

Tomoki Wakatsuki

The Haruki Phenomenon

Haruki Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer



Springer

The Haruki Phenomenon

Tomoki Wakatsuki

The Haruki Phenomenon

Haruki Murakami as Cosmopolitan Writer

 Springer

Tomoki Wakatsuki
Tokyo, Japan

ISBN 978-981-15-7548-8 ISBN 978-981-15-7549-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-7549-5>

© Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2020

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Library_Stuttgart_2016_Jpg_\(159089915\).jpeg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Library_Stuttgart_2016_Jpg_(159089915).jpeg)

Photographer: Steffen Fritz

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd.
The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

Foreword: Breaking Down the Wall of Japanese Literature

To me, this monograph represents the first attempt in English to apply a systematic and plausible approach to explain what has come to be known as the “Murakami Haruki *genshō*,” better known in English as the “Murakami phenomenon” or simply the “Haruki phenomenon.” Our current parlance has taken on some bizarre expressions, including (alas) “Murakami-mania” (does this mean there is such a thing as a “Murakami-maniac?”) and even “Harukist.”

These gruesome neologisms express, however, something very real that is happening today: Murakami Haruki’s books are being read globally, by what must be one of the most diverse readerships in history. As the author of this volume notes, echoing numerous preceding scholars (Jay Rubin, for one; myself for another), Murakami is read by people around the world, from every social stratum (butcher, baker, and candlestick maker), from all religious backgrounds, from every age group. He is read, perhaps more importantly, by Japanese and non-Japanese alike. And this leads to one of the most common questions I hear—usually from bewildered Japanese news reporters—about this author: why is he so popular outside of Japan? What is his secret?

My strategy is sometimes to turn the question back on itself: how do we explain Murakami’s success in Japan? What accounts for his readership here, in his home country, where he seems to break every literary rule, thumbs his nose at tradition, at the literary establishment (commonly known here as the Bundan or “literary guild”), at everything that Japanese literature is supposed to be? How, in short, does he get away with all that and still have Japanese readers lined up for miles to buy a million or more copies of his latest tome?

The answer may be the same for both questions, though in slightly different ways. Just as an increasingly globalizing world has been hunting for a more cosmopolitan flavor in its reading matter—cosmopolitan, but without being snotty about it, what Wakatsuki will term “everyday cosmopolitanism”—Murakami happens onto the stage. As the world seeks out what, for want of a better term, we might call “global” literature, Japanese today seem to be looking for something more than the usual lip service given to catchphrases like *kokusaika* (“internationalization”) and *gurōbaruka*

("globalization"). And this is, and always has been, tied to the intricate question of identity in Japan.

Japan (as a nation) has always struggled with a sense of dual identity: curious about the outside world, yet insular, even xenophobic, toward that same world. Certainly, since the Meiji period (1868–1912), and perhaps even before that, there has been an apparently contradictory urge to be (and be recognized as) the "equal" of industrialized nations around the world and at the same time to maintain a clear and unshakeable sense of "being Japanese." It is a kind of tightrope of identity; let us be "international," but let us be cautious not to become *too* international. The well-documented efforts of the Japanese government over the past three decades to bring about the internationalization and globalization of Japanese society are, in fact, barely concealed attempts to gain respect and market share from the rest of the world, but on strictly Japanese terms. Japanese schoolchildren are ordered to learn English and exposed to native English speakers from primary school onward (witness the growth of the JET Program(me)), but always under carefully controlled conditions, like studying foreign cultures and languages in a laboratory. Not that I mean to put this down; at least Japanese schoolchildren are being exposed to *some* foreign culture. By contrast, how many American schoolchildren run around trying to greet foreign visitors to their country in their own languages?

But these efforts are beginning to wear thin. Young Japanese are no longer shying away from learning real English (and other foreign languages), and they are beginning to do something that many in the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports, and Technology (MEXT, for short) probably never envisioned: they are using their foreign languages to encounter the "other," a term that will arise often in this volume to signify cultures and peoples different from themselves. It is a cornerstone for the cosmopolitan identity, a willingness to meet the difference in the world and, rather than remark on its foreignness and exoticism, actually *join* with that difference, be affected, forever altered, by that encounter. In this spirit, young Japanese respond positively to the cultural bounty that surrounds their islands; they travel abroad, live in (as opposed to visit or tour) other countries, picking up what the world has to offer. And they do this not just to bring new ideas and technologies back to Japan (as was the practice in the Meiji period, relieving other Japanese of the burden of going abroad themselves), but to *internalize* this multicultural knowledge and understanding, making it a part of themselves, as truly cosmopolitan Japanese. This is the new Japanese "subject," and s/he is a rapidly increasing commodity.

Today's Japanese are different from any of the past; culturally savvy, multilingual, curious about the outside world, and with one additional advantage to their forebears: access to that world, through technology, and also through opportunity to go abroad. They are, admittedly, confused about their identity, but rather than undergoing a "crisis" over this, they revel in their confusion. I see this sense of delighted confusion every day on my university campus, among students who are born to Japanese parents, yet have grown up or studied for extended periods abroad. I see it in others who have one or more non-Japanese parents, yet were born and raised in Japan. And I hear that same confusion echoed in more conservative visitors

to my campus, who ask me, “how many of your students are Japanese?” To which I usually reply, “How do you define ‘Japanese’?”

There is usually no coherent response to this.

And just as there is no clear definition of what it means to “be Japanese” (despite decades of discussion through the *Nihonjinron* (“theory of Japanese”)) debates, there is no longer any sense of what constitutes “Japanese literature.” Is this supposed to be merely fiction written by Japanese people? How “Japanese” do they need to be? Are the thoroughly English novels of Kazuo Ishiguro (who was born in Nagasaki) actually “Japanese literature”? Should we exclude the novels of Hideo Levy, who has not a drop of Japanese blood in him, yet writes in Japanese? What about the various writers of Chinese or Korean ethnicity who have lived their lives in Japan and write in Japanese as their own mother tongue? Do they count?

What I am trying to say is that the “Haruki Murakami phenomenon” is not a “Haruki” phenomenon at all, but a global literature phenomenon. It is part of a wider breakdown of clear-cut cultural and ethnic boundaries in the globalized world. This phenomenon is familiar enough to many of us who come from diverse, multicultural societies—the People’s Republic of China, the Russian Federation, or the USA, to name only a few—but it scares Japanese conservatives half to death. We might argue that the phenomenon is named after Murakami in part because the idea of a full-on, no-holds-barred cultural and ethnic free-for-all is simply not something we are ready to face in Japan at this time. The “Haruki phenomenon” is still, for many, a Japanese show, still something in which the Japanese can take pride as the originating culture. Its localization also allows us, for a moment longer, to ignore its ontological status as a mere part of something much bigger: the cultural “wave” of the cosmopolitan sphere that is engulfing the entire planet, Japan along with everywhere else.

But we must also be fair in assigning considerable responsibility to Murakami as a leading voice in this wave. He did not invent multiculturalism, nor cosmopolitanism, nor the global novel. What he *did* do—and this may have been purely a stroke of luck—is to bring the question of cultural heritage and nationalism to the forefront of the literary debate in Japan. Perhaps it is doubly fortunate that Murakami is a Japanese writer: in the first place, the world *does* respect and appreciate Japanese art; in the second, that same art has always been kept at arm’s length from the world, hidden behind a jealously guarded wall of cultural mystery. Wakatsuki writes of the “Big Three” Japanese writers—Jun’ichiro Tanizaki, Yasunari Kawabata, and Yukio Mishima—as authors sanctioned for foreign consumption, both by the sincere efforts of their translators and by virtue of their thoroughly “Japanese” nature. Put another way, the Japanese literary establishment was happy to have these three writers represent Japanese literature as a whole, for they were “exotic,” and in some instances, “unintelligible” to all but a handful of their non-Japanese readers. It was an idea that appealed to the conservative idea that Japan is a unique culture, truly accessible only to Japanese. All the world was welcome to have a look, to marvel at the uniqueness; but further penetration was to be carefully controlled.

Murakami broke down that carefully guarded the cultural wall. And now he throws eggs at it. It is difficult not to draw analogies with Mikhail Gorbachev, breaking with his Soviet hardliners and obliging Ronald Reagan’s challenge to “tear

down” the Berlin Wall, for Murakami was, in effect, breaking faith with a century of Japanese literary tradition, redefining the Japanese novel as something that was *not* steeped in mysterious cultural signs, nor written in obscure language, but something clear and accessible even to readers who knew nothing about Japan or its people.

Is it any wonder, then, that the world stepped up to “claim” Murakami as their own, even as the Japanese literary establishment was busy casting him out? And Murakami was ready to join with a global readership. The “wave” of his popularity radiated outward, from a core of readers in Japan to a mass of readers in East Asia, North America, and Europe, and this was no accident, but a carefully planned strategy on the part of translators, publicists, and of course, the author himself. The strategy has worked. Murakami is the recipient of a laundry list of major literary awards around the world, even as he remains unanointed by the coveted Akutagawa Prize in his homeland. He probably *ought to* be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, if only for what he has done to break down the separating walls of national literature. But this may also be exactly the reason he will never win it. And as speculation on this subject arises every year around the beginning of October, it may well be that the Japanese literary establishment would like him back—perhaps if they offered him the Akutagawa Prize now? But he probably will not come back. For he now belongs to the world: a *global* writer who happens to write in Japanese.

The volume that follows, written by a scholar not of Japanese literature but of social theory, cultural studies, and cosmopolitanism, take important steps toward explaining the “Haruki phenomenon” from the perspective of a changing global cultural scene. It confronts honestly and boldly the identity conflict of “Japanese” versus “other,” outlines frankly the ambivalence of today’s Japanese subject, and explores Murakami’s impact on both the Japanese and the global cultural spheres. Wakatsuki looks unblinkingly at the so-called *Nihonjinron* debates that sought to uphold the concept of Japanese uniqueness and was in many cases used to valorize the Japanese race and culture vis-à-vis the rest of Asia, if not the whole world.

Most importantly, in this volume Wakatsuki positions Murakami himself as a cosmopolitan; not merely as a Japanese who appreciates the trappings of foreign cultures (as one might say of Tanizaki or Mishima), but as a human subject who encounters the cultural “other” in a spirit of openness, hospitality, and tolerance, and who welcomes the “other” into his own identity, his own worldview, and on a practical level, into his own professional work as an author.

This is what made Haruki Murakami the ideal writer to break the closed circle of Japanese literature—to break down the wall, so to speak—and offer himself up as a voice for the entire world. He may not be the first Japanese writer to exhibit this quality of openness, but he is the first of his kind to catch the full attention of the world, as well as his own people, and to “speak” in a language that is intelligible to all. And this may be the true “phenomenon” of Haruki Murakami.

Acknowledgements

Like many monographs of this kind, this work began life as a doctoral dissertation. I am deeply indebted to Paul Jones and Claudia Tazreiter at the University of New South Wales in Sydney for their valuable advice in the fields of cultural studies and sociology. I extend thanks as well to Jocelyn Pixley and Kimiko Kimoto for their help and encouragement during my postdoctoral research. I would like to express my gratitude to some former colleagues at the Embassy of Canada in Tokyo, particularly to Deborah Lyons and Christine Nakamura, for their encouragement to pursue my academic studies. Understanding multiculturalism in Australia and Canada has led me to investigate cosmopolitanism in the age of globalization. Thanks are due to my dear friends Karl Vollmer, Kyung-Ae Han, Russell, Maria, Atsuko, and Tae-Yong, for always being there for me, from various parts of the world. I also wish to express my appreciation to the members of various graduate seminars in contemporary Japanese literature at Sophia University, who were my real-life inspirations and models of everyday cosmopolitanism.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the instructor of that seminar, Professor Matthew Strecher at Sophia University, without whom this monograph would never have materialized. His continued support throughout the course of preparing the manuscript empowered me to carry out and complete this journey. I am also deeply grateful to editors Rebecca Zhu, Carolyn Zhang, Chino Hasebe, and Yoshio Saito at Springer for their constant advice and support and for their apparently endless patience as I moved through the painstaking process of revising the final manuscript.

On a personal note, my interest in cultural identity goes back to the early childhood of living abroad, and my late mother's war-time experience as a Japanese girl born in Sakhalin was what inspired me to pursue the idea of identity and belonging. I thank my parents and family for their trust and encouragement. And last, but certainly not least, I am truly grateful to my husband, Noboru, for always believing in me. Thank you for being my personal cheerleader all along, even though you have never read Haruki Murakami!

Notes

Pronunciation and Name Order

Conforming with the publisher's standards, macrons have not been used in this text to indicate Japanese long vowels, except in the titles of Murakami's works, names of Japanese authors, including their works, and Japanese literary terms of relevance. Those of Murakami's works which have been translated are initially given with their original Japanese titles (written phonetically) and thereafter are cited using their English titles. Works not yet translated are given with their Japanese titles.

Japanese names are given in the Western order, with a given name followed by surname. However, citations of Japanese-language sources and of scholarly English-language sources in which the original Japanese order is used are shown in their original order.

Translation of Japanese Sources

All translations from Japanese sources are done by the author of this manuscript, unless noted otherwise.

Permissions

Portions of Chap. 4 are reprinted here with the kind permission of Sense Publishers. The original material appeared in 'The Haruki Phenomenon and Everyday Cosmopolitanism: Belonging as a "Citizen of the World"'. In: M. Strecher and P. Thomas (eds) *Haruki Murakami: Challenging Authors*, pp. 1–16.

Portions of Chap. 5 originally appeared in “Haruki Murakami as a Cosmopolitan Phenomenon: from ‘Ordinary’ to ‘Celebrity’.” *Celebrity Studies Journal* 9(2) (April 2018), pp. 248–254, and are used with permission.

Contents

1	Introduction: A Cosmopolitan Roadmap to the Haruki Phenomenon	1
1.1	Is Murakami World Literature?	3
1.2	Everyday Cosmopolitanism and the “Other World”	5
1.3	Introducing the Chapters	7
	References	12
2	Everyday Cosmopolitanism and Haruki-Mania	13
2.1	The Haruki Phenomenon	13
2.2	Identity and Belonging, as a Cosmopolitan	16
2.3	After the Speeches in Jerusalem and Barcelona	19
2.4	Murakami’s Cosmopolitan Commitment in <i>Colorless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage</i>	22
2.5	<i>Le Mal du Pays</i> : Past Memories and Beyond	23
2.6	In Search of the “Right Place” of Belonging	25
	References	30
3	Is Murakami “un-Japanese”? The Myth of “Japaneseness”	33
3.1	The Myth of “Japaneseness” and the <i>Nihonjinron</i> Discourse	34
3.2	The <i>watakushi shōsetsu</i> and the Japanese Self	37
3.3	The Language of the New Meiji Subject	39
3.4	Novel Subjects for a New Nation-State	42
3.5	Lost Identity: Westernization and Japanization	46
	References	51
4	A Friend of the “Egg”: Murakami Speaks in Jerusalem	55
4.1	As a Novelist and an Individual	56
4.2	From Cosmopolitan Exile to Cosmopolitan Commitment	58
4.3	What Is the <i>System</i> ?	61
4.4	Representations of the <i>System</i> in Murakami’s Works	63