

Haruki Murakami and the Transition of Modern Culture

—From the Perspective of Young Readers in East Asian Cities

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Abstract

Since the end of the 1990s, common phenomena can be seen in the youth culture of East Asian cities. The works they like to read have changed. Literature is no longer the most popular field for them. The number of people who like manga, animation, light novels, etc. is constantly increasing. And the way they read texts has also changed. If it can be said that most of the previous readers pay attention to interpreting the author's thoughts or appreciating the storyline and style, many young readers now pay attention to the character. This means that they do not regard the work as an organic whole, but as a combination of several elements (=modules), and they appreciate each module separately. They also store the modules in their mind as a database, and take it out to rebuild the module freely, and then appreciate it again. This change has also brought about changes in readers' request for works. If it can be said that former readers seek to get in touch with human, social, and historical truth through works, young readers now seek to communicate with fellow-friends through works. Behind this phenomenon are changes in the mood of young people. They feel a certain barrier to society, and many people have a sense of loneliness, blockage, and emptiness. It is not simple change in the trend from literature to subculture. It means the fundamental changes that modern culture has faced since its formation in the 19th century. The way Haruki Murakami (村上春樹)'s fans read his works is a typical example of the changes in literary reading. They resonate with the sense of loneliness, blockage, and emptiness of the work. In a sense, it can be said that they extract the part that matches their feelings (=a certain kind of module) from the work, appreciate and share it. What they seek is not to get in touch with a certain sense of truth, not to think about issues and lead to solutions through literature, but to feel sympathy and share comfort. From those points, their focus and request for works are different from those of previous literature.

Not only their reading method but also their activity is similar with the subculture fans. For example, exchange activities between fans are active. Judging from the situation of the fans of Haruki Murakami above, the readership of literary works seems to have begun to change. Haruki Murakami may be one of the very few writers who can adapt to such changes in the readership. Perhaps this is an important reason for his popularity all over the world. To this point, Haruki Murakami, like subculture, represents a major turning point in modern culture.

Keywords

Haruki Murakami, Youth Culture, Resonance, Loneliness, Blockage, Emptiness, Relief and Healing, Communication with Fellow Readers

1. What Is the Problem?

Since the end of the 1990s, common phenomena can be seen in the youth culture of East Asian cities. Firstly, the works they like to read have changed. Literature is no longer the most popular field for them. The number of people who like manga, animation, light novels, etc., so-called subcultural works, is constantly increasing. And the way they read texts has also changed. For example, if it can be said that most of the previous readers pay attention to interpreting the author's thoughts or appreciating the storyline and style, many young readers now pay attention to the character. This means that they do not regard the work as an organic whole, but as a combination of several elements (=modules), and they appreciate each module separately¹. They also store the module in their mind like a database², and take it out to rebuild the module (character, etc.)³ freely, and then appreciate it again. This change has also brought about changes in readers' request for works. If it can be said that former readers seek to get in touch with human, social, and historical truth through works, young readers now seek to communicate with fellow-friends through works. Here is the reason why they focused on the secondary creation. If it is an original work, those who look at the work may not recognize the worldview and the characters in the work because it is original. But for the secondary creation, the fellow friends all know the borrowed characters or worldview, which has an advantage in communication. Behind this phenomenon are changes in the mood of young people. They feel a certain barrier to society, and many people have a sense of loneliness, blockage, and emptiness. For them, the existing literary

¹Refer to Lev Manovich (2001). *The language of new media*. Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press.

²Refer to Hiroki Azuma (2001) (東浩紀) *Animalizing postmodern-Japanese society as seen from otaku* (『動物化するポストモダン-オタクから見た日本社会』). Kodansha shinsho (講談社新書) Tokyo.

³In fact, everything can be modularized except for characters. For example, in a mobile phone novel, the story itself is segmented into several modules. There is an element of the story that is commonly called 'the seven deadly sins of mobile phone novels'. It is ironic that most mobile phone novels are a combination of seven elements (modules): prostitution, rape, pregnancy, drugs, incurable diseases, suicide, and true love. Young readers appreciate the work as a combination of these various modules.

works do not inspire them, nor do they make them feel the real feeling of contact with people and society as before.⁴ However, it is not simply a change in the trend from literature to subculture. The above phenomenon is not only a problem surrounding subcultures, but the same changes can be seen in the reading of pure literature. So, as I said, it means the fundamental changes that modern culture (which regards literature as an important pillar) has faced since its formation in the 19th century⁵. Among them, the way Haruki Murakami (村上春樹)'s fans read his works is a typical example of the changes in literary reading.

Of course, Haruki Murakami was accepted by readers overseas through translation. There are many discrepancies in the translation of each language. For example, in the Chinese version, the translations of Lin Shaohua (林少华) and Shi Xiaowei (施小炜) from the mainland and Lai Mingzhu (賴明珠) from Taiwan are so different. The differences between English and other languages version need not be discussed. Some English translations have deleted tens of thousands of words from the original text. However, in the questionnaire surveys and interviews I conducted in various cities, when I asked “Which parts of Haruki Murakami do you like?”, the most common responses from almost all cities were “resonate with the loneliness of the characters in the work” and “resonate with the sense of emptiness of the work”⁶. (Related to Beijing Questionnaire Results, please refer to **Figure 1**) And many people feel some kind of “relief” or “healing” from it. Although the translations are different, the readers’ feelings are similar. Although Haruki Murakami’s works are regarded as pure literature, the way young readers read his works and the request for them are different from the reading of previous literary works.

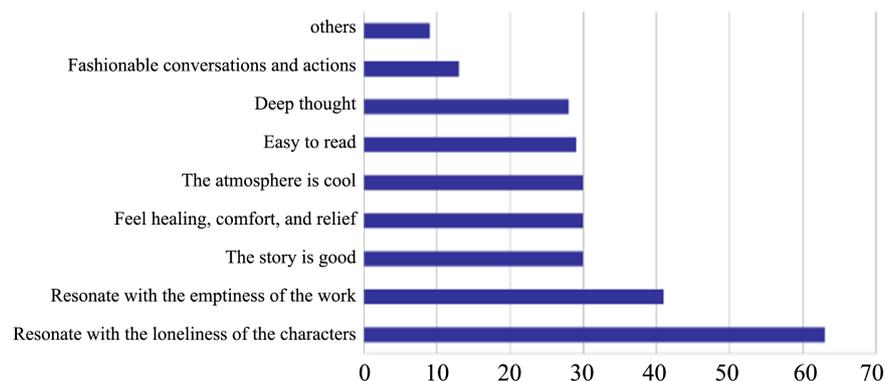


Figure 1. Questionnaire survey in Beijing “What do you like about Haruki Murakami’s novels”?

⁴For a detailed analysis, please refer to Takumasa Senno (2020), “Where are we going now? Subculture in East Asian cities and the heart of youth” CULTURAL STUDIES, VOL. 34, NO. 2, 208–234.

⁵To be precise, the birth of modern culture is the first half of the century in Europe and America, the end of the 19th century in Japan, and the beginning of the 20th century in China.

⁶The fans of Haruki Murakami who answered “Resonate with the loneliness of the characters” (the people who liked or prefer Haruki on the questionnaire), 95 out of 126 in Shanghai, 63 out of 96 in Beijing, and Taipei 80 out of 102, 25 out of 65 in Hong Kong, and 20 out of 45 in Singapore, all ranked first. The fans who answered “resonate with the emptiness of the work”, 64 in Shanghai, 41 in Beijing, 68 in Taipei, and 24 in Hong Kong, all ranked second. In Singapore, it is slightly different. The second-placed answer is “the work has a depth of thought”. There were 6 people who answered “Resonating with the emptiness of the work”.

It is not seeking to get in touch with a certain sense of truth, but to resonate with the sense of loneliness, blockage, and emptiness, and to share some kind of “relief” or “healing.” And this corresponds to the feelings of young people. Their hobbies for Haruki Murakami are also similar with the fans of subcultures and their fan activities. (In fact, most subculture lovers also like Haruki Murakami’s works). This seems to mean that the readership has also begun to change in the field of literature. The mood of young readers in East Asian cities (feeling of loneliness, blockage, emptiness, barrier to society, etc.) may also promote the above reading.

Specifically, how do young people read Haruki Murakami’s works? How does their way of loving Haruki Murakami reflect the above changes? What kind of changes has taken place in the field of literature? Below, we carefully analyze these problems.

2. The Sense of Loneliness, Blockage, and Emptiness in Haruki Murakami’s Works

When we discuss the problems of the sense of loneliness, blockage, and emptiness in Haruki Murakami’s works, we must first understand the characteristics of these feelings described by him.

Many people have already talked about the sense of loneliness and emptiness in Haruki Murakami’s works. In fact, this has something to do with his temperament. He himself has a strong sense of loneliness, and it can also be said that he has a tendency of autism spectrum. It should be noted here that I am not saying that Haruki Murakami is a patient with autism. Autism spectrum is a new discourse produced to grasp the mental state of modern people. To put it simply, it refers to “not good at temporary interpersonal relationships, but instinctively has a strong desire to prioritize one’s own care and practice, or to maintain one’s own rhythm” (Hideo Honda, 2013, “*Autism Spectrum*”, p. 13, softbank shinsho, 本田秀夫『自閉症スペクトラム』ソフトバンク新書, Tokyo.). This includes people who have severe symptoms and are not suitable for social activities and should be treated. It also includes people who can fit the society without treatment. The latter is not a “disease” in the general sense, it can be said a certain personal temperament. Psychiatrist Hideo Honda said that 10% of people in modern society belong to this spectrum. They just often feel the difficulty of interpersonal relationship to some extent, and with a certain sense of loneliness.

The so-called Asperger’s syndrome in the past is also a similar symptom. This syndrome is now classified by the autism spectrum as a part of it. According to general statements, Asperger’s syndrome has the following three characteristics. Social deficit, communication deficit, and rigidity or restricted interest. These are of course the characteristics of the autism spectrum. Most people with this tendency are very intelligent, no different from ordinary people. Among the famous artists, writers, and scholars, there are also many people who tend to Asperger’s syndrome. In fact, almost all people have similar temperament, but if it reaches a level that is not suitable for society, treatment should be started, and then it is considered a certain kind of “illness.” This means that there are many

people who are not ill, but they are not good at interpersonal communication and love loneliness in society. For example, how does a doctor judge you are a spectrum of autism? According to the questionnaire DSM-V set by the American Psychiatric Association, divided into three columns from A to C, in case that each column has two or more items that match, then it is judged as an autism spectrum. This means that there may be more people who have matching items but do not reach the level of two items in each column. They are not sick, but they tend to love loneliness and are not good at interacting with others.

Haruki Murakami himself, and many characters in his works, have this tendency. The question that we explore is the relationship between this loneliness factor and the change in the way of reading the text, as well as the change in the reader's requests for literature.

Firstly, it is necessary to confirm that Haruki Murakami himself has the temperament of loneliness (social deficit). He said: "I'm the kind of person who likes to be by himself. To put a finer point on it, I'm the type of person who doesn't find it painful to be alone." (Haruki Murakami, 2009, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* 『走ることに ついて 語る ときに 僕の 語る こと』 Vintage International p. 15. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle version) and "Even so, after I got married at an early age (I was twenty-two) I gradually got used to living with someone else." (ibid. p. 16) In this work he also said that he doesn't like to exercise with others, only likes one person swimming or running. At least it can be said that his love for loneliness tends to be autistic. In "*Haruki Murakami Goes to Meet Hayao Kawai*", p. 79, Shincho bunko (Haruki Murakami, 1999, 『村上春樹, 河合隼雄に会いに行く』, 新潮文庫) he said: "I think writing novels is a kind of healing behavior in many parts." In addition, his novels also contain similar views; "In the end, writing is not a full step toward self-healing, just a tiny, very tentative move in that direction." (Haruki Murakami, 1979, *Hear the Wind Sing* 『風の歌を聴け』, p. 4. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle version) It is possible that he is conscious of his own trend.

As a result, there are also many descriptions of loneliness in his novels. And they almost have the tendency of autism spectrum, that is, loneliness belonging to social deficit, communication deficit, and rigidity or restricted interest. Then, what parts of Haruki's works do readers feel the sense of loneliness, blockage, emptiness, and resonate with it?

3. Resonance with the Sense of Loneliness, Blockage, and Emptiness

Let us first look at the example of social deficit.

The first example is a description in the work "*South of the Border, West of the Sun*" (国境の南、太陽の西) (Haruki Murakami, 1992), which has relatively strong autobiographical factors. The protagonist's girlfriend said to the protagonist as follows,

"You prefer to think things over all by yourself, and you don't like people peeking inside your head. Maybe that's because you're an only child. You're

used to thinking and acting alone. You figure that as long as you understand something, that's enough."

(What Girlfriend Izumi said to the protagonist. Chapter 3, *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, Vintage International. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle version, p. 38.)

The girlfriend Izumi criticized the protagonist's "social deficit", in other words the trend of autism spectrum. And looking at the following example, the protagonist does have such a tendency. This part describes his tendency to become less and less accustomed to society after graduation from college, that is, to strengthen the tendency of "social deficit".

I withdrew into myself. I ate alone, took walks alone, went swimming alone, and went to concerts and movies alone. I didn't feel hurt or sad.

(the protagonist's monologue. Chapter 5, *ibid.* p. 51.)

Above example illustrates how the protagonist of this novel is not good at interpersonal relationships and loves loneliness.

Many similar characters can be seen in Murakami's novels. There are two examples in China's most popular novel by Haruki Murakami (1987), *Norwegian Wood* (ノルウェイの森). The first example is a dialogue between the protagonist and his girlfriend Naoko's friend Reiko. The second example is what Naoko said to the protagonist "I".

"Just kidding," she said. "Don't get mad. But really, though, what are you good at?"

"Nothing special. I have things I like to do."

"For instance?"

"Hiking trips. Swimming. Reading."

"You like to do things alone, then?"

"I guess so. I could never get excited about games you play with other people. I can't get into them. I lose interest."

(*Norwegian Wood*, Vintage International p. 114. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle version.)

"... You were the link connecting us with the outside world. We were struggling through you to fit in with the outside world as best we could. In the end, it didn't work, of course." (Chapter 6, What Naoko said to me, *ibid.* p. 129)

The previous example describes a lonely protagonist who cannot get used to society. The second example is that Naoko summarized the relationship with the protagonist and said that it is difficult to communicate with the outside world, and both indicate the trend of "social deficit".

That is not all. The following two examples are conversation when the protagonist's girlfriend Naoko and her friend Reiko introduce the situation of the hospitalized person to the protagonist "I", and the protagonist's impression of the hospitalized person.

Patients with problems like ours are often blessed with special abilities. So everyone here is equal—patients, staff—and you.

(What Reiko said to me. Chapter 6, *ibid.* p. 97)

The dining hall had all the atmosphere of a specialized-machine-tool trade fair. People with a strong interest in a limited field came together in a limited spot and exchanged information understood only by themselves.

(Thoughts of the protagonist “I”. Chapter 6, *ibid.* p. 107)

The former shows that although the people in the hospital including Naoko and Reiko are mentally ill, they are very intelligent. The latter expresses that they tend to have “social deficit”.

The above examples all describe the protagonist “I” and the heroine Naoko have the tendency of autism spectrum, and no matter how hard they try, they can’t get rid of this difficulty. In this regard, “*Norwegian Wood*” is not a romance novel, but a novel describing the process of lonely persons healing the hurt in their heart.

Next, let’s look at the description of communication deficit. The dialogue between the protagonist “I” and his girlfriend in the first chapter of “*Dance Dance Dance*” (ダンス・ダンス・ダンス) is a typical example.

“I like this very much that you and I are together, but I don’t like to stay together from morning to night. What’s the matter?”

“Hmm.”

“It’s not that I’m upset when I’m with you, but that the air becomes thinner, like it’s on the moon.”

...

“Anyway, I sometimes feel that the air becomes as thin as on the moon, being with you.”

“It’s not that the air on the moon is thin,” I pointed out. “There is no air at all on the moon’s surface. So...”

(Haruki Murakami, 1991, “*Dance Dance Dance*”, Chapter 1. pp 19-20, *kodansha bunko* (講談社文庫), translated by Senno)

The girlfriend said: “I sometimes feel that the air becomes as thin as on the moon”, which means that although I like you, I sometimes feel a certain barrier when I am with you. But the protagonist replied: “It’s not that the air on the moon is thin”, and “there is no air on the moon’s surface at all.” He could not understand her real meaning, only understood the meaning of the words. This became a reason why he felt lonely. This is also one of the characteristics of the autism spectrum, “communication deficit”.

Finally, we look at examples that describe rigidity or restricted interest. The following is also the dialogue in “*South of the Border, West of the Sun*”.

I started to go to the library, devouring every book I could lay my hands on. Once I began a book, I couldn’t put it down. It was like an addiction; I read while I ate, on the train, in bed until late at night in school, where I’d keep

the book hidden so I could read during class.

(The Protagonist's Monologue. Chapter 2, *South of the Border, West of the Sun* Vintage International p. 20. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle version)

The protagonist "I" is a high school student, and his reading behavior expresses the temperament of "rigidity or restricted interest". He seems to have a tendency towards autism spectrum.

Such descriptions of loneliness or love of loneliness are countless in Murakami Haruki's works. The sense of loneliness described by Haruki Murakami is nothing more than the suffering of people who are not good at interpersonal relationships and cannot get used to the society. I said that it has the trend of autism spectrum. The important thing is that Murakami's fans resonate with the loneliness of the characters in the above works, and they also resonate with the storyline that does not reach a satisfactory ending. It certainly has a strong sense of emptiness. We can see this trend among readers in Japan and other East Asian cities. What they seek is not the feeling of getting in touch with a certain kind of truth. At least, regarding to Haruki Murakami, the way readers read literary works has obviously changed.

4. Sharing the Sense of "Healing" and "Relief"

There is another important characteristic of the way that Haruki Murakami's fans read his works. They feel some kind of "relief" or "healing" from it. Haruki Murakami described characters with a sense of loneliness and blockage, while sending readers "this is also possible" and "you are allowed." For example, in "*South of the Border, West of the Sun*", there is a following description.

I felt again like a helpless, confused twelve-year-old. I had no idea what I should do, what I should say. I tried my best to stay calm and use my head. But it was hopeless. Everything I said and did was wrong. Every emotion was swallowed up in that radiant smile. *Don't worry*, her smile told me. *It's all right*. (Chapter 12, the protagonist's monologue, *South of the Border, West of the Sun*, Vintage International, pp. 143-144. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle version.)⁷

The protagonist "I" feels that he is not going well, but from the smile of his girlfriend, he feels "Don't worry, it's all right." Fans of Murakami probably get "healing" or "relief" for such parts. This description has always existed since his early works. For example, the sentence in the debut novel "*Hear the Wind Sing*" is as follows.

⁷The translation of this part of the English version is incomplete. According to the original text, I translated it as follows: In front of her (the protagonist's girlfriend Shimamoto-the quoter), I often don't know what I'm doing or what to say, and I have no way of judging. I want to calm down and use my brains, but I can't do it. It feels like I always say the wrong things to her and do the wrong things, and no matter what I say or do, she looks at me with a charming smile that seems to swallow all emotions, as if saying "Don't worry, it's all right." (p. 198, kodansha bunko 講談社文庫, Tokyo, 1995).

Yet I can't help thinking: if all goes well, a time may come, years or even decades from now, when I will discover that myself has been salvaged and redeemed.

(Chapter 1, p. 4. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group. Kindle version.)

The “salvaged and redeemed” in the translation is “relief (救済)” in the original text. It can also be said that some kind of “healing”. Murakami’s “relief” or “healing” has two characteristics. One is that he does not encourage hard work, but affirms the current situation and says, “You don’t have to work hard. Sometimes you should wait.” The other is that he said, “I don’t know if you can succeed in the end. In fact, it’s okay if you lose, and you can be allowed.” The description in “*The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*” 『ねじまき鳥クロニクル』 below really talks about this issue. This part was deleted in the English version.

... That is there, I think, that is there, and waiting for me to reach out. I don't know how long it will take, or how much effort it will take, but I must stop and try to reach out to that world. That's what I should do. When you should wait, you have to wait, Mr. Honda said.

...

I may be defeated, or I may be lost, or I may not be able to reach anywhere, or perhaps everything has been destroyed irretrievably no matter how hard I tried. Maybe I am just picking up ashes in the lost market, or perhaps no one here is betting on me. “It doesn't matter.” I said to someone there in a slight but decisive voice, “One thing is clear: at least I have something worth waiting for and something worth seeking.”

(Haruki Murakami, 1997, *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, Book Two: Bird as Prophet, Chapter 18 The letter from Crete, What fell from the edge of the world, The good news is quietly talked about*, pp. 359-361, Shincho bunko, 『ねじまき鳥クロニクル第2部: 予言する鳥編』第18章クレタ島からの便り、世界の縁から落ちてしまったもの、良いニュースは小さな声で語られる, 新潮文庫) Tokyo,

In addition, scholar Yoichi Komori (小森陽一) also admitted when analyzing “*Kafka on the Shore*” that readers feel “healed” or “relief” in Murakami’s works. He said as follows:

The novelist Mitsuyo Kakuta (角田光代) feels “violence of the will less will” for the novel “*Kafka on the Shore*”. On the contrary, most readers of this very popular novel feel “healed” and “relief” for some reason.

(Yoichi Komori, 2006, “*Murakami Haruki Study-A Closer Reading of Kafka on the Shore*”, p. 9 『村上春樹論—「海辺のカフカ」を精読する』 Heibonsha shinsho 平凡社新書)

In the questionnaire survey I conducted in 5 cities in East Asia⁸, when I asked “Which parts of Haruki Murakami do you like?”, the number of people who answered “feeling some kind of healing, comfort or relief” was not the most, but

⁸Refer to Note 1.

it occupies the first few positions. In Shanghai, 40 out of 126 respondents (sixth place), 30 out of 96 in Beijing (third place, with two answers of the same number), and 47 out of 102 respondents in Taipei (fourth place), 6 out of 65 people in Hong Kong (the eighth place), and 4 out of 45 people in Singapore (the eighth place). Although there are differences in every city, but the number of people who answered “feeling some kind of healing, comfort, or relief” was basically the same as the number of people who answered “good storyline”, “thinking depth”, “cool atmosphere”, “conversation and actions are cool”. The sharing of “relief” or “healing” as above also indicates a change in the way and purpose of literary reading. Then, how do readers resonate with “loneliness” and share “healing”?

5. How Do Readers Resonate and Share?

Many people mentioned “healing” and “relief” in the answers in the free description column of the above-mentioned questionnaire and the speeches in the interview. Here are some examples.

“In its unique atmosphere, you can feel that maybe this novel is just written for you, reaching your heart without telling you what to do. Therefore, the ending just says to you, Just like this.” (Shanghai, Free answers to questionnaires)

“It is about the text of the soul. It constructs a time and space, so that people can feel, read about themselves, or know something or things to accompany.”

(Shanghai, free answer to questionnaire survey)

“The plot of the work may not be complicated, but the whole story gives people a pure and breathtaking feeling, which makes people involuntarily integrate into the protagonist’s mood and have the same experience. So every time I close the page and return to real life, there will always be a sense of freshness that is like emerging from the water. And then it seems to have a certain healing effect, and I feel deeply pleased.” (Beijing, free answer to the questionnaire)

“Haruki Murakami’s book comforted my heart. The protagonist in the book is confused, but not afraid, indifferent and does nothing but has a determined attitude, which makes me feel that things are still promising.”

“After reading his novel, my heart will be very calm. So I like it very much.” (Taipei, answer in interview)

“It makes people feel calm” (Hong Kong, free answer to the questionnaire)

Of course, the meaning of the above answer cannot be summarized simply. But I think the above answer can at least be said in line with the reader’s resonance with the “loneliness” or “emptiness” of the work. This may be because Murakami’s works do not simply remind the despair of today’s society, but describe the suffering of modern people who cannot adapt to society and cannot simply find a way out. And in the hesitation that can’t find a way out, Haruki Murakami’s novels convey a message to readers, such as “Don’t worry” “It’s okay to lose,

and you are allowed.” Although this description does not indicate “a way out” or “hope” to the reader, it may become a kind of “healing” or “relief”. And this description has a sense of reality in modern society. So, Haruki Murakami’s works may resonate with readers. The answer below seems to imply the heart of the reader above.

“After entering society, it is inevitable to feel the fierce collision between ideals and reality, as well as the sense of emptiness it produces. Haruki Murakami’s novel teaches people to live in peace with this sense of emptiness and loneliness. It also teaches people not to go toward complete decadence and sinking, but to live with dignity in their own independent space.”

“My heart is calm, and I understand that everyone is lonely. After reading his novel, I will have a strange sense of satisfaction. The dialogue inside is very revelatory; tell me that life is empty.”

(Shanghai, free answer to the questionnaire)

“To be honest, I don’t know how to read Murakami Haruki’s novels, but between the lines of the novel, I can experience a feeling similar with acquaintance. The protagonist has the confusion and melancholy. We also have been confused, and we have also experienced it.” (Beijing, free answer to questionnaire survey)

From the above examples, we can see that many readers in East Asian cities, including Japan, really resonate with the “loneliness” and “emptiness” in his works. And they feel “healing” or “relief” for the description of “Don’t worry, it’s all right”, like extending the armrest to you. The reason they like Haruki Murakami seems to be here. As I said above, readers of pure literature in modern times have been looking forward to getting in touch with human or social truth through works. You can understand by remembering when you read the works of Dostoevsky, Lu Xun (鲁迅), and Soseki Natsume (夏目漱石). So, how Haruki Murakami lovers’ way in reading texts is so different from the readers of previous literary works. To be honest, their reading is a bit like a fan of subculture. At least many young Haruki Murakami fans overlap with fans of subcultures. Most of the respondents to the above-mentioned questionnaires and interviews are also fans of subcultures.

6. Haruki Murakami and Cultural Transition

As I said, the way young readers read texts nowadays has changed. And this is not only about works in the field of subculture, but also can be seen in the field of pure literature. Then, what kind of changes is facing in literary reading?

To put it simply, literary reading after modern times was formed through the following changes. In modern times, with the rise of the bourgeoisie, the development of printing and writing technology and logistics, and the popularization of literature and art, the behavior of reading have also changed. The Japanese writer Sei Ito (伊藤整) explained this change in reading behavior as follows:

The author writes the work in the secret room, and the reader appreciates it in the secret room. ... Under these conditions, readers begin to listen to the secret words of others, and peek into the secret behaviors and thinking of others. Sometimes it is the distressing voice of guilty humans telling God, sometimes it is an inner monologue that satisfies lust or curiosity.

(Sei Ito, 1959, *The Method of Novel* (小説の方法) Revised Edition, Shinchosha)

In other words, modern readers want to peek into the heart of the characters in the work, and hope to connect with their own heart. However, if the characters in the work are completely irrelevant to the reader, the work is still just a hypothetical story about others, unable to relate to one's inner world. Therefore, literary works gradually formed the following narrative characteristics.

Individuals who exist in real world are very accidental and cannot afford to be human. So creating a "fictional person" let him assume humanity. It's just that one person cannot represent all people, so several protagonists are arranged, and their Pueraria lobata and their cooperation represent human beings.

(Yasuhiko Sugiyama, 1976, *The Art of Language* (杉山康彦『ことばの藝術』), Taishukan Shoten)

This "fictional person" is the "typical". Because he/she is a "typical", the characters in literary works can represent part of the reader's heart, and the reader can invest in the world and characters in the work. After such a change in narrative, readers began to expect to get in touch with a certain kind of feeling on human, social, and historical "truth" through literary works. In other words, in modern times, literature has become something that allows readers to feel a certain "realism" through this narrative mode. It can also be said that since then, literature has a certain sacred mission, which is to inspire readers to think about important issues of human, society, and history.

Although the young lovers of Haruki Murakami do not divide the works into modules when they read the works, they resonate with the sense of loneliness, blockage, and emptiness in his works, and feel a certain relief and healing. This feeling is a very important point for them to support Haruki Murakami. In a sense, it can be said that they extract the part that matches their feelings (=a certain kind of module) from his works, and appreciate it. What they seek is not to get in touch with a certain sense of truth, not to think about issues and lead to solutions through literature, but to feel sympathy and share comfort. From those points, their focus and request for works are different from those of previous literature. Their reading method is similar with the subculture fan's way.

In addition, their activity is also similar with the subculture fans⁹. Haruki

⁹In a questionnaire survey I conducted with college students in five cities in East Asia in 2020 (refer to note 1), we can also see that young readers' way of reading manga, animation, and other subcultural works are similar with those of Haruki Murakami's works. (For the example of the Beijing survey, the subculture of "Resonance of loneliness or emptiness" is the fifth and sixth position, and Haruki Murakami is the first. For "feeling healing or relief", the subculture and Haruki Murakami are both the first 4. All occupy the upper position. Please refer to **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**).

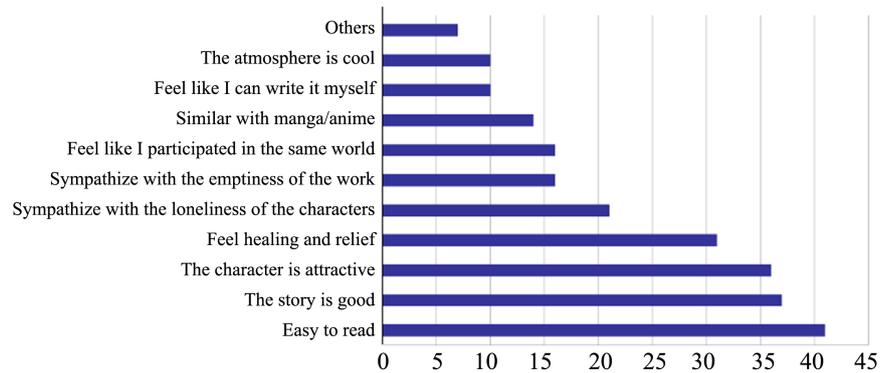


Figure 2. Which parts of the light novel do you like?

Murakami's fans don't just appreciate the works, they connect with each other and do activities together. For example, in Japan every year near the announcement of the Nobel Prize winners, fans gather to communicate and taste the dishes, snacks, and drinks that appear in Murakami's works. In China, the fans of Haruki Murakami are called "village people (村民)" (because Haruki Murakami (村上春樹)'s "mura (村)" means village), they communicate and chat with each other on the Internet. These activities are very similar to fan activities for young subculture lovers. Please remember that in addition to the storyline, they also focus on communicating with their friends. If you have a good opinion, get a huge response in time, and get the feeling of finding your place. To say the least, fans of Mo Yan (莫言) and Kenzaburo Oe (大江健三郎), who won the Nobel Prize for Literature, would not do such activities.

Judging from the situation of the fans of Haruki Murakami above, the readership of literary works seems to have begun to change. That is their reading method, the requirements of the work, the communication with fellow fans and so on. Haruki Murakami may be one of the very few writers who can adapt to such changes in the readership. Perhaps this is an important reason for his popularity all over the world. To this point, Haruki Murakami, like subculture, represents a major turning point in modern culture.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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