favor. Yasuda asked his parents to send him money but he did not want his parents to know where he lived. Therefore, he asked Oshin whether or not she minded if he asked his parents to send the money to Oshin's house. At first Oshin refused, but after listening to Yasuda's explanation, Oshin changed her mind. Yasuda explained that he was fighting for tenant farmers' rights so that they could have a better living, shown in line 39-56. Here, Yasuda gave an act that threatened his own self-image by confessing that he joined an "underground" movement to fight for

sharecroppers' (tenant farmers) rights. A political value is foregrounded in the FTA, reflecting "Taisho Democracy" in Taisho period which was a movement against feudalism.

Oshin finally agreed to help Yasuda. After Oshin got the money that Yasuda's parents sent, she went to Yasuda's house to give the money. During this moment, Yasuda made another confession about his identity, shown in line 57-60. Here, Yasuda gave a further act that threatened his self-image by confessing that his father was a landlord. This act is considered as an act that threatens Yasuda's face because, at that time, Yasuda was fighting against landlords to defend tenant farmers' rights and he portrayed landlords as "villains". Therefore, confessing about his father's identity is considered as an act that threatens his own self-image. A political value is foregrounded in the FTAs, showing the spirit of the movement that Yasuda was joining in which the members of the movement highly fought against rich people. It reflects "Taisho Democracy" that happened during Taisho period.

From the episodes discussed above, it can be seen that the utterances produced by the characters in Oshin can reveal the conditions of Japan during Meiji and Taisho periods. However, the writer is fully aware that, originally, the characters in Oshin use Japanese in the conversations and the one analyzed in this study is the English subtitle. Ideally, the analysis should be based on the original language to give more accurate interpretations toward the utterances, in which this point is considered to be the limitation of this study.

However, there are reasons why the subtitled version is chosen instead of the one with Japanese language. First, with regard to the rationale, this study aims to investigate Oshin's portrayal of Japan which can reveal Japan's dark history to people outside Japan, meaning that the subtitled version should be chosen since people outside Japan watch Oshin with subtitle.

Second, Babb (2015) states that Oshin has become the most well-known Japanese TV drama in international world. Oshin has been

broadcast to 68 countries outside Japan with various subtitles including English. This shows that most of Oshin's viewers are people from outside Japan, meaning that the number of viewers who watch Oshin with subtitle outweighs the number of Japanese viewers who watch Oshin with the original language. This is another reason why the subtitled version is chosen.

Third, according to Dramanice.at (2016), Oshin has given a new point of view about Japan to people from outside Japan since it brings the new knowledge of modern Japan and its citizens. This demonstrates how people outside Japan, who watch Oshin with subtitles, gain new knowledge about Japan through Oshin. This is the reason why this study is significant even though it is conducted based on the English subtitle since the subtitle can still deliver the message of the story well.

This is in line with the study conducted in 1997. Singhal and Udornpim (1997) mention that one of the examples that show how Oshin was well-known all over the world is that the term Oshin was used in everyday speaking by politicians, economists, and people in general worldwide, including former US president Ronald Reagan who used the term Oshin to describe Japanese' work ethic in his speech during his visit to Japan. This shows how the message of Oshin could be well received by people outside Japan through subtitle.

In addition, the four Oshin episodes used in this study are taken from a website (Dramanice) which uploads the series of Oshin that is broadcast by KSCI, which is an independent TV station owned by NRJ TV LLC. NRJ TV LLC is a company that does a business in television broadcasting services, located in Texas, USA. This source is believed to be trustable since it is an official broadcasting company so that the subtitle is believed to be reliable.

CONCLUSION

Despite the limitation discussed in the previous chapter, this study will bring a significant benefit for the current knowledge. It will give the

reader the knowledge of how face threatening acts can describe Japan's history. It shows that the face threatening acts used in Oshin reflect Japan's unstable economic, social, and political conditions in Meiji and Taisho periods.

It is hoped that the reader of this study will be more aware of any cultural value that might be contained in an utterance in a TV series. It is also expected that future studies will base the current study to examine Face Threatening Acts in other stories outside Japan. It would also be more desirable if the future studies could examine stories with dialogues in the original language instead of the subtitles.

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