MURAKAMI HARUKI:
A SERIOUS LITERATURE WRITER UNDER THE COVER OF POP CULTURE

by

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Abstract

As a famous contemporary writer, Murakami Haruki has a wide-reaching influence throughout the world, especially in East Asia. In my thesis, I intend to analyze his novels and short stories from 1979 to 2014. In doing so, I will reveal why Murakami Haruki is so popular in Asia, particularly China. This analysis will demonstrate that East Asian public culture has been undergoing changes during the past 20 years. I will analyze four of Murakami’s works: *Wild Sheep Chase* (1982), *Norwegian Wood* (1987), to *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* (1995), and finishing with *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki And His Year Of Pilgrimage* (2013). Though the evolution of his works, Murakami makes it clear that Japanese society has been under transformation since World War II. After the end of the war, this society changed from a capitalist to cosmopolitan one. I will also discuss how his novels are associated with China, as well as his works’ adaptation in China and among Chinese readers. Since becoming famous, Murakami’s work has been highly criticized. These criticisms has come primarily from Komori Yōichi, Fujii Shozo, Kuroko Kazuo and Kato Norihiro. By discussing these critics, I want to reveal the true meaning for Murakami to be a writer and why I consider him as a serious literature writer under the cover of pop culture.
1 Introduction

During one of his lectures, Murakami quoted John Irving and said “A good story is like a narcotic fix. If you can inject a good one into reader’s veins, they’ll get the habit and come back to you for the next one, no matter what the critics have to say. His metaphor may be shocking, but I think he is right.” I could not agree more with this statement. Yet, when reading his novel, I questioned how unique Murakami’s work was. I wanted to know if he was a serious literature writer or if he was simply writing to satisfy readers’ preference.

Is Murakami Haruki a shallow petty bourgeoisie writer or a serious writer who could be able to get the Nobel Prize? Is Murakami’s work a low-calorie textual consumer product in the business community, a high-level placebo that meets the shallow human needs or a serious inquiry into the darkest place of human heart and society? Why readers are so fascinated by his work?

In Ōe Kenzaburō’s view, he considered that “pure” literature must have a certain social responsibility and should essentially be a didactic model, an attitude which has, to some extent, prevented the development of postmodern literature in Japan. Indeed, Murakami’s story telling style has already varied from the traditional Japanese literature style. As a representative of writers who belong to the 1980s generation, he is facing the necessity to find a new pathway into the novelistic space. He need to approach new themes and to explore new territories for his generation. Through my research and analysis, I have concluded that Murakami is indeed a serious writer. He uses pop culture as a vehicle to convey his ideologies and insights to a younger

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audience. Under the guise of pop culture, Murakami devotes himself to assessing problems human being and questioning several important aspects of life. This included topics such as the meaning of life and death, the truth about nature, the existence and time, the relationship between memory and the material world, looking for identity and understanding, and the meaning of love.

After Norwegian Wood, which gained huge popularity around the world, Murakami continued to publish several long novels. This included IQ84, Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage, and the new book which just came out this year Killing Commendatore. Like Sam Anderson stated in the New York Times Magazine years ago: “Over the years, Murakami’s novels have tended to grow longer and more serious — the sitcom references have given way, for the most part, to symphonies — and now, after a particularly furious and sustained boil, he has produced his longest, strangest, most serious book yet.” In response Murakami has been quoted saying “I’m kind of a big kettle. It takes time to get boiled, but then I’m always hot.” Murakami has been fierce, and will continue to boil.

I will apply my analysis of Murakami’s work to several topics in this thesis. As he published his short and long novels from 1979 to 2017, the theme of his work may or may not be changed, the historical background has been changed significantly and impacted his protagonists. Murakami himself also changed so much during this period we are not only talking about the

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5 No English version published until I write this thesis.

6 Sam Anderson is an American book reviewer and author, who is the critic at large for The New York Times Magazine.

7 “The Fierce Imagination of Haruki Murakami”. A version of this article appears in print on October 23, 2011, on Page MM36 of the Sunday Magazine with the headline: The Underground Man. https://nyti.ms/2jAE8fU
literary perspective when we talking about his literature but more important, the social and political impact his novel made on the world.

So besides the personal reason, I will elaborate the reason why I choose Murakami to discuss in my thesis from the following aspects: what motives made Murakami start and continue to write novels? What social impact have his novels made in Japan and the world? What’s the value or aim of life for Murakami and his work advocate, and how does it arouse sympathetic response among his readers? Why is Murakami a such controversial writer? More important, why is his fame worldwide and globalized?

2 Background

After Murakami’s novel Hear the Wind Sing (Kaze no uta o kike 1979) debuted, he won the prestigious Gunzo Newcomers Award. This novel “captured the hearts of readers through the quirky characters contained within such as Rat and J, the lively language, and the bittersweet portrayal of the collapse of the radical student movement after 1969.”

His novels have spread more rapidly throughout East Asia after Norwegian Wood was published in 1987, which sold more than ten million copies in Japan alone. Murakami was also acknowledged by the Chinese fan-base as a writer who satisfies the cultural desires of the “middle class”. Norwegian Wood was printed in 22 different editions and more than one million copies were sold in China. It became a mythical giant in the Chinese publishing industry where the average print runs of literature novels do not exceed 10,000. Some young East Asians even imitate characters from his novels; the so-called “Murakami fanatics” not only imitate Murakami’s attitude in his

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nights, but also the way he or his characters in novels talk, act, and dress. “According to a Chinese Internet post, many young Chinese people who have recently come across Murakami’s literature would ask each other, ‘Do you Murakami?’ instead of ‘Have you read Murakami?’” Like the popular advertisement ‘Do you yahoo?’ Murakami has become a symbol of the younger generation’s common desire: They want to eat beef stew and spaghetti and drink beer listening to the Beatles and jazz music, just like Murakami’s characters do. They want to live in a ‘cool way’ like Murakami’s characters. Many readers from all over the world expressed the reason they like Murakami’s work as they feel connected to the atmosphere of his novels.”

Suddenly, a new middle class who reads books for leisure appeared in the 1990s. At the time, there was no one writer who seemed to satisfy readers’ newly found taste in literature. However, with the publications of his works growing, Murakami stepped in to fill this void. Murakami would face a similar situation in Korea: Murakami broke into the empty cultural space that was created at the end of the National Literature (Min-jok-mun-hak) or Grassroots Literature (Min-jung-mun-hak) movement. It seems Murakami became popular among Asian readers because his work satisfied their psychological needs. The more specific reason will be explained later.

Murakami did not start writing until he was 29 years old. Once he started, however, he found he could not stop. At the time, Murakami had been running a jazz bar. He said in his new essay collection *Novelist as Profession* that he enjoyed the feeling of earning his own living as well as the free life this work can provide. What made him suddenly want to take up writing? As


he said in his very first novel *Hear the Wind Sing*, the idea came to him while he was watching a baseball game one afternoon. He realized that novel is the only way to express himself and heal the loneliness of other people. “A narrative is a story ... it is a dream you keep doing, whether you are aware of it or not. Just as you are constantly breathing, you are constantly continuing to dream of your story. And in these stories you have two faces. You are the object and the subject at the same time. You are all, and you are one part. You are real and a phantom. You are a storyteller and also a character in the book. It is through this multi-level role in our story that we can heal the loneliness of the individual as a lonely person in this world.”  

For Murakami, a “narrative” is like a dream which repeats itself again and again. Only when the dream—the story in side one’s mind—has been fully expressed, that “we can heal the loneliness of the individual as a lonely person in this world.”

Another reason that Murakami wrote the stories in my opinion is to search for the memory of his own existence. Through using history, Murakami is able to investigate his own experiences as they pertain to creating the man he became. He demonstrated this idea in his novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, by telling Cinnamon’s story, Murakami said:

But why, finally, had Cinnamon written such stories? And why stories? Why not some other form? And why had he found it necessary to use the word “chronicle” in the title?…I had some idea, however vague, of what Cinnamon was looking for in his writing. He was engaged in a serious search for the meaning of his own existence. And he was hoping to find it by looking into the events that had preceded his birth…To do that, Cinnamon had to fill in those blank spots in the past that he could not reach with his

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15 Ibid
own hands. By using those hands to make a story, he was trying to supply the missing links…the assumption that fact may not be truth, and truth may not be factual. The question of which parts of a story were factual and which parts were not was probably not a very important one for Cinnamon. The important question for Cinnamon was not what his grandfather did but what his grandfather might have done. He learned the answer to this question as soon as he succeeded in telling the story.  

2-1 Why Murakami Haruki wants to write

In his essay *Novelist as Profession* Murakami said: “In the novelist's profession, as far as I'm concerned, there's no such thing as winning or losing. Maybe numbers of copies sold, awards won, and critics' praise serve as outward standards for accomplishment in literature, but none of them really matter. What's crucial is whether your writing attains the standards you've set for yourself. Failure to reach that bar is not something you can easily explain away. When it comes to other people, you can always come up with a reasonable explanation, but you can't fool yourself. In this sense, writing novels and running full marathons are very much alike.”

Murakami writes to search for the meaning of his own existence. In order to do that, we cannot rigidly adhere to so-called “facts”, but only seek for the “truth”. By giving up “fact” and relying on the “truth”, Murakami is able to dig into his own subconscious mind. Looking past his own personal feelings, he delves into a level of his own collective unconsciousness. The more he digs, the vaguer the boundaries of his own understanding become. Murakami’s novels demonstrate his flirtation with the lines between the material world and the spirit world, fact and

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memory, and life and death. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Murakami gives readers the star-marked sheep. From the deepest place of consciousness, the “sheep man” jumped out. In *Kafka on the Shore*, the founder of KFC Colonel Sanders, works as a pimp in a back alley in Takamatsu. The most remarkable example is, in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, two worlds co-exist —“the end of the world” is the narrator’s subconsciousness and spiritual world. Although this "other world" is not always dead and annihilated, it is undeniable that its subject is still unavoidably linked to "death". And Murakami's writing process, to some extent can also be seen as his initiative to dig deep or passively wait for the deepest story of consciousness to come into his brain. The process of getting into the deepest consciousness level may be extremely dangerous. But it is precisely because of that, that Murakami can experience the feeling of death with each creation of a new novel.

In *Hear the Wind Sing*, we can tell the protagonist has become estranged from others (even by his best friend) and he “has to” act like a cool, detached person. Murakami instinctively abhors the “Japanese relationships”; he wants to get out of Japan and away from the Japanese.18 Later on, in *Norwegian Wood*, characters express their feelings more directly: “I didn’t know how to relate to other people. I didn’t know what it means to love another person.” 19 “I think I’ve got this hard kernel in my heart, and nothing much can get inside it. I doubt if I can really love anybody.”20 “Neither of us is interested, essentially, in anything but ourselves.”21 “but neither of us is able to feel any interest in anything other than what we ourselves think or feel or

do. That’s why we can think about things in a way that’s totally divorced from anybody else.”

With his personal maturity, the feeling of sober and detachment becomes increasingly prominent. He began to explore the origin of this sparse attitude. He started to try to explore his life, his generation, and the history of his country—Japan. Through his writing, Murakami attempted to figure out what was lacking in Japanese society. This has led to his instinctive disgust for Japanese society. Eventually he came to the conclusion:

We did away with the pre-war emperor system and put the Peace Constitution in its place. And as a result we have, to be sure, come to live in an efficient, rational world based on the ideology of a modern civil society, and that efficiency has brought about an almost overwhelming prosperity in our society. Yet, I (and perhaps many others) can’t seem to escape the suspicion that even now, in many areas of society, we are being peacefully and quietly obliterated as nameless articles of consumption. We go on believing that we live in the so-called free ‘civil state’ we call ‘Japan’ with our fundamental human rights guaranteed, but is this truly the case? Peel back a layer of skin, and what do we find breathing and pulsating there but the same old sealed national system or ideology.

Speaking through Cinnamon in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, Murakami was also hoping to find the answer by tracing the events that happened before he was born. One of the biggest issues Murakami had noted was Japan’s refusal to acknowledge the aggression towards the Asian people, especially to China. Japan also does not want to take the corresponding moral responsibility. In his short story “A Slow Boat to China” we can tell the complicated feelings

22 Ibid

23 David Stahl, Mark Williams, eds. Imag(in)ing the war in Japan: representing and responding to trauma in postwar literature and film. Vol. 34. Brill, 2010. P70
Murakami had towards China and the Chinese people. Through literature, however, Murakami faced and took the responsibility of the history between Japan and Asia.

Shanghai was the first city in China to accept Murakami Haruki. During the 1980s, China got its first taste of Murakami Haruki. In his book *China in the work of Murakami Haruki* 24, Japanese scholar Fujii Shozo quoted a Shanghai female writer’s work, which was created in the last 1980’s. The protagonist was a young Shanghai “modern girl” who created a “Murakami world” according to the life described in his books. This was the beginning of China’s urbanization and globalization. From the crevices of traditional culture, Shanghai’s young people started to experiment and practice a new style of life. A new influx curious young people began to find life in the essence of exotic cultures. Murakami’s books would act as a “guide” for this new style of life.

At the end of 2016, in the cafe on the second floor of a veteran bookstore in Dongcheng District, Beijing, I saw another kind of Murakami Haruki reader. This reader was a young girl who grew up in a rural county in China. However here she was eating tuna spaghetti cooked in olive oil and mixed with red chili peppers, while recalling reading Murakami in middle school. It is easy to imagine the place where she had grown up: noisy narrow streets filled with tricycles, motorcycles and cars, colorful large font characters and star posters printed and hanging over street stores, and a tape recorder loudly playing cheap merchandise promotions. The sounds were like flying dust, floating in the streets. This is how a small town were in the early 1980s. But inside this cluttered and noisy realm, a new era was growing. In the Xinhua Bookstore 25, filled

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25 Xinhua Bookstore (Chinese: 新华书店) owns the largest and only country-wide bookstore chain in China.
with teaching reference newspapers and periodicals, customers could also buy varieties of literary books, which had been imported from Europe and America. In school libraries, the latest urban literature fiction was available. This included Murakami Haruki's books about a new distant world: the Beach Boy's rock and roll, Vans brand jackets, and casual sex among adolescents.

Murakami’s influence was far reaching. From the 1980s Shanghai “modern girl” living life according to Murakami’s novels to the girl who read his books at a rural library, his works infiltrated society. Through this, the “Murakami industry" began to become popular in China. Due to globalization and urbanization, gaps and distance, as well as self-seeking, were spread in China along this geographical track. The girl who was telling me her reading history in the cafe in Dongcheng, Beijing, while she was recalling reading in her hometown school library, was sitting in a corner of the largest city in China thousands of miles away from her hometown. She spent several years trying to fill the distance between herself and the city: reading, running, working hard. Yet, as we talked, she told me that she was unable to decide which path to take. Should she continue to stay in Beijing and follow her dreams? Or should she return home to a town, which had undergone significant changes? She personified Murakami’s own protagonists through her emotional dilemma. She must choose between the trend of the time and her inner desires.

Her dilemma brought many questions to my mind. How would a small town girl be able to adjust to life in such a large and different city? How does one carve out a life in a new world? As a Chinese translator, Lin Shaohua said: “The relatively liberal human and political environment in the new period has promoted the awakening of people’s self. The rapid development of economy also provided the material base for self-development. The ingenuity of
Murakami is that, he always reminds us: does your ego really belong to yourself? Is your mind really your own to control? Hasn’t the concept in your mind been replaced? Have you already been overwhelmed by the business of information? Using Murakami’s words, do you really need to drive a ‘Mercedes-Benz’ and wear Pierre Cardin and Rolex? Furthermore, is your mind free? Is the ego of yourself the true self?”

This question is not only for the “external youth” who are coming from the small towns in China. It also applies to “local youth” who are born in the big city. A consequence of globalization is that everyone has lost their hometown. The Shanghai girl who studies Western lifestyles through Murakami’s novels is looking into a new life, as is the girl who born in a rural area considering moving into the big city. Both of them have to face a new world — a vast world which has been transformed by globalization. Everyone has the opportunity to embark on the path of self-awareness. At the same time, everyone will also face the danger of losing himself or herself in the vast world. By using a seemingly simple and oral rhythm of writing, Murakami describes the strange, new world, as well as its fantasy and powerlessness. Murakami writes often about the path to salvation in an illusionary and powerless world. Besides that, the most fascinating tale, however, is his personal story.

Regardless of the standard, Murakami Haruki is a successful individualist, with financial and spiritual freedom. Not too many authors can maintain a “best-selling” position for more than 20 years. Murakami has while simultaneously maintaining the distance with other books on the market. He does not belong to any associations, hardly attends social occasions, and does not compromise to mundane rules. Young conductor Yu Lu is one of the several Chinese people to

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have met Murakami Haruki privately. When Yu studied conducting with Seiji Ozawa, Murakami would often show up to the rehearsal hall to take lectures. Yu recalled, “Murakami drove an old white Jeep. He would always buy second-class seats when he took Shinkansen. He is not fastidious about his clothing; a short-sleeved shirt and shorts are what he would wear when he showed up.”

Through connecting his personal story with the background of his growth period, Murakami’s story becomes even more inspirational for younger generations. Murakami Haruki grew up in the commercial port between Kobe and Osaka. He left his hometown and came to Tokyo. As a “stranger” new to this metropolitan atmosphere, he spent his life living by his own rules. He separated himself from the collectivism of the "baby boom generation". In his own subtle way, Murakami fought the rules of the external world. It was only when he began writing novels that Murakami found the way to achieve his personal goals.

In a large number of essays, Murakami shared his own stories with his readers. Essay are important and special products in the "Murakami industry". Very few writers want to write the details of their own lives, including all things great or small that have occurred to them. For those young people who come to a strange country, the frank attitude and simple words of Murakami’s essays make him a mentor. He becomes an objective and well-intentioned friend who teaches them how to live in big cities, as well as how to mature as a person. He provides a spiritual idol for thousands of young people who are searching for themselves in this world.

Murakami shows these youths how to be an individualist who does not have a deep friction with

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27Ozawa Seiji (小澤 征爾 おざわ せいじ), born September 1, 1935, is a Japanese conductor, known for his advocacy of modern composers and his work with the San Francisco Symphony, the Toronto Symphony, and the Boston Symphony. He is the recipient of numerous international awards.

28 *Life Week magazine, No.7*. China Publishing Group, 2017. P31
the world but keeps a sincere, kind and virtuous attitude. By telling his own story, Murakami provides a path for how to get “virtue”. His tale teaches youths to be persistent. This can include keeping up writing, running, and other simple, hardworking tasks. This encourages the young reader with a sense of excitement to be brave. In the cafe of Dongcheng District, the girl said to me: “Compared with other difficulties, it is so simple to keep doing something!”

When will we want to read Murakami Haruki? When we are confronted with a strange world after leaving our hometown. When we need comfort after we have lost ourselves inside the world. Murakami's words console all of us in a sincere but simple way. However, some literary critics argue about his limitations. Some believe the subject of his work is not grand. Others feel he lacks understanding of profound suffering. Still, other critics point out that even though he tried to breakthrough to something broader, he still fell back into the small world of the individual. These criticisms all become part of “Murakami's comfort”. His limitations in the eyes of literary critics are so fit to the bourgeoisie style—how to become an individual is the proposition of this era. His description of the dilemma for urbanites’ spirit, and his stubbornness in facing this dilemma is powerful comfort to the young people in the bourgeoisie style.

Starting in the late 1980s, Murakami Haruki became the most famous "phenomenal" writer in China. Shanghai translation press editor, Mr. Shen Weifan said this was “because what he wrote in our era.”29 When we talk about Murakami, we are talking about the stories of countless young people who are leaving their homes. As our understanding of other cultures and the world grows, urbanization allows for an unprecedented expansion of knowledge and philosophy, the ability to move more freely and discover a world that is ideal to our beliefs and inner desires. Murakami Haruki uses his simple and straightforward style to write about our

29 Life Week magazine, No.7. China Publishing Group, 2017. P33
insecurities and consolations, and out hardships and hopes. When we are fragile, reading Murakami can be of great comfort. When we grow up and become mature, he has served his purpose and we want to leave him. However, as we mature and move on, a new wave of young readers turn the pages of Murakami’s stories and start on their own internal journey to growth.

The world created by Murakami’s literature is infinite. The points I have brought up here will later be used to emphasize the importance of his work.

2-2 Murakami Industry

In a quiet area of Minami-aoyama in Minatoku, Tokyo, there is a six-story office called the "Danish Apartment". It is here where Murakami Haruki’s office is located at the top of the building. The office is a three-room suite. The rooms are set up very simply: a small computer desk, a file cabinet, two or three bookshelves, a round dining table is placed in the middle, two chairs, and a coffee table. It is more like an ordinary rental apartment instead of an office. One would not expect it to serve as a work space for a writer whose works are on bestselling lists all over the world. It is here that the Chinese translator Lin Shaohua met with Murakami one spring afternoon in 2003.

Murakami’s outfit was as ordinary as the room’s furnishings: gray jeans, three-color striped shirt, black T-shirt inside, folded cuffs, thick front hairstyle, and a fit body of medium height. “He always has a ‘Forever boy’ image”, Lin Shaohua recalls. “He looks a little bit

30 Minami-aoyama (南青山) is one of the wealthiest neighborhoods of Tokyo, located in the northwest portion of Minato Ward. The area is well known for its international fashion houses, cafes and restaurants.

31 Minato (港区 "Harbor") is a special ward in Tokyo, Japan. It is also called Minato City in English. Minato hosts a large number of embassies. It is also home to various domestic companies.

32 Life Week magazine, No.7. China Publishing Group, 2017. P46
cautious and shy just like a little boy meeting with a stranger for the first time, even though his face is no longer young.” When they spoke with each other, Shaohua noted that "Murakami doesn’t like to look in your eyes directly. He is more likely to look down on the table. The tone of his voice is not too high but with a rhythm. He speaks and behaves not too much different from his protagonists, such as Watanabe in *Norwegian Wood*. Even when he talks, the words he was using, as well as his tone, are identical with the characters in his work. The laughs too. It is hard to believe he can laugh….It’s hard to tell he is a famous writer from his looks, nor like the general Japanese who will say ‘Nice to meet you’ for the first time they met.”

It is ironic that such a nondescript man, one who would not warrant a second glance walking down a rural Chinese road, would create an impact so large it comes with a label. In 1987, Murakami Haruki’s first realist novel, *Norwegian Wood*, was published. More than 2 million copies were sold in Japan. This equates to roughly one copy per family living in Tokyo. The “Murakami fanatics” became a wave that swept around the world right after *Norwegian Wood* was printed. China is also an important consumer of "Murakami" brand products. Since 2001, *Norwegian Wood* printed 22 times in Shanghai translation presses only. *Kafka on the Shore* sold 260,000 copies during the first two years after it came out. It is considered a “legend” in Chinese publishing industry. Here, the average printed number is less than 10,000 copies, including foreign literature. Right before Murakami met with Lin Shaohua, Shanghai Translation Press had published 20 volumes of the *Murakami Haruki Collection*, which was the first time in the world. Shanghai translation press editor Shen Weifan said that, “Only Murakami Haruki’s book have such charm for readers that just by reading the name of the author they will buy the book. They don’t even care about the titles.” Shen Weifan is the editor of *Murakami Haruki Life Week* magazine, No.7. China Publishing Group, 2017. P46.

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Through his hands, Murakami’s 8 million copies of works were sold, equivalent to 190 million yuan.

In the history of world literature, many authors and works are considered “phenomenal”. Take China for example. In the 1980s, Milan Kundera and One Hundred Years of Solitude by García Márquez were extremely popular. However, what Murakami had achieved is a new phenomenon. Not only did his Norwegian Wood become a best-selling book, but he also created a long lasting industry chain. Starting in the 1980s, the enthusiasm for his works has lasted more than 20 years. From Japan to East Asia, Murakami’s influence grew to reach Europe and the United States. “Murakami Haruki” is a popular brand in the publishing market. A book containing various pieces about trivial daily life should be in poor demand in the traditional publishing industry in China. Yet, after Murakami’s name was attached to this, tens of thousands of books were sold. More importantly, people's acceptance of Murakami has gone beyond language and fictional boundaries. Japanese scholar, Fujii Shozo, said that, in a Taipei cafe restaurant, he found Murakami Haruki’s light food menu. It included the marinated beef sandwich from Hear the Wind Sing, tomato cheese sandwich found in The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, tomato salad and ham spaghetti in Dance Dance Dance, salmon mushroom rice eaten in A Wild Sheep Chase, and the commemorative edition coffee cup in Kafka on the Shore. “Murakami” associated foods are selling at 3 to 4 times the cost of an ordinary lunch set. 

From the “Murakami industry”, the “Murakami world” is derived. In accordance with his novels’ descriptions, people made “Murakami” recipes, online music websites uploaded classical music which Murakami loves to listen to, and “Dolphin Hotels” were opened near the seaside in Sapporo, Japan. A South Korean company organized the “Kafka on the Shore” Kansai tour.

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34 Life Week magazine, No.7. China Publishing Group, 2017. P52
group. Even a Polish translator is finishing a “IQ84” themed tour with Tokyo as the primary destination.... even some non-mainstream music is starting to become best-sellers simply because they were mentioned in Murakami’s book. Czech classical musician Leoš Janáček’s Sinfonietta is weird in some ways, invoking feelings of nervousness and excitement through its use of an overlapping, messy symphony. 15 trumpeters follow the orchestra. It sounds like five songs are playing simultaneously.35 This symphony is introduced at the beginning in IQ84 as an introduction to the narrative and appears frequently throughout the novel. Murakami once said that he chose the Sinfonietta because it was completely out of the realm of pop music.36 Ironically, after IQ84 was published, this symphony began to grow in popularity. Even conductor Seiji Ozawa has expressed gratitude, and acknowledged that this was due to Murakami.

Although the “Murakami” brand is growing in popularity, Murakami Haruki’s office remains a normal looking apartment in Aoyama, adjacent to many fashion shops. The office building is not tall and retains the traces of the old times with an attitude of indifference towards all of its fashionable neighbors. Murakami has jokingly called this place “Murakami Industrial headquarter”. Neat, polite staff, walk around in the carpeted room barefoot; all requests, such as copyrights, royalties, visits, cooperation and other requirements, are all handled quickly.

2-3 Murakami as an Individual

It is not easy to meet with the founder and the only producer of the “Murakami Industries”. Murakami Haruki has kept a low profile and protected his private life very strictly.

35 Life Week magazine, No.7. China Publishing Group, 2017. P60
36 Ibid.
He refuses to show up on television, does not attend any regular meetings, does not participate in any social groups including any writing association, and rarely gives public speeches. In a speech at Kyoto University, the media was not allowed at Murakami’s request. He does not participate in literary group activities, and even rejected some literary awards he won, wherein doing this, however, he started to become known all over the world. He also refuses to contact the publisher outside of any formal business. On behalf of the Chinese publishing Group Corp., Lin Shaohua negotiated with him about copyrights. “I have told him that the publishing house wanted to host and invite him for a trip. He let his secretary tell us that the money is no big problem, but no trip.” Murakami met with Lin in 2003; the meeting was one of only two times he would meet with Chinese visitors.

The other meeting occurred in 1996, before his works got popular in China. Mr. Ye Zongmin, who is the editor of Jiangsu Yilin Publishing House, wanted to introduce The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle to Chinese readers and to meet with Murakami and his wife. For this meeting, Ye Zongmin did a lot of work. Ye Zongmin knew that a staff member of Murakami’s office was a haiku lover, so he asked someone to send one of his own haikus to her as a gift. This provided a chance for him to meet with Murakami. Before the meeting, Zongmin said “because it’s hard to know how Murakami looks like since the Japanese media rarely publish Murkami’s photos, he is a kind of a mystery person for us. A Japanese avant-garde female poet once told me that Murakami never ties his shoelaces, so I also want to verify it.” Ye Zongmin recalled, “I heard that he ran a bar business before, and there are a lot of romantic plots in his work, so before I met with him, I thought he should be a unconventional and romantic person. But when Murakami

37 Life Week magazine, No.7. China Publishing Group, 2017. P62

38 Ibid.
appeared in front of me with his wife, he was completely different from what I imagined. He is about 1.72 meters tall, normal looking. If you have to find his facial features, I would say his eyebrows are slightly wider than the average person. Other literary celebrities I have met are either suited or long haired, totally hipster styles. But Murakami is in a super normal outfit with casual jacket and pants, sports shoes. I also paid attention to his shoes. They are tied.”

Murakami Haruki was born in 1949. This was during Japan's baby boom, which occurred after World War II. Sociologists call the people who were born between 1947 and 1949 as the “baby boom generation”. The key features of this generation include watching TV, reading comic books, listening to the Beatles, actively joining student movements after they get into college; they are about 5% of the total population of Japanese. They are also the symbol of the first fertility peak after World War II. Although Murakami belongs to the “baby boom generation”, his family was a little different. “His parents have only two children. Besides himself, he also has a sister.” During that time period, each Japanese family typically has five or six children, Murakami’s situation is very rare.” Lin Shaohua said.

As the only boy in the family, Murakami Haruki was favored and given more freedom by his parents. He recalled his high school, Kobe High School, was a public “high enrollment rate school”. They would post a list of the top 50 students after each test. Murakami’s name was never on the list, but his parents did not blame him for that. As a high school Japanese teacher,


40 Dankai no sedai (だんかいのせだい) “Baby boomers” This particular generation is called Dankai no Sedai (nodular generation). The term was coined by novelist Taichi Sakaiya in his 1976 work of the same name. "Source: "Nodular generation" rocked society. Kiyomi Arai. Daily yomiuri.www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/features/004/05.htm


42 Life Week magazine, No.7. China Publishing Group, 2017. P68
his father taught Murakami Japanese literature every Sunday morning. His father hoped his son could become interested in Japanese classical literature, but he had always preferred Western literature instead. Although that was not what his father wanted, his parents continued to encourage Murakami to read what he liked. They allowed him to buy books in the local bookstore, as long as they were not comics or weekly magazines.\textsuperscript{43}

Through the interactions with his parents, Murakami began to learn how to get along with the world with mild friction. He was an average student in school. He did not make a lot of effort to meet his school’s evaluation criteria, but he did not confront or fight with the education system he disagreed with. He said that, “Although it’s bad to say that about school (I’m sorry), I don’t have any good memory of it…anyway, when I finally graduated from college, I felt a tremendous sense of relief and exultation. ‘I don’t need to go to school anymore’. It was like unloading a huge burden from my shoulder. I never missed my school (probably).”\textsuperscript{44} In high school, he was fascinated with playing mahjong, hanging out with many girlfriends, killing time in jazz bars and cinemas, smoking, and skipping classes. He failed the college entrance examination the first time. However, he abided by his parents’ wishes and took the examination again. However, Murakami changed his major from law to literature and enrolled in Waseda University’s drama department.

The 1960s was a turbulent era. After Murakami was admitted to Waseda University, the student movement started and classes were suspended. Murakami Haruki, as a very marginal person, and had a tentative relationship with that era. He grew a beard and grew his hair to his shoulders. He would wear grubby clothes around campus. Murakami would also join the student


movement sometimes. Murakami participated in throwing stones at the police and fighting against them, but never got more involved. The student movement soon turned into a riot. Anti-institutional factions started fighting each other. A student who did not have any interest in politics was killed.\(^{45}\) Murakami writes:

After that, I was like a lot of students who began to feel disillusioned with the way the movement was made. Some mistakes and injustices were hidden behind the movement. After the whirlwind subsided, everything was over. Only disappointment and bitterness was left in our heart. No matter how correct the slogan and how beautiful the promises we have made, if the spiritual and moral strength are unable to fully support that, then it’s nothing more than an empty and vague excuse. I have been keenly aware of the problem after that and still firmly believe it. Language does have a rock solid power. But that only works when the language is correct. At least it have to be just. We cannot let language get out of control.\(^{46}\)

Murakami set himself apart from mainstream society, which seemed to have lost its imagination and was getting more violent and hollow. He started to retreat back into a more personal realm. During his study at the university, Murakami would stay in the media room to watch movies and read scripts. He had even thought about becoming a movie screenwriter at one point. “I realize that this job is not a good fit with my personality, because from the script to the final film, you have to work together with a large group of people to accomplish it.” \(^{47}\)


\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) *Life Week magazine*, No.7. China Publishing Group, 2017. P70
After World War II, Japan entered into a rapid economic recovery period. The “baby boom generation” were starting to take on important roles in society. They created the economic miracle through collectivist work and lifestyles. They gained a good reputation historically because of the rapid developments in Japan. However, Murakami sensed a “gap” in that society and a possibility of another life: “Fortunately, young people don’t need a huge amount of money to run their own business like these days. So people like me who ‘do not want to work for a company’ or ‘do not want to grovel before the system’ chose to run their own businesses. Such as cafe, restaurant, bookstore…The world seems to have a lot of ‘gap’ places. If you are lucky enough to find your gap, you can make a life anyway.”48 This marginal lifestyle helped him step into a more individualized realm.

3 Analysis of Murakami’s novels

3-1 Lost identity in economic progress

Norwegian Wood & wild sheep chase

“I really like you, Midori. A lot.”

“How much is a lot?”

“Like a spring bear,” I said.

“A spring bear?” Midori looked up again. “What’s that all about? A spring bear.”

“You’re walking through a field all by yourself one day in spring, and this sweet little bear cub with velvet fur and shiny little eyes comes walking along. And he says to you,

‘Hi, there, little lady. Want to tumble with me?’ So you and the bear cub spend the whole
day in each other’s arms, tumbling down this clover-covered hill. Nice, huh?’

“Yeah. Really nice.”

“That’s how much I like you.”

“That is the best thing I’ve ever heard.” 49

This is what Watanabe, who was attending his second year of college in Tokyo, said to
Midori in front of her father’s family shrine in 1969. In Murakami’s *Norwegian Wood*, bright and
beautiful descriptions, like the conversation above, are few and far between. In the end, nothing
happens between the two college students; the most they do is hug. This is particularly special in
Murakami’s work in which the sex scenes occur often. The heart-stirring part of this work is the
depiction of the 20-year-old man’s inner struggles over a two-year period. Using a historically
based background, Murakami paints a picture of youth, love, pop-culture, isolation and the
disconnect we feel with each other.

At the beginning of the millennium, as one of thousands of readers, I read this novel. The
doubt I had in the book, unfamiliar scenes and distant feeling which are under a foreign culture
context all made me feel overwhelmed. Nevertheless, I also got a sense of belonging. This book
provides readers with an idea of how to find a sense of identity and self-awareness. At first
glance, Murakami is writing a sentimental youth novel: characters are skipping classes, drinking
alcohol, playing rock music and hanging out with girls. But how does Murakami explain those
characters’ outrageous actions? He does this through hiding the historical background within the
pop-culture words.

The 1960s were a special time for Murakami as a Japanese citizen. He was born in 1949 and attended middle school in the early 1960s when Bob Dylan, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones were making their debuts. *Norwegian Wood* was named after a Beatles’ song. Murakami grew up under the influence of post-war democratic values. In this post-war period, Japan followed a single-minded pursuit of economic goals and became a capitalist country. This was part of Japan’s national rebuilding agenda and can be seen as an attempt to quickly recover from the humiliating of defeat that came at the end of World War II. Under this circumstances, the pressure of economical progress began to make people lose their personal identity, and left them unable to connect with others. We see this in *Norwegian Wood*:

“I’m not going to believe in any damned revolution. Love is all I’m going to believe in.” Said Midori who is so simple and naive. But opposite of what she said, abnormal and outrageous also can be the descriptions of her personality. “Know what I did the other day?” Midori asked. “I got all naked in front of my father’s picture. Took off every stitch of clothing and let him have a good, long look. Kind of in a yoga position. Like, ‘Here, Daddy, these are my tits, and this is my cunt.’”

“Why in the hell would you do something like that?” I asked.

“I don’t know, I just wanted to show him. I mean, half of me comes from his sperm, right? Why shouldn’t I show him? ‘Here’s the daughter you made.’ I was a little drunk at the time. I suppose that had something to do with it.” 50

In the opposite of the revolution, does she intentionally take this action against the invasion made by ideology of the times on students’ personal life? Murakami did not provide
negative causes of any of the characters. But connected with Japanese society in the late 60s, we can get a sense of the reason as:

“A lot happened in late January and February that year, 1969... The student strike started at the end of May. ‘Dismantle the university,’ they all screamed. Go ahead, do it, I thought. Dismantle it. Tear it apart. Crush it to bits. I don’t give a damn. A breath of fresh air for me. I’m ready for anything. I’ll help if you need it. Just go ahead and do it.”  

In this quote to “Dismantle the university,” Watanabe is wandering into the side of the conflict. He seems more negative towards the student movement at this point. In the late 1960s, a global-wide student movement took place. Besides America and Western Europe, Japan, followed suit with the Zenkyōtō movement. Tens of thousands of students were involved in protests and student strikes. This movement furthered the post-war Japan democratization.

Two unprecedented mass political movements created turbulence within Japanese society in the 1960s. These two movements were “Anpo movement” and the “Zenkyōtō movement”. Murakami spent his youth under the shadow casted by these movements; this background has become an undeniable piece of Murakami’s stories.

The “Anpo movement” was a national political movement in that occurred between 1959 and 1960. This movement was perpetrated by students and ordinary citizens. In order to fight against the Japanese government’s decision to change Anpo Treaty to meet the US’s need during the Cold War, tens of thousands of marching people surrounded The Diet for several days. In the


52 Anpo (安保), the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan (日本国とアメリカ合衆国との間の相互協力及び安全保障条約 Nihon-koku to Amerika-gasshūkoku to no Aida no Sōgo Kyōryoku oyobi Anzen Hoshō Jōyaku) also known in Japan as *Anpo jōyaku* (安保条約).
end, the Japanese government did not listen to people’s opinion. A series of campaigns against security treaties emerged during the latter 10 years, known as “60’s Anpo” and “70’s Anpo”.

“All Campus Joint Struggle Committee” was referred to as “Zenkyōtō”. In 1968 and 1969, Japanese students were influenced by the Chinese “Cultural Revolution” and the French “May Revolution in Paris”. A nationwide student movement was set off. Their aim was to form a new left-wing student organization to fight against the traditional left-wing partisans. Questioning the status of the university raised the passion and fanaticalness of the students' participation in politics. This movement began at the University of Japan and the University of Tokyo. Later, it quickly spread to other universities in Japan. Waseda University, which Murakami attended, also became involved. On the night of October 21, 1968, large-scale international anti-war demonstrations broke out in Shinjuku, which led to the closure of Shinjuku Station and the surrounding areas of the railway and bus lines. A large number of people were arrested. The second year, Waseda University student strikes led to a total of five months’ suspension. Murakami expressed his feeling toward this movement in Norwegian Wood:

While the tall student passed out his handbills, the round one went to the podium and started lecturing. The handbills were full of the usual simplistic sloganeering:

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53 All Campus Joint Struggle Committee: student group active at universities throughout Japan between 1968 and 1969. In Japanese: 全学共闘会議（ぜんがくきょうとうかいぎ）

54 The Cultural Revolution, formally the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a sociopolitical movement that took place in China from 1966 until 1976. Set into motion by Mao Zedong, then Chairman of the Communist Party of China, its stated goal was to preserve ‘true’ Communist ideology in the country by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society, and to re-impose Maoist thought as the dominant ideology within the Party.

55 May Revolution in Paris (France: Mai 68) The volatile period of civil unrest in France during May 1968 was punctuated by demonstrations and massive general strikes as well as the occupation of universities and factories across France.

“Smash Fraudulent Elections for University President”; “Marshal All Forces for New All-Campus Strike”; “Crush the Imperial-Educational-Industrial Complex.” I had no problem with what they were saying, but the writing was lame. It had nothing to inspire confidence or arouse the passions. And the round guy’s speech was just as bad—the same old tune with different words. The true enemy of this bunch was not State Power but Lack of Imagination. 57

Instead of introducing the panorama of this historical incident, Murakami used Watanabe’s life to tell the story: “I started to work at a trucking company. Riding shotgun, loading and unloading trucks, that kind of stuff…I worked on the truck five days a week, and three nights a week I continued my job at the record store. Nights without work I spent with whiskey and books.” 58 “Thinking back on the year 1969, all that comes to mind for me is a swamp—a deep, sticky bog that feels as if it’s going to suck my shoe off each time I take a step…The people around me had gone on ahead long before, while my time and I hung back, struggling through the mud…Death had already taken John Coltrane, who was joined now by so many others. People screamed there’d be revolutionary changes—which always seemed to be just ahead, at the curve in the road.” 59 Murakami’s disappointment in the revolution has been revealed through the protagonist’s words. By introducing John Coltrane, an American spiritual jazz musician, Murakami is able to to reveal the meaningless and feebleness of the revolution. Coltrane can also meet the needs of a college boy. A sense of alienation of the protagonist is detailed throughout this novel.

To Marx, capitalism is the cause of alienation; Murakami’s characters in *Norwegian Wood* subscribe to Marx’s idea of an egalitarian society. However, they attempt to realize it, not through a sense of community, but in a society of alienated people. Watanabe and Naoko, the alienated “couple” do not and cannot love each other. Ueno Chizuko interprets this story as depicting a lack of communication. Ueno Chizuko says, “If love is a human relation, this novel does not describe any love, but instead it follows the process in which people fail to communicate.” Eventually, Naoko kills herself and Watanabe loses his sense of identity formed in modern human relations. Naoko’s illness is related to the suicide of her boyfriend Kizuki. The two had retreated from society into their own world. When Kizuki died, Naoko could not establish deep relations with anyone else. Neither Kizuki nor Naoko could bear their paranoid human relations. Alienated from modern society, they failed to find their own post-modern world.

The conflict between collective identity and individual identity is also a very important part in Murakami’s novels. In the 1980s, the Japanese economy was booming. Japan loomed in the world's and its own imagination as an unstoppable economic machine. To many, Japan was a suitable model for economic and social development: the economy was great, schools were good, and violence was nearly nonexistent. Its successes were spoken of in almost utopian terms. After the first ten years, the influence of capitalism kept going and increased the belief that people were more passive. Murakami felt they had lost themselves in a material society, which can be seen in several of his works, including *A Wild Sheep Chase* (1982) and *Hard-Boiled Chizuko Ueno, Ogura Chikako, and Tomioka Taeko. “Danryū bungakuron.” The Theory of Male Fiction* (Chikuma Shobō, 1992) 96 (1992).


Wonderland and the End of the World (1985). These books seemed to capture the sense of “disillusionment, disconnection, and confusion that lingered close to a placid surface even during halcyon days”\textsuperscript{62}. In A Wild Sheep Chase, the Rat notes:

It’s not something I can explain in words. It’s like, well, like a blast furnace that smelts down everything it touches. A thing of such beauty, it drives you out of your mind. But it’s hair-raising evil. Give your body over to it and everything goes. Consciousness, values, emotions, pain, everything. Gone. What it comes closest to is a dynamo manifesting the vital force at the root of all life in one solitary point of the universe.\textsuperscript{63}

In that mountain villa, the soul of Rat which had been died together with the sheep met with me (the protagonist). All peoples are controlled by the sheep and cannot resist them at all. The sheep have a powerful authority to control people’s will and destroy their own thought. A core question raised in A Wild Sheep Chase is that what the sheep in this novel symbolizes. To Kawamoto Saburo, the sheep stands for the idea of revolution and self-denial pervasive in Japan in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{64} Introducing Kawamoto’s interpretation, Fukami Haruka construes the sheep as a symbol of the dark side of Westernized modern Japan – aggressive expansion, including the invasion of other Asian countries, and industrial development at the cost of the natural environment.\textsuperscript{65} The notion of “sheep”, for Karatani Kojin, is a symbol that represents the negation of thought as it is understood in terms deriving from Western individualism and


\textsuperscript{64} Saburo Kawamoto. "Toshi no kanjusei (The Sensibilities of Metropolis)." Tokyo: Chikuma Bunko (1988).

humanism. The sheep in this story follows the trajectory of modern Japanese society – the unification and oppression of Asian people (the Sheep Professor), the consolidation of Japanese people and defense of their culture (the Boss) and a vision of the future resulting in total conceptual unity (the Rat) – as inevitable stages of evolution. As Murakami, Fuminobu notes: “A *Wild Sheep Chase* can be interpreted as a work that describes modernist ideology in Japan: its cult of the intellectual, its pursuit of rationality, development of political and economic power, its suppression of the ‘other’, its deep love and identification with the ideological constructions of Japanese tradition and its aim for future unity.”

3-2 From individual to community

*South of the Border, West of the Sun*

An outsider would probably have said we had an ideal life. Certainly I was convinced of it at times. I was fired up about my work and was taking in a good deal of money. I owned a four-bedroom condo in Aoyama, a small cottage in the mountains of Hakone, a BMW, a Jeep Cherokee. And I had a happy family. I loved my wife and my two daughters. What more could anyone ask for?  

The famous Japanese contemporary literature writer, Ōe Kenzaburō, who is considered to be a social non-conformist and existentialist has talked about Murakami in his article “From postwar Japanese literature to today's Predicament”. Murakami’s literary character is built on a

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67 Ibid

consciousness, that is, he never takes any active attitude to the community, and even to their personal life—the most vital living environment. Instead, passively and unreservedly, he accepts the secular influence from the outside world. It is as if he can play the background music, while building his own inner dream world without leaving any flaws.”

I agree with this comment.

Murakami never cared about literature protocol or subjective initiative. But in fact, Murakami’s réquiem, which show the nostalgia for the “forever young” 60’s to 70’s, has already stopped. *South of the Border, West of the Sun* was published in 1992. It is considered to be an important part of Murakami’s transition period. In the book, the concept of “Family” is brought up for the first time. This intervention of “Family” was considered as Murakami started to work harder to portray the social image. Although it is a story about an "errant" middle class man and it seems less experimental and adventurous than *A Wild Sheep Chase* or *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, to Murakami, the meaning is extraordinary. The protagonist, Hajime, in this novel can be considered as a typical successful person in a materialist society. Hajime ran a very good business of bars and owned a small cottage in the mountains of Hakone. He has two daughters as well. But Shimamoto, his childhood friend, showed up during that time. At first glance, there is nothing new in this novel. It appears to be no more than a popular novel of Japanese marriage and love. But taking a deeper look at this novel, it seems like Murakami is trying to explore the inevitable and accidental things in our daily life under the fashionable cover of “errant”. It is not a novel which only talks about middle age people’s affair. A very intriguing passage in this novel is:

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After all, I was part of the late-sixties–early-seventies generation that spawned the radical student movement. Our generation was the first to yell out a resounding ‘No!’ to the logic of late capitalism, which had devoured any remaining postwar ideals. It was like the outbreak of a fever just as the country stood at a crucial turning point. And here I was, myself swallowed up by the very same capitalist logic, savoring Schubert’s Winterreise as I lounged in my BMW, waiting for the signal to change at an intersection in ritzy Aoyama… I was living someone else’s life, not my own. How much of this person I called myself was really me? And how much was not? These hands clutching the steering wheel—what percentage of them could I really call my own? The scenery outside—how much of it was real? The more I thought about it, the less I seemed to understand.

Murakami expressed the faint feeling of middle-class people against capitalism here. When you enjoy the benefit of capitalism, your heart will be materialized by the inner desire of yourself, even that is what you despise. What you have opposed or spurned will eventually devour you from the outside to the inner core.

3-3 Shock from the war

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*

“Do you know the story of the monkeys of the shitty island?” I asked Noboru Wataya. He shook his head, with no sign of interest. “Never heard of it”.

“Somewhere, far, far away, there's a shitty island. An island without a name. An island not worth giving a name. A shitty island with shitty shape. On this shitty island grow

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palm trees that also have shitty shapes. And the palm trees produce coconuts that give off a shitty smell. Shitty monkeys live in the trees, and they love to eat these shitty-smelling coconuts, after which they shit the world's foulest shit. The shit falls on the ground and builds up shitty mounds, making the shitty palm trees that grow on them even shittier. It's an endless cycle.”

I drank the rest of my coffee.

“As I sat here looking at you,” I continued, “I suddenly remembered the story of this shitty island. What I'm trying to say is this. A certain kind of shittiness, a certain kind of stagnation, a certain kind of darkness, goes on propagating itself by its own power in its own self-contained cycle. And once it passed a certain point, no one can stop it -even if the person himself want to stop it.”

In 1991, Murakami Haruki and his wife left Japan and moved to Princeton University as a visiting researcher. This occurred during a period known as the “bubble economy”. “It is not a difficult thing to live in Japan as a person who writes,” Murakami later wrote. “Plus Japan’s economy was booming at that time, as well as the publishing industry also showed a good situation. Stocks were rising and real estate prices was high. The money was going to overflow. New magazines continue to came out. The magazine publisher can get as many advertisements as they want…There were many ‘tedious work’ at that time. I even had such invitation: ‘You can go anywhere on this earth, you can spend as much as you want, you can write whatever you want to write about.’ I also had a luxurious invitation from a stranger: ‘I have bought a castle in

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France, how about you live there for one year or half to write your novel?” (I have politely refused these two proposals.) Now when I recall that time, I still feel incredible.”  

Because of the social background, Murakami moved out of Japan: “The whole society is noisy and impetuous. Everything is about money. There is no way I can settle down and grind out my novel. If I stay in that environment, maybe I would be spoiled…I want to put myself in a more tense environment, open up new boundaries and try new possibilities.” Under this circumstance, he wrote *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*.

The Gulf War occurred during the time in which Murakami left Japan. On the way to the American Embassy, in a taxi he heard the news of the US military sending missiles to attack Baghdad. After arriving in the United States, he found that the whole country was filled with a strong wartime atmosphere. People are keen to express their views about the war. Because Japan did not send a Self Defense Force to join the war, they were accused by the “Angry Youth” of America. Murakami wrote about what he saw in the US during that time in his book *And then, Sorrowful Foreign Language*. His observations were made in a Murakami-style humorous and ridiculing tone. But the shock he got is far more complicated than what he had previously been exposed to. In an interview with the US media, he admitted that he felt a strong shock during that time. *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* was created under that circumstance. Jay Rubin once commented that this novel was “a creative act of self-examination, as well as a significant development in how Murakami considers his own responsibility as a storyteller.” From that

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74 Ibid


point on, Murakami began delving deeper into his literary voice. Murakami stated in one speech that, “Until I came to America, I had never spoken like this before an audience. I had always assumed that there was no need for me to do such a thing because my job is to write, not to speak. Since coming to live in America, however, I have gradually begun to feel that I wanted to speak to people. I have come to feel more strongly that I want the people of America—the people of the world—to know what I, as one Japanese writer, am thinking.” This was an enormous change for him.

The Battle of Nomonhan provided the historical background for *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. This war was filled with decisive engagements regarding the undeclared Soviet-Japanese border. This conflict was fought between the Soviet Union, Mongolia and the Empire of Japan. Because of their defeats in the West and North, Japan turned their expansion efforts towards the Pacific. The Battle of Nomonhan was considered by Japanese historians to be the biggest defeat in Japanese history. Born in the post-war era, Murakami had nothing to do with these tragic wars, nor was he obliged to be responsible for that history. However, he felt guilty for what Japan had done during the war: “I was born after the war, and have nothing to do with the World War II, but in Japan, the atmosphere does not allow me to speak these words: I deeply feel that, as a Japanese, more or less we must be responsible for history. I think, if I live in Japan, this feeling would not come to me. In other words, I cannot say ‘none of my business’ when I mourn for the people who died in the historical events 50 years ago.” It was a universal taboo topic for post-war literature writers to write about Japanese modern history, especially as it related to their history of invasions. Murakami Haruki, on the other hand, chose to

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uncharacteristically abandon his “always cool posture” and focused his attention to the modern history of Japan. He searched large amounts of historical data and analysis of the details of this tragic war in order to seek out answers for his own questions:

As a country we did not use the appropriate way to show the world of the content and direction of our culture. Japan and the Japanese do not seem to have a strong sense of crisis made by our indifference to the reality. At least in my opinion it is so, and I feel sad about it. Originally I intended to get away from Japan and freely live abroad as an individual. But after I left and faced the whole world, the desire of seek the way as a Japanese get even more intense. The more I get away from Japan, the more close I have to get with Japan… I could not be able to explain myself to others. This is a very complex self-contradiction.79

Under this context, Murakami re-examined modern Japan based on its history. Through his writing, Murakami conveyed his concern and took historical responsibility as a writer. He wrote: “I was determined to write this battle as a vertical line in the novel. The book I read took me back to 1939 Mongolia. I heard the rumbling sound of fire and feel the sand from the battlefield.” Murakami seized this incredible opportunity to “make the battle, which neared the border of Mongolia, Manchuria in 1939 appear inappropriate in the reality of Tokyo.”80

This novel revolved around the main character, Toru Okada, looking for his wife, Kumiko Okada, who left their home and never came back. This novel was set in the 1984-1985. The search for his wife was not Okada’s only inward exploration of self-awareness. However, it


led him to the Battle of Nomonhan. The image of Kumiko represents her family background, which provided the connection to Japanese history. Later on, this would prove to be part of the core narrative of the novel. At the same time, Kumiko’s background also provides the narrative that leads to the dark, post-war Japanese political stance. Kumiko's uncle Yoshitaka Wataya was “a young technocrat newly graduated from the Military Staff College with a major in logistics.”

Wataya was a follower of Kanji Ishiwara, who was the Lieutenant General of Japanese Army during the invasion of China. After the war, Kumiko’s uncle intends to allow her brother, Noboru Wataya, inherit his position in the House of Representatives. As his successor, Noboru completed two generations of political alternation and become a new generation of villains. Mr. Honda, who experienced the war himself, also witnessed the marriage between Toru and Kumiko. Here, Mr. Honda was able to explain the history of the Battle of Nomonhan to the couple. Lieutenant Mamiya shared the same memory Mr. Honda had expressed. After Mr. Honda passed away, Lieutenant Mamiya became the one to complete the historic story and pass its lessons on to Toru and Kumiko. During the quest to find his wife, Toku encountered a person named Cinnamon. By using his special ability, an extensive zoo massacre in China was revealed. This acts as a supplemental emphasis that increases the understanding of the historical landscape already being painted. At this point, Murakami has merged history and modern reality into one and the story moves forward based on this premise.

The Battle of the Nomonhan, or The Battles of Khalkhyn Gol, was a military conflict on the border between Mongolia and Manchuria. Manchuria was a puppet state of Japan; Mongolia was a communist state allied with the Soviet Union. The historic conflict began on 11 May 1939 and lasted 135 days. The incident was triggered by a territorial dispute between Manchuria and

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Mongolian. Japan was the first to stir up the trouble and ultimately, caused the earliest large-scale multi-dimensional war at that point in history. Both Japan and the Soviet Union sent their elite troops and outstanding generals to the war. The war is considered to be one of the most tragic failures in the history of the Japanese army. After the loss of nearly twenty thousand soldiers’ lives, Japan had to recognize the existing Manchuria and Mongolian border as a legitimate one. According to the research of Japanese historians, the loss of the Japanese in this incident is:

7696 people dead, 8467 wounded, 1021 people were lost, in total of 17364 people. The loss rate is 28.7%, especially in the 23nd division, casualties 10646 people out of 15147. The loss rate is 73.3%. The first line and the captain-level officers were almost all killed or suicide. After the establishment of the armistice agreement, three captains suicide who were responsible for defeat and retreat. 82

Despite the fact that the Battle of Nomonhan was much smaller than World War II, its influence on the fate of Japan cannot to be overlooked. Attacking the Soviet Union from Siberia to the Baikal Lake area was the essence of Japanese “North” strategy. The defeat of the Japanese forces during the Battle of Nomonhan demonstrated the military strength of the Soviet Union. Thus, Japan was forced to adjust began to implement a “South” strategy. Japan changed plans and geared up to attack Southeast Asia. This adjustment not only changed the entire battlefield deployment pattern of World War II, but also directly led to the attack on Pearl Harbor two years later in the South Pacific. This attack on the US was ultimately responsible for the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan. These bombs forever marred Japanese culture and led to the

unconditional surrender in the Potsdam Proclamation. The cost of this war increased the loss of Japanese lives from 20,000 to 2 million.

In June 1994, Murakami Haruki went to northeast part of China and the Mongolian border area to conduct a field investigation of the Battle of Nomonhan. At that time, the first and second volumes of The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle had just been published and a third was in process. About this, Murakami said in the essay Nomonhan's iron graveyard: 83

I have read books about the Battle of Nomonhan in the library of Princeton University, and as the reality of that battle came out more clearly in my mind, I began to grasp - though it was obscure - the meaning of the reason I was strongly appealing by that battle. It is probably because, in a sense that the whole process of the battle is too too Japanese, Japanese-style.84

Of course, the Pacific War in the big sense in Japanese-style, but if we take the Pacific War as a sample to analyze about, it is too large. It has been seen as a stereotyped historical catastrophe, that stands on our head just as a monument. Nevertheless, the Battle of Nomonhan was different. In regards to time, this battle took less than four months. Now, we call it "limited war." Regrettably, however, the head of the army hardly learned any lessons from it. Because of this, the Japanese army used the same tactics in their war with the south. As history often does, this led to a repeat outcome for Japan: loss. No more than twenty thousand soldiers lost their lives in the Battle of Nomonhan. Because they failed to learn from history, the war in the Pacific cost Japan more than two million lives. Regardless of the numbers, however, the loss of the


84 Ibid
Japanese soldier lives was needless. They were treated as nameless consumables; their lives thrown away by poor efficiency and self-serving desires of a disconnected organization.

After the war, the Japanese began turned their focus towards peace: “As for the low efficiency which ultimately lead the country to destruction, we try to destroy it as a pre-modern thing. We are not to pursue the responsibility of their own as the inherent inefficiency, instead we treated it as an externally imposed to deal with. Same with a surgical surgery, we excluded it physical.”  

85

After the defeat at the Battle of Nomonhan, Japanese leaders did not analyze the experiences and learn lessons from it. As always, they continued to rely on the old national system and guidelines. As a result, they were defeated in World War II at a much higher cost than ever before. Thus, in Murakami’s *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, the description of the Battle of Nomonhan is a response to *A Wild Sheep Chase*. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the main theme was: “The basic stupidity of modern Japan is that we’ve learned absolutely nothing from our contact with other Asian peoples.” 86 Nothing changed for the Japanese leaders. As a result, Murakami started to worry about the current system in Japan:

I can not break away from the question that we are still quietly obliterated as a nameless consumable from many of our social aspects. We believe that our fundamental rights as human beings are guaranteed in this peaceful “democratic state” of Japan. But is it so? Strip off a layer from skin, the breathing and heart beating is still same with the old self-enclosed national organization and its philosophy. During the process when I read books about the battle of Nomonhan, the fear I sensed is that: The war which happened fifty-five


years ago is not far from us. A kind of suffocating closures we are embracing will one day erupt at some place with unstoppable strong momentum, won’t it?

In this way, between the distant two places which are in the quiet library of Princeton University in New Jersey and in noisy train from Changchun to Harbin, I as a Japanese continue to feel the same kind of unhappy. So where will we go? 87

The tragic life of the Siberian prisoners after the defeat of Japan was paralleled in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* through the zoo incident before the defeat of Japan. By telling the story of Toru Okada’s life in the context of modern Tokyo and his search for his wife, Murakami is able to define the essence of contemporary Japan. It is important to note that Toru's wife searching was not aimless. It led to a well of self-pursuit.

*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is about a historical story. The heart of the story is the Battle of Nomonhan. Toru Okada as a character triggers the recap of Japanese history through the eyes of other characters. These characters, Mr. Honda and Lieutenant Mamiya, recall their lives after Japan was defeated. Furthermore, the tales told by Nutmeg and Cinnamon, helped to provide a vivid example of the tragedy of war. Among these vivid accounts, scenes like The Zoo Attack and Boris the Manskinner use lifelike details to depict a heart breaking, bloody and violent war for readers.

However, we should understand that the novel is different from factual history. Even though Murakami considered history a story in and of itself, the facts of history are always more complex. The “war” in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* is not historically factual, but plays an important part of the spiritual burden belong to Murakami’s generation. When Murakami was

asked in an interview, “Why should your generation take responsibility for a war which ended before it was born?” He replied, “Because we’re Japanese. When I read about the atrocities in China in some books, I couldn’t believe it. It is so stupid and absurd and meaningless. That was the generation of my father and grandfather. I want to know that drove them to do those kinds of things, to kill or maim thousands and thousands of people. I want to understand, but I don’t.”

Toru Okada dug deep into his well of awareness, and found his—more precisely, Noboru Wataya’s—uncle had committed crimes. Murakami drew a parallel between Noboru and those who control the state power and lead the country to evil abyss. There are some similarities between Noboru’s uncle and “The Boss” in *A Wild Sheep Chase*: both of them are on the top of the state power center, both of them have participated in the national war, both of them have been successfully cleared of their guilt and finally involved in the lifeline of the political economy. However, there are a few differences between *Wild Sheep Chase* and *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. “The Boss” is a parasitic body chosen by Sheep who has the soul of the evil will, in a sense. “The Boss” can be regarded as a victim in this way. Finally, through the cooperation between “I” and “Rat”, the Sheep was killed inside of “Rat’s” body. Noboru and his uncle on the other hand do not have such a mythological ability. They regard themselves as the owner of state power, which could be consider as an inheritable existence. Regardless of their willingness, their family’s evil tradition will be passed on to the next generation. This also explains why Kumiko decided to have an abortion after she became pregnant, which then triggered a marriage crisis: she wanted to block the inheritance of the evil descendants. Things are always relative: if the evil could be passed on to the next generation, then the fighters who fight that evil power could be also be passed on to the next generation. In this way, Mr. Honda and Lieutenant Mamiya chose to

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pass the fight, via stories, on to Toru. The significance of their existence after the war lies in the recollection of all the memories they have about the Battle of Nomonhan in order to complete their historical mission. After Toru knows about that history, he decides to get down into the well and tries to thoroughly analyze himself in order to clarify the past and present intertwined relationship.

There is another character who also plays a role in this self-exploration trip in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Cinnamon recalls the history of the Zoo Attack. He uses his experiences and self-assessment to realize the purpose of his own existence. Some scholars argue that Cinnamon is the character who is most likely the “alter ego” Murakami famously includes in most of his narratives. However, I think it would be more appropriate to treat Toru and Cinnamon as two different ego variations of the author. Cinnamon is a storyteller who dug into history in order to explain the current emptiness. Murakami is like Cinnamon because he uses stories, like *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*, to achieve self-exploration. Like Cinnamon, these stories are inspired by the history of his own country, especially the history of the invasion of China. Cinnamon's earnest quest for history makes people feel that a cool Murakami writes as a way of exploring his own alienation. Here, he began to explore his life, time and country. He was trying to figure out what was missing, what gives him the sense of alienation, and couldn’t feel more things. In *Norwegian Wood*, using Nagasawa’s words, Murakami confessed to his emotional emptiness:

“‘We’re a lot alike, though, Watanabe and me,’”

“Neither of us is interested, essentially, in anything but ourselves. O.K., so I’m arrogant and he’s not, but neither of us is able to feel any interest in anything other than what we ourselves think or feel or do. That’s why we can think about things in a way that’s totally
divorced from anybody else. That’s what I like about him. The only difference is that he hasn’t realized this about himself, and so he hesitates and feels hurt.”

“Where Watanabe and I are alike is, we don’t give a damn if nobody understands us,”

“That’s what makes us different from everybody else. They’re all worried about whether the people around them understand them. But not me, and not Watanabe. We just don’t give a damn. Self and others are separate.”89

_The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle_ is a masterpiece of Murakami Haruki's work, which is far away from his native language environment. It is also a masterpiece of the journey of self-exploration. Furthermore, it is the “greatest work” of Murakami Haruki's examination of Japan and its history. Using _The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle_ as a starting point, Murakami Haruki began to clear his sense of responsibility and define his mission as a Japanese writer. He abandoned his alienated posture and took a serious role in trying to find a cure for the chronic illness that exists in Japanese society.

**3-4 Step into Mature**

_Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage_

“And in that moment, he was finally able to accept it all. In the deepest recesses of his soul, Tsukuru Tazaki understood. One heart is not connected to another through harmony alone. They are, instead, linked deeply through their wounds. Pain linked to pain, fragility to fragility. There is no silence without a cry of grief, no forgiveness

without bloodshed, no acceptance without a passage through acute loss. That is what lies at the root of true harmony.”

*Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* came out in 2013. One million copies were sold during the first week. This number broke the Japanese publishing industry sales record. The popularity of Murakami’s book once again shows that his novels can create a strong resonance with readers. No matter where is is published around the world, Murakami Haruki’s work has become a very important read. *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* is another novel full of realistic factors after the model of *Norwegian Wood*. Murakami said in an interview that, “When I wrote *Norwegian Wood*, I thought that if I did not write a realist novel, I would not be able to go to the next level.”*Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki* is a simple yet clever story which you can finish reading in a single night. Criticisms never stopped. Some say his imaginative writing has declined; they believe his inspiration has dried up and that he could not write anything new. But in my opinion, Murakami chose the theme of “growing up” as a reflection of the characteristics of this era. The reason is that the economy of Japan was completely developed by this point and Japan had grown into the postmodern society: “In the flourishing and prosperous capitalist society, people have competitive and restricted relationships. The nihilism of the young generation has perfectly matched with Murakami literature’s feeling of loss.”

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91 In response to the critic Yutaka Yukawa's question, Murakami commented on literary roots and past works. https://www.jiji.com/sp/v4?id=201305murakamiharuki_int0003

can tell that one of the reasons Murakami’s novels has been loved by readers from the beginning to nowadays is his accurate grasp of an era’s theme.

We can summarize the overall creative characteristics of Murakami’s novels as follows: First, Murakami wrote using strong political metaphor, such as *A Wild Sheep Chase*. Second, he used methods similar to detective-style plot structures, as demonstrated in *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. Third, Murakami focused on individual growth, which is apparent in *Kafka on the Shore*. Fourth, he engaged the soul of exploration and healing through works like *Norwegian Wood*. In my opinion, *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage* is the integration of all these factors. Murakami combines a variety of superb creative techniques and different themes together to review and gives a retrospective of history to provide care and guidance for individuals with a plot like a detective novel to contemplate the era and social problems. From the title of the novel *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, one may observe that the novel can be very directly divided into two parts: “*Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*” and “*His Years of Pilgrimage*”. I’ll discuss “*Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki*” first and move on to “*His Years of Pilgrimage*” later. As a continuation of his previous style, Murakami set up a riddle at the beginning. Tsukuru Tazaki was abandoned in his sophomore year of high school by his four best friends, which made it impossible for him to live for a long time. He even thought about suicide. Although the five friends got along very well, Tsukuru deeply doubted that he has ever been needed by them at all: “And aside from Tsukuru Tazaki, they had another small, coincidental point in common: their last names all contained a color. The two boys’ last names were Akamatsu—‘red pine’—and Oumi—‘blue sea’; the girls’ family names were Shirane—‘white root’—and Kurono—‘black field.’ Tazaki was the only last name that did not
have a color in its meaning.”

Tsukuru has always thought that all four of them are colorful figures, only himself is an empty person at his core. He had no personality and expertise, and felt that eventually he would be excluded: “Aka was the one with the best grades…once he made up his mind about something, no matter how trivial it might be, he never backed down.” “Ao was impressively built…he was a cheerful person and enormously popular among his classmates.”

“Shiro was tall and slim, with a model’s body and the graceful features of a traditional Japanese doll…She was also a wonderful, skilled pianist” “Kuro wasn’t beautiful, but she was eager and charming and always curious…She was independent and tough, with a mind as quick as her tongue.”

Tsukutu was abandoned by the community because “Shiro” claimed that she was raped by him. He did not respond to this, but chose to silently endure the accusations and resulting exclusion. One of the characteristics of this long novel is the description of main characters’ color. Besides Tsukuru’s four best friends, there were two other people whose name include colors. One is Fumiaki Haida, “which meant, literally, ‘gray field.’” and Midorikawa —“Green river”. In this novel, Murakami used Midorikawa’s words to explain these colors:

“Each individual has their own unique color, which shines faintly around the contours of their body. Like a halo. Or a backlight. I’m able to see those colors clearly…it’s a temporary ability. You get it in exchange for accepting imminent death. And it’s passed along from one person to the next.”

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95 Haruki Murakami. *Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*. Translated by Philip Gabriel. Vintage, 2014. P60


51
My discussion here does not intend to use color to tell of Murakami’s creative intentions. For Murakami, the most important thing is how to visualize the individual. The characters in this novel are full of personalities, which he uses the bright colors to help express. Therefore, in order to achieve a deep understanding of these characters, I believe that it is necessary to analyze the colors of these characters as assigned by Murakami. From the theory of yin and yang, we can assume that “gold” “wood” “water” “fire” “soil” represents “white” “green” “black” “red” “yellow”. With that, it would seem that Tsukuru is not as colorless or empty as he believes he is. He is the color of “yellow” which controls the balance of the five elements. This also means he is in a central position amongst his friends. That is to say, because of the existence of Tsukutu, the small group can be coexist harmoniously. The other four friends are inherently flawed. Because of her purity and naivety, “Shiro” was affected and destroyed easily. “Kuro” looked like a charming and independent girl, but she was also an accomplice who expelled Tsukutu from their group. “Ao” was strong and cheerful but could not get rid of his mediocre fate. “Aka” was smart, but that is also the reason he engaged in speculation. In his own opinion, Tsukuru’s existence was useless, but he underestimated and misunderstood his ability to create. His name itself is important: “Tsukuru”—“the character that meant ‘create’ or the simpler one that meant ‘make’ or ‘build’” 97 In the eyes of “Ao”, Tsukuru was a person who could bring peace to others; as long as he was there, other people could find inner peace and return to their self naturally. “Aka” also admitted that, among the five of them, Tsukuru was the most powerful one; he felt that the remaining four of them did not even have the courage to leave their hometown. “Kuro” also told Tsukuru that he was not lacking in color; instead, he was a very colorful man who had been building beautiful railway stations.

The characters in Murakami’s novels are always able to impress readers. Comparing this set of characters with his previous protagonists who were closed in their own cages and could not break out, Tsukuru is different because he actively searches for answers. After the impact of a serious social incident, a positive gesture started to show up in Murakami’s novels. What’s more, a concept of "colleague" first came out in this novel. Characters were no longer wandering alone in the melancholy and helpless world; they started to find happiness in their work. They also began to find conciliation in talking with people.

In my opinion, another impressive setting in this novel can be found in *His Years of Pilgrimage*: “For the people working on the rail lines, and the police, and, of course, the passengers, this (terrorist attack on a train) remained the one unimaginable, nightmare scenario. And there was no way to prevent it, even now, after such a nightmare actually did take place in Tokyo in the spring of 1995.”

In 1995, Japan's confidence was further rocked. First, in January, a powerful earthquake struck western Japan, near Kobe, which was Murakami Haruki’s birthplace. Jay Rubin writes that the Japanese saw the earthquake as “a wake-up call to the emptiness of their lives in a society in which most people have . . . more money . . . than they knew how to spend.” On March 20, a major subway line in Tokyo was struck by a coordinated sarin gas attack that shook the Japanese people in a way similar to how the 9/11 disaster affected Americans. People struggled to understand what had happened and what it signified. Following the attack, suspicion quickly focused on Aum Shinrikyo, a radical Buddhist cult. This caused more uneasiness, since most cult members were not considered “outsiders”; they were Japan’s “best and brightest” - young, middle-class men and women educated at top universities who felt

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completely alienated by Japanese society. As noted in his other works, Murakami again brought history into the context of this novel. “Pilgrimage” is Tsukuru’s self-healing trip 16 years later. Both the personal pain and national calamity required understanding and healing.

Nagoya in Japan is a unique city. The Japanese generally believe that Nagoya is the most traditionally-based city. In Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage, Murakami uses Nagoya as the first stage. The five friends were all born and raised in Nagoya. Only Tsukuru went to Tokyo for college. The rest of them stayed in Nagoya because, for them, Nagoya is where home is and will always remain. Going away from their hometown to attend college in Tokyo is unbelievable for “Aka” “Ao” “Shiro” and “Kuro”. It is from this point that the relationship between Tsukuru and his best friends begins to disintegrate. This timing is exactly same as the 1995 incidents. Paul Scalise quoted Japanese psychoanalyst Miyamoto Masao’s assessment, “Japan has gone downhill in the last few years and young people just don’t know what to believe. ... At school they feel alone and unprotected… When they leave school, they join cults because the cults give them a sense of belonging.”100 The developed economy brings to the people not only the rich material life, but also the spiritual emptiness by the excessive pursuit of money. The characters were dragged into a mental predicament and did not know where to release their stress. Through the story of Tsukuru’s pilgrimage, Murakami tried to reveal the historical problems. Our mission is not only to recover and reconstruct a society after a disaster, but to learn from what we had experienced. When Tsukuru was expelled from the friendship 16 years ago, five different trajectories resulted. Although Murakami did not provide any advice of ultimate happiness for readers, he did inject modern Japanese literature with a greater sense of social responsibility. As Murakami said in the end of this novel that, “We truly believed in

100 Ibid
something back then, and we knew we were the kind of people capable of believing in something
—with all our hearts. And that kind of hope will never simply vanish.”

4 Murakami’s work in China

As the most popular Japanese writer in the past several decades, Murakami Haruki has a
huge reputation among the younger generations all over the world. His audience in China is
especially large. As Murakami said himself that, “It’s unbelievable for myself why it is Chinese
rather than Koreans to appear in my novel. I’m just writing no more than the shadow of my
memory. China for me is not just something I want to write as an image, but rather, ‘China’ is an
important ‘symbol’ in my life.” Therefore, one must ask: why is he so popular in China? Why
are there so many Chinese characters in his novel? These are the two questions I intend to
explore as a Chinese reader of Murakami’s work. In this section, I will focus on the complex
relationship between Murakami Haruki and China.

4-1 Chinese elements in Murakami’s work

Murakami’s interest in China, especially during the war period, might have something to
do with his own father, who was drafted to fight in China during World War II. In February 2009,
when he visited Jerusalem to receive Jerusalem Prize, Murakami gave a speech and talked about
his father, who had died one year earlier:

101 Haruki Murakami. Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage. Translated by Philip

My father died last year at the age of 90. He was a retired teacher and a part-time Buddhist priest. When he was in graduate school, he was drafted into the army and sent to fight in China. As a child born after the war, I used to see him every morning before breakfast offering up long, deeply-felt prayers at the Buddhist altar in our house. One time I asked him why he did this, and he told me he was praying for the people who had died in the war. He was praying for all the people who died, he said, both ally and enemy alike. Staring at his back as he knelt at the altar, I seemed to feel the shadow of death hovering around him. My father died, and with him he took his memories, memories that I can never know. But the presence of death that lurked about him remains in my own memory. It is one of the few things I carry on from him, and one of the most important.”

His father’s experience in China became so traumatic for him that Murakami could not eat Chinese food. Because of his father, Murakami admits that he does not know how to be a father to the next generation so he decided to not have children. All of these may be symptoms of his disavowal of what his father has done in the war-torn China in the 1930s. Obviously, Murakami Haruki relates to his father’s weaknesses and feels guilty for it.

Murakami’s writing about China in the 1990s can be traced back to his very early short novel, “A Slow Boat to China”, whose title referenced Frank Loesser’s jazz standard “A Slow Boat to China”. Murakami mentions three Chinese people that the Japanese protagonist meets during different stages of his life in this short story, which was published in 1980. Just like his memory about his father, the encounter with the Chinese in this story is merely a faded memory.

or something long gone for the protagonist. Overall, three Chinese characters were portrayed in a positive image in this short story. Fujii Shozo has even attributed these feelings to a sense of “original sin toward to the Chinese”\(^\text{104}\). Besides the differences between the two countries, China is never a radical other to Japan, as the two nations share more cultural commonality than either does with the West. Celeste Loughman argues that China in Murakami's *A Slow Boat to China* is a “metonym for the most influential source of Japanese culture”,\(^\text{105}\) and that the encounters with the Chinese are precise reconnections with the lost cultural past and the innermost world, where essential Japaneseness can be found.\(^\text{106}\)

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, of course, Murakami mentions China prominently in this narrative. As mentioned above, while he was working on *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* in 1994, Murakami decided to make his first trip to China. He was encouraged by the Japanese publisher to travel to Nomonhan, the battlefield near the border between Mongolia and China, where the short but brutal battle between Russia and Japan took place in 1939. He claims that while visiting there he had a “revelation” that changed his life: “I felt as though I had experienced the battle myself... I wondered what I would have done if I had been a Japanese living in 1939”\(^\text{107}\). The story has graphic depictions of several violent scenes, like the skinning alive of a Japanese spy by Mongolian soldiers, Japanese soldiers killing zoo animals, a Chinese prisoner of war executed with a baseball bat by the Japanese army, and the protagonist using a baseball bat to attack a man.

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\(^{105}\) Celeste Loughman. "No place I was meant to be: Contemporary Japan in the short fiction of Haruki Murakami." *World Literature Today* 71.1 (1997): 87-94.


57
on a street in contemporary Tokyo. The shadow of the Nomonhan battle has never vanished and it continues to haunt Japan just as his father’s past will not let go of Murakami. When he reflects on the battle in China, at the same time, he reflects on his own past. He wants to know about the history just like he wants to know about his father and his own identity. Murakami told Kyoto News in an interview in Tokyo that, “The issue of historical understanding carries great significance, and I believe it is important that Japan makes straightforward apologies. I think that is all Japan can do---apologize until the countries say: ‘We don’t necessarily get over it completely, but you have apologized enough. Alright, let’s leave it now.” 108 As a writer, he personifies the idea that it is his responsibility to write about the history even if it is not direct. In the depths of his heart, he feels guilty for what his father did and he cannot wipe it from his memory.

4-2 The popularity of Murakami in China

Murakami’s popularity rose in the Japanese literature scene after he won the Gunzo Prize with *Hear the Wind Sing* in 1979. Murakami’s work being translated into more than 50 languages and selling millions of copies outside his native country, and his extraordinary sales have created an international stardom of which Mishima Yukio109, Japan’s earlier self-styled literary export, could only dream.110 *Monthly new book* magazine published in Taipei on August 1985 was the first to introduce Murakami to another country. The history of the acceptance of Murakami in

108 Tokyo, Agence France-Presse. 2015.4.17
109 Mishima Yukio (三島由紀夫 January 14, 1925 – November 25, 1970) a Japanese author, poet, playwright, actor, and film director. Mishima is considered one of the most important Japanese authors of the 20th century
China has spanned more than a quarter century. In East Asia, especially in China, readers accept Murakami’s works in various ways; the most influential novel written by Murakami has been *Norwegian Wood*. Lai Mingzhu’s official version came out in 1997, and by January 2002, it had been reprinted twenty-one times. By 2004, the novel had gone through twenty-two editions and sold approximately 47,000 copies in Hong Kong. At about the same time, a translation by Lin Shaohua had also spread across the Chinese mainland in 1989. Most of the readers were university students. In 1998, however, the feverish influence of Murakami Haruki in Hong Kong and Taiwan began to spread to Shanghai urbanites and sales rapidly picked up speed. What’s more, he also created a social and cultural influence. It is apparent that Murakami has become a lodestar, an entity beyond mere authorship. As Lin Shaohua said, “We can say that Murakami and his *Norwegian Wood* has become a fashion, and mark of status, and a style.” Thus, Murakami became the spiritual mentor of many young artists. What’s more, Murakami Huraki fans track the movements of their query through his interviews and public lectures; they speculate about his private life and habits; they collect first editions, proof copies, and other

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111 Fujii Shozo 藤井省三. refers to the “big three translators in the Chinese-speaking world” (namely, Lin Shaohua in mainland China, Lai Mingzhu in Taiwan, and Ye Hui in Hong Kong), and discusses how they have become targets for fan interest in much the same way as Murakami himself. *Murakami Haruki no naka no Chûgoku* [China in the work of Murakami Haruki]. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha. 2007.


114 The major Mainland Chinese and Taiwanese sites—Cunshang.net (http://www.Murakami.net) and Cunshang Chunshu de wanglu senlin (Murakami Haruki’s Woods), contain updates on literary prizes that Murakami has received, transcripts of the rare interviews that he has granted, information about commemorative reissues of his books, and news about research colloquia investigating his work.
publishing memorabilia. The Murakami fans in China were both male and female; they were in their twenties, thirties, and forties; they comprised students, professionals, aspiring white-collar workers, and would-be slackers; and through his fiction, these fans sought, and found, guidance on how to live the Murakami way. So-called “Murakami manuals” began to appear across China: An Illustrated Handbook to Murakami Haruki’s Music, A Tour of Murakami Haruki’s World, and Cunshang Recipe. These books began to circulate among Murakami’s fans, feeding a growing appetite that would help them to become more like their “mentor.”

Some young East Asians even imitate characters in his novels and they are known as “Murakami fanatics”. Murakami has become the young generation’s common desire. They want to live in a “cool way”, like Murakami’s characters.

115 Joyce Yan, the rights director of China Times Publishing, describes how the company “organized a ‘MurakamiMania’ campaign, sending journalists to his fans’ homes to report on their Murakami-related collections of memorabilia”. Novelist Pan Xiangli has turned the craze for Murakami memorabilia into the subject matter of self-consciously “cool” fiction. Her short story “Baishui qing cai” (White Water, Green Grasses) features an ardent Murakami fan who collects not just every volume of his work, but every single edition: “She not only has all Murakami Haruki’s novel, each novel she has more than one version. She assumes that she got everything that China published. She even has the original version. Even though she cannot speak Japanese, ‘I can learn it!’ she said like singing as song. And whenever she would readily picked up a Murakami’s book, she just open it with a random page then began to read. While reading, her brow will be up slightly, smooth face suddenly seems to grow older.”


It is hard for one not to ask why. What exactly is the reason that Murakami Haruki, a Japanese writer, became so popular in China? Many readers, regardless of their nationalities, say that the reason they like Murakami’s novel are because they feel connected to the atmosphere of his work. Also, there was no other writer who could satisfy the middle class reader’s taste for novels. However, Murakami was a writer who was able to meet their new reading desires.

Besides readers’ opinions, many scholars are also trying to explain why Murakami is so popular in China. Lin Shaohua, for example, argues, “The pellucid quality of the writer’s prose is a tonic for readers who are mired in a ‘linguistically impoverished society’. Murakami teaches Chinese the strange beauty of loneliness, and the ways in which solitude can bring a deeper apprehension of the self-vital lessons for those still in ontological recovery from the collectivism of the Maoist years.” Later on, Jay Rubin makes a rather different point when he suggests, “Murakami’s works offer a ‘way out’ for East Asian readers from the strictures of the Confucian family system.” Shimada Masahiko states, “Murakami’s best-selling magic in post-colonial East Asia is attributable to his painstaking excision of all Japanese local color”. Leung Ping-

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122 Masahiko Shimada (島田雅彦) is a Japanese writer. He began his career as a novelist by describing himself as sayoku (left-wing). In his works, he often refers to the Emperor and to the Japanese Imperial Family.

kwan\textsuperscript{124} claims, “By contrast, that it is precisely Murakami’s growing willingness to grapple with Sino-Japanese relations—and in their darker hues (as demonstrated in \textit{The Wind-up Bird Chronicle} and \textit{After Dark})—that has won him readerly allegiance”.\textsuperscript{125} I intend to explore Murakami’s “Murakami phenomenon” from different perspectives, which includes inner loneliness caused by huge economic changes and nostalgia from history incidents.

\textbf{4-3 Why Murakami is popular in China}

\textbf{4-3-1 Inner loneliness produced by huge economic change}

The leading figure here is Fujii Shozo\textsuperscript{126}, who is a pioneering researcher investigating why East Asians are so captivated by Murakami. He writes, “In terms of geographical location, the ‘Murakami Phenomenon’ was launched in the clockwise direction of ‘Taiwan → Hong Kong → Shanghai → Beijing’, and in time it was the trend of halving the economic growth in the above areas. I refer to these two phenomena as ‘Clockwise rule’ and ‘Economic growth law’”.\textsuperscript{127} According to Fujii Shozo, in the second half of the 1960s, the average economic growth rate in

\textsuperscript{124} Leung Ping-kwan, (梁秉鈞) Hong Kong writer. He is Professor of Comparative Literature Department of Chinese Lingnan University in Hong Kong.

\textsuperscript{125} Shozo Fujii(藤井省三) In the midst of globalization (Gurôbarizêshon no naka de グローバリゼーションのなかで). \textit{How is the world reading Murakami Haruki? (Sekai wa Murakami Haruki o do yomu ka? 世界は村上春樹をどう読むか)}. Shibata Motoyuki 柴田元幸 et al. Tokyo: Kokusai kôryû kikin. 202-203.

\textsuperscript{126} Fujii Shozo(藤井省三), born in 1952 in Tokyo, Tokyo University PhD of literature, Now he is the professor of the University of Tokyo. He has long been engaged in the study of comparative literature in East Asia, including Lu Xun and Han Han's modern Chinese writers, Taiwan feminist writers Li Ang, Hong Kong film Wong Kar Wai, and Murakami Haruki and Matsumoto Qing Zhang and other Japanese writers in the acceptance of the Chinese language circle.

Japan reached 17.6% (this is the surface number, the actual rate is 11.1%) and became the heyday of high economic growth. The city quickly changed its tone and the scenery that which belonged to the old days gradually disappeared. Norwegian Wood lovers were wandering in the streets of Tokyo. They were looking for the Tokyo scenery, which was gradually disappearing. After eighteen years, when the youth of Murakami’s characters came to the end, it was mid- to late-1980s. During this time, Japan's average economic growth rate was 6.1% (actually 4.9%). This was about two-thirds lower than before. On the contrary, in 1975 the average annual income of Japan was $4,450 per person, and in 1987, it jumped to $16,271. As for Taiwan, from 1964 onwards, the economic growth rate over ten years was 11.1% and reached the highest rate in 1987 of 13%, before it dropped down to about 6% later. When the “Murakami phenomenon” came from Japan, Taiwan was experiencing the end of a high economic growth like Japan. Hong Kong was undergoing the same scenario as Taiwan. The GDP growth rate in the 1960s was actually 8.8%, and continued to climb to 9% (nominally 19.4%) during the 1970s. However, in the 1980s, Hong Kong's economic growth rate fell to 6.5% (nominal 15.4%). During the first half of the 1990s, it was reduced to 5.7% (nominally 14.3%). The same is true of mainland China. When Deng Xiaoping took over, he promoted the Chinese Economic Reform policy, which stared in December 1978. Economic reforms were planned in two stages. The first involved the de-collectivization of agriculture, permissions for entrepreneurs to start businesses, and allowing foreign investments. During the late 1980s and 1990s, the next stage of reform took place through contracting out of state-owned industry, and also included a significant amount of privation. China's economic has been rapidly changed since the reform. China's annual GDP growth was 14.2% in 1992. Until 1995 it has maintained about 10%. But in 1996 the rate became 9.6% and began to show the sign of a recession. On the other hand, the average annual income
increased from 379 yuan in 1978 to 9546 yuan in 1999. In Shanghai and Beijing, the GDP increased to thirty thousand yuan and twenty thousand yuan, which is close to the Japanese economy in the late 1960s when the story of *Norwegian Wood* happened. Excessive urbanization happened, and as result that urban landscapes and relationships have been intensely changed. The world in Murakami’s work spoke to the reality in China, which is rich in material but empty in spirit. Lin Shaohua interprets this phenomenal as, “After 10 years, readers have deepened the understanding of Murakami Haruki. With college graduates increasing as well as white-collar workers, more people were able to become richer than previously experienced. The acceptance of Murakami’s works was also growing more than the first several years. The relatively loose human and political environment in the new era provided the self-awakening of Chinese people. The rapid economic development also provided material foundation for self-growth. The uniqueness of Murakami’s work always reminds us: is your ego really your own? Is your mind really controlled by you? Haven’t ideas in your mind been replaced? Have you already been overwhelmed by business information? Borrowing Murakami’s words is, do you really need to drive 'Mercedes-Benz', wear Pierre Cardin and Rolex? Further, is your mind free? Is your ego the true self? In the past, Chinese people do not need to think about “self”, because someone will think for us and decide for us, even choose family for us. We only need to follow the leaders and shout slogans. There is no ego, there is no loneliness. It can be said that loneliness is the inevitable outcome of the modernity of self-conscious.”

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very interesting phenomenon that appeared in China during the same time: the Xiao Zi culture.

“Xiao Zi” is a cultural term describing a lifestyle that was originally a Chinese translation of petite bourgeoisie. Xiao Zi expressed people’s desire to chase modern tastes, living standards, and arts. Especially after the economic reform in the People's Republic of China, urban Chinese who had been immersed in Marxist ideas of class conflict wanted to define themselves through a new identity. They saw themselves as being between the poor proletariat and the rich bourgeoisie. That is why they call themselves “petite bourgeoisie”, a phrase meant to distinguish themselves from ordinary city dwellers. During the high-speed economic growth, the Chinese did not know how to enjoy the boom. But when such rapid growth came to an end and industry was no longer growing and services industry begin to rise, urban dwellers began to enjoy more luxurious things. Murakami Haruki’s acceptance occurred during this period. The loneliness created by economic change expressed in Murakami’s novels met the need of those prescribing to the Xiaozi style.

4-3-2 Lost and nostalgia out of history incidents

As we discussed in the last chapter, the Zenkyoto movement happened during the 1960s. We can get a sense of the tension during the student movement from Norweigan Wood: “The student strike started at the end of May. ‘Dismantle the university’, they all screamed. Go ahead, do it, I thought. Dismantle it. Tear it apart. Crush it to bits.” According to Eiji Oguma, he is a historical sociologist at Keio University and an expert of the history of ideas in postwar Japan.
Japanese student movement was a collective expression of the friction between the youth (college students) and Japan’s rapid economic development in the 1960s. In Oguma’s view, even though the University of Tokyo Student movement was virtually over at this point, the Zenkyoto style of struggle spread across Japan. A large number of college students replicated the organizational pattern, including the name Zenkyoto, its basic ideas, slogans, and strategies of the movement. Oguma also paid special attention to the slogan of “Self Negation.” He points out the idea that students should negate their status as elites and strive for a new identity in order to change the university and Japanese society. Instead of Japanese students’ self-criticism, he sees their search for new subjectivity as a result of “Gendaiteki Fuko.” What Oguma wants to explain here is that because of the highly developed capitalistic country single-minded focus on economic growth, the younger generation often feels a sense of emptiness and the lack of reality produced comes from that. Between the 1960s and 1970s, Japan experienced rapid economic expansion and industrialization. Oguma argues that Japanese youth, at the time, began to suffer from a new type of alienation and lack of self-identity, which some of them chose to express through radical student movements. Their desires were commendable but the outcome was less than satisfactory. As Watanabe said in *Norwegian Wood*: “I made a point of visiting those former leaders and asking why they were attending classes instead of continuing the strike, but they couldn’t give me a straight answer. What could they have said? That they were afraid of losing college credits through inadequate attendance? To think that these idiots had been the ones


134 Gendaiteki Fuko, 現代的不幸 (contemporary misfortune).


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screaming for the dismantling of the university! What a joke. Let the wind change direction a little bit, and their cries turned to whispers.”

After the failure of the Zenkyoto movement, the universities returned to their normal style of teaching. Because of the political storms, the students (including Murakami’s characters: Watanabe, Naoko, Midori, Nagasawa) experienced a sense of spiritual desolation, which is followed by insecurity, frustration, hopelessness and anxiety. For this generation, which experienced this movement during their college years, no matter whether they participated in this event or not, they share the same historical memory and emotional impact. After the mental pain and melancholy, most of young people discarded their dreams and beliefs, and let the economic growth completely consume their life. After the earth-shattering “revolution,” Watanabe was actually facing the same world, which doesn't change at all. It’s not hard for him to ask: “What the hell had those guys been doing behind the barricades?” This is also how Murakami Haruki felt after experiencing this movement himself.

In China, students went through the same feelings almost at the same time. During the 10 years span between 1966 and 1976, China had The Cultural Revolution (formally the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution). This was a sociopolitical movement in China. After the failure of “Great Leap Forward” (1958-60) led by Mao Zedong, he felt that his own position in government had weakened, which was followed by economic crisis. In order to keep himself in party leadership and strengthen his authority, Mao, together with his wife Jiang Qing and defense minister Lin Biao, formed a group of radical party members to reassert Mao’s authority over the Chinese government. By shutting down the nation’s schools and calling for a massive youth mobilization to attack other party leaders, Mao drew the conflict, which was between the Chinese government and radical party members.

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people and the Chinese government, into a tension between people themselves. He also started the so called The “Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement”. As a result, a great number of urban youth were sent to mountainous areas or farming villages, with a purpose of “learning from the workers and farmers” there. In total, approximately 17 million youth were sent to rural areas. Many fresh high school graduates were forced out of their homes in cities. They became the so-called “sent-down” youth (also known in China as “educated youth” and abroad as “rusticated youth”), and their lives were in fact replaced by exile to remote areas of China. Many of them lost the opportunity to attend a university and turned into China’s “lost generation.” Besides the Up to the Mountains and Down to the Countryside Movement, many people were killed during the Cultural Revolution, and millions of others suffered imprisonment for crimes they never committed, not to mention seizure of property, general humiliation and torture that occurred especially among educated people.

In 1989, Norwegian Wood was translated into Chinese, which is also the year another famous incident took place in China. The Tiananmen Massacre of 1989, commonly known as the June Fourth Incident or '89 Democracy Movement in Chinese, was led by student-popular demonstrations in Beijing and received broad support from city residents. This event exposed deep splits within China's political leadership. The protests were triggered in April 1989 by the death of former Communist Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, a liberal reformer who was deposed after losing a power struggle with hardliners over the direction of political and economic

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138 Events named by date in Chinese are conventionally named by the number of the month and the date, followed by the type of event. Thus, the common Chinese name for the crackdown on the 1989 massacre ("六四事件"), is literally (word-by-word) "Six" "Four" "Incident" ("六" means “six” "四" means "four", "事件", means "incident"), which refers to the incident which occurred on the "Fourth day" of the "Sixth month", in other words, the "June Fourth Incident", which is the usual translation.
reforms.\footnote{Barry Naughton. \textit{The Chinese economy: Transitions and growth.} MIT press, 2007. P99.} University students marched and gathered in Tiananmen Square to mourn for Hu Yangbang. Yangbang had also voiced grievances against inflation, limited career prospects, and corruption of the party elite.\footnote{Philip Pan. \textit{Out of Mao's shadow: the struggle for the soul of a new China.} Simon and Schuster, 2008. P274.} Among the issues addressed by the protesters were government accountability, freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and restoration of workers' control over the industry.\footnote{Andrew Nathan. "The Tiananmen Papers". \textit{Foreign Affairs}, 2010.} During the peak days, there are around one million people gathered in the Square. One of the scholars who led the students’ movement was Fang Lizhi, a Chinese astrophysicist who published a large number of papers on astrophysics and cosmology in the 1970s. Later on he became a world renown scientist, but was exiled by the Chinese government because of the Tiananmen Massacre after 1989.

Just as Fujii mentioned, many Murakami Haruki fans participated in the democratic movement.\footnote{Shozo Fujii. "China inside Murakami (村上春樹のなかの中国)." Vol. 826. Asahi News Press. 2007. P235} After the movement was over, they had feelings of disillusionment. They defined themselves as too passionate, restless, and anxious when they were young. It is not hard to notice that their experience is similar to Murakami’s protagonist in \textit{Norwegian Wood}. In particular, the young middle class that emerged with this new wealth began to paradoxically distrust the fruits of their success, which is similar to Murakami’s “I” narrator’s perspective. We can get a more complete idea from Lin Shaohua, who thinks Chinese people had finally realized the meaninglessness and superficiality of the previous time, and banished the Cultural Revolution...
from history. As the ideology lost its meaning, Murakami’s 1960s substituted for concrete history and filled in the emptiness of the people’s historical consciousness.143

5 Murakami in American and around the world

5-1 Murakami and American culture

The relationship between Murakami Haruki’s mythology and American culture and literature has been widely discussed by the academic scholars as an important topic in recent years. Since the twenty-first century, numerous books have been published. This includes Iron using man—Murakami Haruki and America (1991) by Sengoku Hideyo 144, Walking Towards Murakami Haruki—The stage of the work and the shadow of violence (2000) by Hara Takashi 145, Murakami Haruki and America—The origin of violence (2001) by Yoshida Haruo,146 Murakami Haruki and Motoyuki Shibata’s America (2003) by 147 Masashi Miura and Yūzō Tsubouchi’s America—Murakami Haruki and Jun Etō (2007) 148. In addition these are American


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scholars’ books, such as: *Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words* by Jay Rubin (2002) and *The forbidden worlds of Haruki Murakami* by Matthew Strecher (2014).

After World War II, as a result of US’s unilaterally occupation, Japanese changed its community culture style which developed before the War and had a radical change of political, social and national lives. In order to change from the Axis powers to Allied Powers, Japanese was still scarred from World War II which made them unable to be emotional about Japanese cultural forms. As Ruth Benedict writes, “In Japanese eyes, it removed from the stark fact of defeat the symbols of humiliation and challenged them to put into effect a new national policy, acceptance of which was possible precisely because of the culturally conditioned character of the Japanese.” Attaching itself to the United States became a basic trend of the postwar Japanese collective consciousness and also an important aspect of the country’s national character: “The absolute influence of the United States spread to almost all areas: politics, economics, military, intelligence, knowledge, and mass culture. Japan relies on a particular foreign country in such a broad field was impossible before 1945.” Murakami had been breathing the air of the US occupation since he was born. Until he became a novelist at the age of 29, he had been drinking in America culture as filtered by Japan. As Jay Rubin said in *Haruki Murakami and the music of*


151 The Axis powers (Japanese: 构轴国 Sūjikukoku), also known as the Axis and the Rome–Berlin–Tokyo Axis, were the nations that fought in World War II against the Allied forces. The Axis powers agreed on their opposition to the Allies, but did not completely coordinate their activity.—source from: GlobalSecurity.org.


words, “Murakami had begun life during the American occupation of his country and had grown up in an increasingly affluent Japan that still admired America for its wealth and culture. He hungered after the ‘American trad’ look of John and Robert Kennedy, and went to see the movie *Harper* more than ten times to admire the West Coast casual- traditional style of Paul Newman, who really knew how to wear a pair of sunglasses.”¹⁵⁴ His college life conveys the fact that Murakami accepted American education and cultural influences. No matter that this influence was unconscious or initiative, it was not difficult at all for Murakami to understand American literature. This made him significantly different from many of his predecessors. Whether it was Natsume Soseki or Mori Ogai, whether they went to Britain or Germany, their study of the West is a “going out” process; the purpose is to use the merits of Western culture to find and build a unique Japanese culture. But Murakami is different. There was no difficulty for him in choosing between American culture or the traditional Japanese culture; however, it was difficult to form his own style in the novel as a result of it. Saiichi Maruya commented on the Gunzo Prize for New Writers that, “The American fictional novel which was painted by this Japanese lyricism will eventually become Murakami’s own creation.”¹⁵⁵ Expressing Japanese styled emotion in the American style novel could be seen as Murakami Haruki’s creation and pursuit. For a contemporary Japanese novelist, such a choice also undoubtedly includes worship of American literature. As Japan’s economy started to recover and it became a part of a powerful international community, the demand for American postmodern culture also increased. Japanese people’s adaption of American lifestyle increased rapidly. This is an indisputable fact of social and

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¹⁵⁵ Saiichi Maruya was a Japanese author and literary critic. Source from 丸谷オーさんによる群像新人文学賞の選評 The influence by new American novel (新しいアメリカ小説の影響). http://murakami-haruki-times.com/maruyasaiichireview2/
cultural evolution, but also the reason why Murakami’s novels were favored by people. During the 1990s, Murakami’s global reach in Europe started. Whereas western European countries began to publish his novels in early 1990s, his works were not introduced in Eastern Europe until after late 1990s.\textsuperscript{156} Just like Jay Rubin notes in his book \textit{Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words}: “Everything Japanese was of interest in America now, especially the story of a cool young guy who didn’t buy in to the economic mystique; and from America the interest spread to Europe. In 1989 Murakami became the first Japanese writer since Kōbō Abe to attract a substantial audience beyond the small field of Japanese literary studies in America.” \textsuperscript{157} This phenomenon was surely helped along by Murakami’s own unconventional efforts. In his latest collection of essays, \textit{Novelist as Profession}, he recalled how he brought his book to American market. Instead of relying on his Japanese publisher, Murakami found a local agent himself. In order to provide English translations of his texts for the publishers’ review, he also developed a personal network of translators to work with. Such efforts were rewarded and led to \textit{The New Yorker} publication of his short stories; soon Murakami works began to show up in other magazines: “The first short story of mine that published by \textit{The New Yorker} was \textit{TV People} (1990/09/10). During the next 25 years twenty-seven works have been accepted and published in total. \textit{The New Yorker} editors has their strict judgment on the use of the works. Regardless of how well known and famous a writer is, how close a relationship you had with the editorial department, as long as your work does not meet their standard, your work will be bluntly rejected…Of course even my works have been rejected several times. It is totally different with Japanese magazines. However, if your work can break through this strict difficulties and be


published in *The New Yorker*, you can be able to open up the American market. That is how my name has gradually been known to everyone in America. I think this is a very effective way.”  

About why his books became widely popular around the world, Murakami Haruki observes that these countries were in the wake of certain major social changes. As I discussed in last chapter regarding his rise during China’s Cultural Revolution, the sales of his books rose rapidly in Russia and Eastern European countries after the collapse of the communist system. In Germany, there was a similar trend after the fall of the Berlin Wall. This could be a coincidence, but Murakami suggests that after such a major shift in value systems that affect people’s daily lives, it was only natural that they should seek a new “story,” a new system of “metaphors” by which to structure their thinking. “The ‘soft chaos’ which mixed and intertwined by hopes and worries came out step by step. Perhaps in this state of value conversion, the story I provided quickly brought a new and natural sense of reality.” He further observes, “that the confusion caused by a disruption of an established social system such as communism may have led to people losing faith in their own value systems. Under such circumstances, they will try to accept ‘the uncertainty of reality’,” by inter-adjusting the actual social system with their metaphor system. Murakami states that “the reality of the stories my novels offered may have functioned well as the cogwheel for such adjustment.” In other words, a virtuous cycle led by subjective initiative and objective demand brought luck to Murakami Haruki.

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The fading of Japanese style and growth of American flavor is obvious in his novels. There were dresses, but no kimonos; sandwiches, but no sashimi; cocktails, but no sake; jazz music, but no Japanese Enka. Japanese people like to accept such from Murakami because they like the American taste; foreigners like to accept Murakami’s writings because, while they get a taste of the Japanese flavor, they do not need to be worried by the unfamiliar scenes.

Murakami’s translation experience also contributed to the formation of his own style. “In the final analysis, my novels are mostly learned from translation work. By translating foreign writers works word by word, sentence by sentence, I have fundamentally cracked the secrets of the story. For people who create things, getting oddly settled into a fixed system is what's frightening, Translation is like a window opened onto the outside.”

The literature works that Murakami had been translated basically were American modern literature since 20’s. But Hemingway and Faulkner were not included in his translation list, as well as Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who was one of the pioneers of the Beat Generation. That means Murakami has principles on the selection of writers whom he wants to translate. At first, only modern American literature was on his list. This is a reasonable choice for Murakami who grew up under the influence of modern American culture. Second, these American writers are not necessarily the most famous in a traditional concept, but they must be outstanding and popular among readers. Bungakukai had published an additional publication that brought up all the articles about Haruki Murakami, Mizumaru Anzai. Murakami Asahidō wa ikanishite kitaerareta ka (村上朝日堂はいかにして鎌えられたか). Shintosha, 1999.

Bungakukai (文学界, "Literary World") is a Japanese monthly literary magazine published by Bungeishunju as jinbungaku (纯文学, lit. "pure literature") oriented publication. Along with Shinchō (新潮 New Tide), Gunzo (群像), Bungei, (文藝, “Fiction”) and Subaru (昴), it is one of the five leading literary journals in Japan.
Murakami’s comments about his relationship with American writers since the 1980s. Murakami said he had been influenced by American writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Raymond Chandler, Truman Capote, Kurt Vonnegut, Paul Theroux, Richard Brautigan, Gay Talese, Raymond Carver, Tim O’Brien, Stephen King and so on. The works he translated from English to Japanese included: *The Great Gatsby, Tender Is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald; *The Big Sleep, The Long Goodbye* by Raymond Chandler; *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* by Truman Capote; *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut; and *Trout Fishing in America* by Richard Brautigan.

With his unique insight as a novelist, Murakami talked about following topics:

First, he began to read Raymond Chandler novels when he was in high school. The greatest impression he had was that, “Even though Chandler’s way of life and way of thinking does not exist in real life, I can still feel the vivid living authenticity in his novel.”

Second, after he read Capote’s short story *The Headless Hawk*, he proclaimed that it was “my first piece of real literature after all those hard-boiled novels.”

Third, about Vonnegut and Brautigan, Murakami said, “I have to admit that I was really influenced by Vonnegut. I was really fond of these two writers whose work make me feel happy when I read. But I have no idea why my works were seen as inherited from their style.”

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Four, for Murakami, Paul Theroux is an incredible writer. Murakami said, “he is not like these writers who long for new literary style, but the result is his works are often more avant-garde and more ultra-modern.”

Five, the greatest inspiration Tim O’Brien had to give Murakami was that, “The Nuclear Age could be considered as a grand and interesting ‘comprehensive’ novel. The author exhausted all the spiritual elements and fragments, tangible and intangible, everything were all implied in his works.” As Sam Anderson commented in The New York Times that, “You could even say that translation is the organizing principle of Murakami’s work: that his stories are not only translated but about translation. The signature pleasure of a Murakami plot is watching a very ordinary situation (riding an elevator, boiling spaghetti, ironing a shirt) turn suddenly extraordinary (a mysterious phone call, a trip down a magical well, a conversation with a Sheep Man) — watching a character, in other words, being dropped from a position of existential fluency into something completely foreign and then being forced to mediate, awkwardly, between those two realities. A Murakami character is always, in a sense, translating between radically different worlds: mundane and bizarre, natural and supernatural, country and city, male and female, overground and underground. His entire oeuvre, in other words, is the act of translation dramatized.”

5-2 Critics


The reviews of the influence from American literature are mixed. American writer Jay McInerney once pointed out that there are certain similarities between Carver’s “Put Yourself in My Shoes” and Murakami’s *The Wind-up Bird And Tuesday's Women*. Even though Murakami Haruki said he was not aware of that; it is obvious that American writers’ influences already deeply populate his unconscious. Oe Kenzaburo also mentioned Murakami in his article “Japan’s Dual Identity: A Writer’s Dilemma”:

Amidst such a trend, Murakami, a writer born after the war, is said to be attracting new readers to junbungaku (純文学)\(^1\). It is clear, however, that Murakami's target lies outside the sphere of junbungaku, and that is exactly where he is trying to establish his place. It is generally believed that there is nothing that directly links Murakami with postwar literature of the 1946-70 period. (As a hasty aside here, I believe that any future resuscitation of junbungaku will be possible only if ways are found to fill in the wide gap that exists between Murakami and pre-1970 postwar literature.)\(^2\)

Oe was critical of the “young intellectuals” who bring postmodern theory and postmodernism into Japan as a popular concept. It is obvious that Murakami’s works are too far from traditional Japanese novels and “Japanese Bungaku”. Nathaniel Rich even gave sharp criticisms in *The Atlantic*. “His sentences can be awful, his plots are formulaic—yet his novels mesmerize”; “No great writer writes as many bad sentences as Murakami does”; “It is one of the key aspects of his style, this seamless transition from noirish dread to mystical rumination; the most perfect Murakami title, which really could have been used for any of the 13 novels he has

\(^{170}\) junbungaku (純文学), meaning pure literature.

written since 1979, remains *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World.*" What’s more, literary critic Kuroko Kazuo even speculated about Murakami’s speech in Jerusalem; he noted that rather than to share in the suffering of the Japanese people, the speech was meant to appeal to the international community in order to raise his hopes for the Nobel Prize for literature. In his book *A critique of Murakami Haruki,* Kuroko Kazuo expresses strong dissatisfaction and skepticism toward Murakami Haruki.\(^{173}\)

## 6 Conclusion

I would say he is a serious literature writer but utilizes pop culture as a means of connecting modern youth to historic and deep references. As Murakami once said, “What I want to say here is the most important thing for me as a writer is ‘qualification as an individual’. The value of a literature prize varies depending on different people. They have their own positions, reasons, ideas and living styles. It cannot be compared and discussed together…It cannot be generalized, so I don’t want to be generalized.”\(^{174}\) What’s more, Murakami Haruki considers himself to be, first and foremost, a Japanese writer: “The opinion that my books are not really Japanese seems to me to be very shallow. I certainly think of myself as being a Japanese writer. I write with a different style and maybe with different materials, but I write in Japanese and I’m writing for Japanese society and Japanese people. So I think people are wrong when they are always saying that my style is really mainly influenced by Western literature. As I just said, at


first I wanted to be an international writer, but eventually I saw that I was nothing but a Japanese writer. But even in the beginning I wasn’t only borrowing Western styles and rules. I wanted to change Japanese literature from the inside, not the outside. So I basically made up my own rules.” Ōe Kenzaburō stated once that Murakami Haruki’s work failed in its attempt to address the intellectuals, in a broad sense, since it did not succeed in providing “models” for the present and the future of Japan. Indeed, Murakami’s story telling style has already varied from the traditional Japanese literature style. As a representative of writers who belong to the 1980s generation, followed by Banana Yoshimoto and Ryū Murakami, they are facing the necessity to find a new pathway into the novelistic space. They need to approach new themes and to explore new territories for their generation. In this way Murakami becomes a (in Jay Rubin’s words) —“one-man revolution” in Japanese fictional style: “He nurtured new, urban, cosmopolitan, and distinctly American-flavoured tastes in Japanese writing.”

For decades now, Murakami has been talking about working himself up to write what he calls a “comprehensive novel”. In an interview with Furukawa Hideo in 2009, Murakami said that he wanted to be a writer like Dostoevsky, who could write a “comprehensive novel”, and he also gave his definition of it:

“In my mind at least it means a novel that’s really long and very heavy. It features all kinds of characters, some normal and others highly peculiar, and combines various perspective in a totally organic way. Obviously, a work of this kind can’t be written in the


178 Furukawa Hideo 古川日出男 (1966–) is hailed by many in Japan’s literary world as a prodigy worthy of inheriting the mantle of Haruki Murakami. After working as an editor, freelance writer, and stage director, he made his debut in 1998 with 13 (Thirteen). In 2002, he won the Mystery Writers of Japan Prize and the Japan Science Fiction Award for Arabia no yoru no shuzoku (The Arabian Nightbreeds)
first person…A comprehensive novel weaves together a number of stories that combine to create an anarchic mix of humor and seriousness; yet while it deals with situations that are inherently chaotic, a clear and consistent worldview form the backbone of the work. It operates as a kind of melting pot in which all these reciprocal factors can be combined…I want to start gradually moving towards constructing this kind of novel.”

This style is also what we have seen in his novel *IQ84*, which is full of anger, violence, disaster, weird sex and strange new realities. It is also a book that seems to want to hold all of Japan inside of it. I want to summarize the meaning of this as the following aspects:

First of all, the purpose of this comprehensive style is to enhance the charm and expressiveness of the narrative by using this new form of storytelling. In terms of content, it is a “multi-dimensional” description of “this era”. It not only includes a variety of social phenomena but also integrates a variety of world-views and the social consciousness.

Secondly, in the creative approach, this “comprehensive novel” uses a variety of exploration techniques to achieve a “comprehensive effect”. Two of the most prominent techniques are the multi-level narrative and intertextuality.

In addition, in terms of genre, a “comprehensive novel” shows features which go beyond the “literary genre”; it crossed the boundaries of pure literature and popular literature, and also breaks the barriers between realism, modernism and postmodernism.

For those critics which regard his work as not pure literature, but instead popular literature, I would argue that Murakami’s works intentionally go deeper than pure literature typically would, obscuring the boundaries of pure literature and popular literature. “... in this combination of the mimetic and the formulaic, and consequently of ‘high art’ and ‘mass culture’,

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Murakami produces a quintessentially postmodern tone in his literature.” More exactly, Murakami’s writing did not fail to achieve this “junbungaku”, but suspends the opposition, affixed at the beginning of the twentieth century in Japan, between “high art” and “mass literature” (大衆文学 taishū bungaku).

In the early stage of his creation, Murakami introduced entertainment factors into his work. For example, in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the protagonist had to find a mysterious sheep, which also involved him into a serious mysterious events. This is obviously similar to the hard-boiled detective novels; in *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, parts of the story in end of the world took place in a medieval style town where lives mysterious unicorn and people who do not have a shadow. Apparently, this setting absorbed some of the elements from mystery fiction. In *Hard-Boiled Wonderland*, the protagonist is a “Calcutec” who has been trained to use his subconscious as an encryption key. This setting is also similar to science fiction; in *IQ84*, entertaining elements are more blatant. Norihiro Katō writes, “It is a new attempt to introduce entertainment as a literature style.” The love story between Aomame and Tengo is like the plot in Japanese popular pure love novels. Murakami Haruki’s novels did combine the different forms of pure literature and popular culture, thus developing his own style. As Murakami said himself: “I used the structure of the mystery novel and filled it with entirely different ingredients. In other words, the structure was, for me, a kind of vehicle.”

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mysterious “sheep”? The author did not explain it in the novel. With its rich symbolism meaning of “sheep”, Murakami distinguished his novel from ordinary detective novels.

From the reaction of readers and literary critics, we can also get a sense of Murakami’s comprehensive style. On the one hand, Murakami continually draws attention from famous Japanese literature critics, such as Komori Yōichi (小森陽一), Fujii Shozo (藤井 省三), Kuroko Kazuo (黒古 一夫) and Katō Norihiro (加藤典洋) who criticize his work from the perspective of pure literature. On the other hand, different from the current pure literature, which in a depressed situation, Murakami has a large number of readers, and his work is even more popular than most popular literature. It can be said that Murakami combines seriousness (profundity) and readability (business value) very well in his novels. It was his departure from traditional values that appealed to the young generation in Asia and spread the “Murakami Phenomenon” throughout the region. As Tomoki Wakatsuki argued that:

His works are characteristically located in ‘no place’ and concern the “search for identity” that attracts readers across cultures. He presents a departure from conventional boundaries, allowing readers to share a common story that can be approached regardless of national, religious or cultural differences. Unlike traditional Japanese writers who were appreciated for their “exoticness” and exclusive “Japaneseness”, Murakami’s everyday cosmopolitanism presents a new Japaneseness that is favorably shared in the global cultural sphere. It promotes an autonomous self-identity that is uninterested in ethnocentric collectivism.183

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Miura Reiichi, a professor from Nagoya University comments that: “Instead of saying Murakami Haruki is representing Japanese writers, it is better to say that this global writer happens to be a Japanese.”

By his character’s words in IQ84, Murakami said “We’re drawing close to the end of the twentieth century. Things are different from back in Chekhov’s time. No more horse-drawn carriages, no more women in corsets. Somehow the world survived the Nazis, the atomic bomb, and modern music. Even the way novels are composed has changed drastically. So it’s nothing to worry about.”

Time has changed. As a postmodern literature writer, Murakami, by using his unique writing style, has fulfilled his duty as a serious writer and guided his readers who are trying to find an answer to their personal questions regarding identity, meaning, and their place in the world.

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