

Time, the Body and Non-Japanese in Murakami's Works

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Introduction

This paper examines the symbolic and cultural significance of time and the depiction of the body in Murakami's novels, in terms of his reaction to post-modern Japanese society. In the process of modernization, the Japanese experienced two noteworthy changes in the history of time: one was the adoption of the Julian calendar and the 24 hour system in 1873, and the other was the spread of quartz clocks in the early 1970s. These changes were also related to two inventions in the history of transport: one was the steam train and the other was the aeroplane. That is to say, in the process of modernization, the Japanese government built centralized authoritarian rules, controlling the system of time and transport.

The Japanese government controlled not only such social systems, but also the individual body. After the Meiji Restoration, the body was physically remodelled and disciplined, idealising that of the Westerners. The Japanese became aware of their own body due to the import of the technology to produce a large mirror and a camera in the 1840s. Similarly, the spread of quartz wristwatches in 1970s introduced the Japanese to the sense of the body as a machine. In Murakami's *A Wild Sheep Chase*, most of the characters wear a wristwatch. They put on and take off their wristwatch like clothes, and sometimes forget that they are wearing the watch, as if it were a part of the body. Today, the body has become interchangeable like a clothes or an accessory.

In Modern Japanese literature, the difference between Japanese body and non-Japanese body has been often stereotyped or exaggerated. This difference can help readers understand the idea of modern Japanese novels. Murakami hardly ever depicts foreign characters from other Asian countries. Only two non-Japanese characters are indicated in his novels; one is Chinese and the other is Korean. However, in the novels, it is not a matter that they are non-Japanese characters. Both of them are minorities in Japanese society, and have a tendency to be homosexual. It is possible that the non-Japanese nationality helps Murakami's readers accept their

homosexuality, granted that Japanese society is heterosexual and homophobic in many ways.

1. The Change of the Time in the Meiji (Modern) Era

Tsunoyama Sakae has written that the Japanese in pre-modern society, especially in rural areas, lived their lives, each following a local time marked by the bell of temples, in the same way that the Europeans did.¹ Moreover, the Japanese used a lunar calendar, and preserved unequal hours even after they acquired the technology to produce a mechanical clock in the sixteenth century. This was because the unequal hours' system was suitable for the agricultural focus of Japanese life up to that part. The unequal hours' system changed the length of daytime depending on seasons, and the duration of the divisions was longer or shorter according to the time of the year. N.H.N. Mody explains, "the Japanese method of dividing the day had its origin in China and was based on the natural day. The day was divided from sunset to sunrise and from sunrise to sunset into two periods of six equal intervals...When, therefore, 'hours' are mentioned in connection with Japanese clocks, it must be borne in mind that not only are these 'hours' not of sixty minutes but that they are periods of time always changing in their duration."²

In 1873, however, the Meiji Government adopted the Julian calendar and an invariable hour system, following the model of Western countries. This was an epoch-making change in the Japanese history of time. In 1872, just one year before Japanese time changed, the first railway was opened between Shinbashi and Yokohama. The Japanese government imported steam train and railway technology from Britain. Not only the technology, but also a new idea of standard time was thus introduced to the Japanese people. In other words, the railways caused a so-called 'Time Revolution' in the Japanese society, as it had done in British society.

Before the introduction of the railway in Japan, the Japanese 'hour' (*toki*) was divided into ten *bu*, as a minimum unit of time. One *bu* meant approximately twelve minutes. However, Japanese society needed a smaller unit like a minute to operate

¹ Sakae Tsunoyama. *Jikan Kakumei (Time Revolution)*. Tokyo: Shinshokan, 1998. 13-128.

² N. H. N. Mody. *Japanese Clocks*. Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1967. 25-26.

the railways on time and stop the train at each station punctually. Moreover, in 1872, the same year that the railway opened, the Japanese government established the first national factory for raw silk thread. Raw silk thread was the chief export of Japan in the Meiji era, and managers needed to make factory employees work as regularly as clockwork in order to increase productivity. That is, the Japanese people had to adopt a new value of not ‘wasting time’, but of managing it efficiently. The famous proverb says ‘Time is money’; in modern society, working hours were directly converted into money in the form of hourly wages.

According to the researcher of time systems, Sawada Taira, in the Edo period at least 30,000 temple bells were produced, as Japan had the hugest stock of copper in the world.³ That is, bells as the tellers of time resounded all over the country. Some temples and warrior classes also had *Wadokei*, Japanese clocks for the unequal hours system, which was a high-class item. For the Japanese in the Meiji era, the main reason for adopting the new time system unquestioningly is that they were sufficiently used to the life with time. Nevertheless, they didn’t imagine how the effect of the ‘Time Revolution’ would spread in their daily life. Before long, temples stopped telling the time, and each family had a wall clock at home.

The first Japanese wall clock was modelled on a clock built by the Seth Thomas corporation in America. This clock spread and could be found in homes across Japan by the early 1900s.⁴ In Soseki’s works such as *Wagahai wa neko dearu* (*I Am A Cat*), the wall clock often appears in the living room. In *I Am A Cat*, Soseki comically described the Japanese, who were pressed for time and punctual to the minute. The Cat as a narrator, thinks that human beings are always whiling away their time in laughter at things which are not funny and in the enjoyment of amusements which are not amusing. In this scene, Soseki criticizes the fact that the Japanese in the Meiji era complained of being short of time, while they often frittered away their time.

³ Taira Sawada. *Wadokei: Edo no haiteku gijutsu. (Japanese Clocks: High Technology in the Edo Period.)* Kyoto: Tanko-sha, 1996. 94.

⁴ Ichiro Oda. *Toki to tokei no hyakkajiten. (The Encyclopedia of Time and Clocks.)* Tokyo: Green Arrow Shuppan-sha, 1999. 41-42.

In 1911, five years after Soseki wrote *I Am A Cat*, Ashikawa Tadao published his book entitled *Jikan no Keizai (The Economics of Time)*.⁵ In the book, Ashikawa criticized the fact that the Japanese, through lack of ability to manage time, were always wasting their time. He insisted that the Japanese try to save their time, and use it more effectively. This new concept of time led to the establishment of *Toki no kinenbi* (Time Day) on 10 June 1920, an initiative of the Life Improvement Union. At that time, radio broadcasting had not yet begun, and it was difficult for the Japanese to know the time correctly, in spite of the adoption of standard time in 1873. Therefore, according to Oda, the events on the first Time Day were an exhibition of old clocks, and an engineer of clocks corrected the time of passers-by. The Tokyo Astronomical Observatory also investigated the accuracy of public clocks at Tokyo station and Ginza Post Office.⁶

2. The Quartz Revolution in the History of Clocks: the Post-modern Era

After the establishment of Time Day, the idea of time management widely permeated Japanese modern society. The Japanese lived their lives according to clocks. However, the spread of quartz wristwatches in 1970s had a different meaning for the Japanese in post-modern society. The Japanese watchmakers, such as Seiko and Citizen, were proud of their advanced technology in quartz clocks. Kasaki Keiji and Namiki Koichi write that it was at the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964 that the leading Japanese watchmaker, Seiko, revealed the technology to the world, being in charge of an official clock.⁷ At that moment, Japanese society was experiencing the first wave of economic prosperity after the War. The clock industry was one of the most promising fields.

A Japanese auto-winding wristwatch was produced in 1950s. In 1969, the first quartz wristwatch, the Seiko Astron, went on sale. This was a memorable moment in the history of clocks. More than fifty years had passed since Seiko produced the first wristwatch in 1913. It was believed by 1969 that the progress of Japanese technology had now defeated that of Switzerland and America. Quartz is a mineral in the form of

⁵ Tadao Ashikawa. *Jikan no Keizai. (Economics of Time.)* Tokyo: Shiseido, 1911.

⁶ *Toki to tokei no hyakkajiten. (The Encyclopedia of Time and Clocks.)* 101-102.

⁷ Keiji Kasaki and Koichi Namiki. *Ude-dokei: zatsugaku nouto. (A Wristwatch: Miscellaneous Knowledge Notes.)* Tokyo: Diamond Company, 2000. 95-101.

shiny crystal, and it is used in making electronic equipment and very accurate watches and clocks. The mechanism of the quartz clock was completely different from that of a spring-driven mechanical clock. David Landes, the author of *Revolution in Time* (1983), explains that the application of quartz crystal was an extraordinary development in the history of clocks.⁸ Jacques Attali also argues that in the future Japan would lead the clock market, although the clock industry had been badly damaged by defeat of the War.⁹ In fact, in 1970, Japan became the second biggest producer of timepieces, 24 million a year. Mass-production made the price of clocks cheaper. Hence, this time, the clock spread to the individual, not just to each home. In other words, the individuals had their own personal time, such as a wristwatch.

Murakami Haruki's *Hitsuji o meguru boken* (*A Wild Sheep Chase*, 1982) is set in 1978. The novel is a reflection of Japanese society in 1970s, and many different types of clocks appear in the story; a wristwatch, an hourglass, a digital clock, an electric clock, a cuckoo clock, a divers' watch, a travel watch and a grandfather clock. *A Wild Sheep Chase* is Murakami's third novel, and it received the *Noma Bungei Shinjin-sho* (Noma Literary Prize for first novels). Murakami had made a sensational debut with *Kaze no uta o kike* (*Hear the Wind Sing*) in 1979. Later, he published *1973 nen no pin booru* (*Pinball, 1973*) in 1980, and *A Wild Sheep Chase* in 1982. His unique writing style, described "story-less stories of nameless characters" by Miyoshi Masao, always attracted much audience attention.¹⁰ Compared with his two previous novels, however, *A Wild Sheep Chase* has a clear plot. It is a kind of adventure novel or quest narrative: the characters are engaged in a search for a sheep with a star on its back. In the novel, the sheep is a symbol of power, as well as imperialism, and through this figure, Murakami essentially criticized the process of modernization in Japan.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, most of the characters wear a wristwatch, and often check the time. They behave as regularly as a clock. They put on and take off their wristwatch like clothes, and sometimes forget that they are wearing the watch, as if it were a part of the body. Jacques Attali says, "a wristwatch, just as an ornament in the

⁸ David S. Landes. *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983.

⁹ Jacques Attali. *Histoire du Temps*. French & European Pubns, 1983. Translation into Japanese.

¹⁰ Masao Miyoshi. *Off Center*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University press, 1991. 235.

19th century, became a common prosthesis in this century.”¹¹ He specifies that the wristwatch was the first cyborg device, referring to the relatively new idea in the 1960s of cyborg machine. Moreover, Nagase Tadashi indicates that the wristwatch was the first cybernetic organism, as if it was buried in the human body, expanding its original function. A wristwatch basically changed the idea of body.¹² That is, the wristwatch brought the sense of clock within the body.

Boku in *A Wild Sheep Chase* has the sense of clock inside his body.¹³ An electric clock hangs on the wall at Boku’s office. Boku recognises that the world remains in motion, as long as he stares at the clock. In addition, as long as the world is in motion, he knows he exists. He cannot confirm his own existence, except by the hands of an electric wall clock. If the clock stopped, he must die, as if his heart would stop beating. The idea of clock inside the body is also mentioned in others of Murakami’s works such as *Noruei no mori (Norwegian Wood)* in 1987. In *Norwegian Wood*, the main character, Watanabe says that he winds his own spring every morning. He visualizes a spring in his body, and gives it thirty-six twists a day, except Sunday. In another work, *Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru (The Wind-up Bird Chronicle)* in 1994-95, a wind-up bird becomes the nickname for Okada, the main character. Okada winds up not only his spring but also the world’s spring. All of them have the sense of the body as a machine.

3. The Changing Concept of the Body

A new view of the body was introduced to Japanese society, with the manufacture of large mirrors and photographic technology after the 1840’s. The large mirror was an invention symbolizing modern civilization. Sato Rika writes, that Japanese people in pre-modern society did not have large mirrors, except twenty-centimetre square mirrors as the largest, or usually five or six-centimetre squares mirrors for shaving. Thus, they rarely had a chance to see their full-length, before the technology of

¹¹ *Histoire du Temps*. 270.

¹² Nagase Tadashi. *Udedokei no tanjo. (The Birth of Wristwatches.)* Tokyo: Kosaido, 2001. 8-12.

¹³ The nameless main character referred to only as Boku; that is masculine “I”.

photography was introduced to Japanese society in the 1840's.¹⁴ In other words, for the Japanese in the Meiji era, Western technology taught them to be more aware of their bodies. In addition, the Japanese body, including facial expression and movement, was remodelled in the process of modernization, idealizing Western styles. At that time, the Japanese had an inferiority complex to Western bodies. Hence, the Educational Ministry encouraged primary schools to have athletic fields and physical education. Good exercise was believed to produce ideal bodies.

In the late twentieth century, the progress of medical science clarified that the organs of the body became interchangeable, like parts of a machine. Today, in Japan, the difference between the skin and the clothes is very ambiguous. It is very common that the body is changed and processed by accessories and orthopaedic operation, especially for young people. For example, they easily change their faces by cosmetic surgery, injecting silicone into their breasts, tattooing their arms, dyeing black hairs, and having their body pierced. In post-modern society, the body is essentially recognized as a machine or an accessory. This change in the concept of the body is different from the change experience in the Meiji era. Washida Kiyokazu argues that changing the body by tattoos and piercing is an initiation to adulthood for young people, becoming independent from their parents. That is because, the body has been thought of a precious gift from their parents. Therefore, the body should not be hurt.¹⁵

Moreover, the changing concept of body is related to the sports boom after the late in 1960s. After the Tokyo Olympic games in 1964, sports became more popular for the Japanese. Sports became not only an entertainment to watch, but also physical exercise in which to participate.¹⁶ In the 1970s, there was a big boom in jogging, and aerobic dancing in the 1980s.¹⁷ This time, the ideal body is not for the strong militarism but for the individualism. According to Washida, such a movement was linked to the development of cosmetic surgery and new design of underwear

¹⁴ Rika Sato, "Kindaiteki Shisen to Shintai no Hakken (Modern Gaze and Awareness of Body)." *Henken toiu Manazashi: Kindai Nihon no Kansei (Gaze as Prejudice: Sensitivity in Modern Japan)*. Ed. Tsubouchi Hideto. Tokyo: Seishu-sha, 2001. 150-180.

¹⁵ Kiyokazu Washida. *Hito wa naze huku o kirunoka? (Why Does the Human Wear Clothes?)* Tokyo: NHK Ningendaigaku. Oct.-Dec. 1997, 9-10.

¹⁶ Takashi Aoki. "Jogingu no fukyu to shakai. (Spread of Jogging and Society.)" Hideyuki Sasaki and Keiji Yamaji ed. *Jogingu no subete. (All of Jogging.)* Tokyo: Runners. 1986, 9-12.

¹⁷ Murakami, himself, is enthusiastic about running, and attended some major road races such as the Boston Marathon and the New York Marathon.

correcting the bodyline.¹⁸ In addition, mass media successively produces new mode, and encourage the masses to change their body. That is, they are not content with their body, as the ideal model of the body often changes. Washida also indicates that the Japanese recognise their identity through doing exercise, in the same way as they hurt their bodies through tattoos and piercing.¹⁹ Perspiration and increase in heart rate stimulates sense of the body.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, Boku discusses American novel, in which after wife walks out, the husband keeps her slip draped over the chair. In the same way, after divorce, Boku searches for the slip of his former wife, but can't find it. In this scene, the slip is a substitute of the skin that Boku is eager to touch again. Moreover, the body like a machine is recognised not totally, but rather partially. The body's part or function is essentially paid attention. Thus, in the novel, the aquarium keeps a whale penis on display, instead of a whale. In addition, Boku's new girlfriend has exquisite ears, with special powers. She blocks her ears, when she has to show them for a modelling job. She says that she can cut on and off the passageway freely, like a machine.

In the process of modernisation, the ideal body was fundamentally produced for the military. That is, incomplete body was the last body the war needed. In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the Sheep Man visits Boku at the villa in Hokkaido. He wears a full sheepskin pulled over his head. The arms and legs are fake and patched on. The hood is fake, but the two horns that curled from his crown are real. Two flat ears, wire-reinforced, stick out level from either side of the hood. The leather mask covers the upper half of his face, and matching gloves and socks are black. There is a zipper from neck to crotch. The sheepskin is definitely like a clothes to put on or take off easily. The Sheep Man is a human, who identifies himself as a member of sheep society. He says that he has moved here, because he does not want to go to war. So, he lives his life on the farm, wearing a full sheepskin pulled over his head. The appearance of the Sheep Man is extremely unattractive. However, the unappealing appearance protects him from the death by war.

¹⁸ *Hito wa naze huku o kirunoka?* 139.

¹⁹ *Hito wa naze huku o kirunoka?* 22.

As a matter of fact, both the concept of the wristwatch and the ideal body are definitely related to wars. That is, the wristwatch was originally invented for the war, as a pocket watch was inconvenient to check the time on the battlefield.²⁰ In Japan, some generals already had an imported wristwatch at the time of the Sino-Japan War in 1894-95. On the battlefield, a wristwatch becomes one of victory goods. In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, the wristwatch of the dead Japanese agent is given to the Mongolian non-commissioned officer, like a part of the body. On the other hand, in the process of militarism, the Meiji government thoroughly tried to control the individual body. For instance, in Soseki's *Sanshiro* in 1908, the Tokyo Imperial University holds an athletic meet. The athletic meet originated from the sports tournament held by Naval Academy in 1874. Later, Tokyo University held the first track meet in 1883. The teacher of physical education had the role of trainer of military drills. The training body essentially strengthened militarism, as all adult males were liable for conscription.

Before the Second World War, the Japanese fundamentally had respect for the idealism. Consequently, the mind was admired, but the flesh was despised. An Anatomy researcher, Yoro Takeshi indicates, "the literature in the Meiji and Taisho eras unconsciously inherited the idealism of the Edo period. Moreover, following the social system, they became Europeanised adopting cerebral sacralization, and excluding the body from literary ideas."²¹ Thus, ironically, the ideal body was regarded to be completely worthless on the battlefield, like an interchangeable mass-production. In particular, at Port Arthur during the Russo-Japan War, the enormous numbers of conscripted youth lost their lives, due to the misconduct of General Nogi Maresuke: 15,390 were killed and 43,914 injured.²² In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the son of Ainu youth is killed in that battle, who arrives in Junitaki-cho as one of the first settlers. The War had a severe impact on people living in the isolated northern place. During the war, numerous soldiers were inhumanly killed on the battlefield, as if they were available in inexhaustible supply.

²⁰ *Udedokei no tanjo. (The Birth of Wristwatches.)* 8-12.

²¹ Takeshi Yoro. "Shinrishugi. (Mentalism.)" *Shintai no Bungaku-shi. (The Literary History of the Body.* Tokyo: Shincho-sha, 1997. 58-59. Translation mine.

²² *Nichiroku Niju Seiki; 1904. (Daily Documents in the Twentieth Century; 1904.)* Tokyo: Kodansha, 1998. 3-5.

4. The Sheep as A Symbol of Japanese Imperialism

In the process of the modernization, the Japanese government paid a great deal of attention to sheep. The author of *Yotei-ki (The Story of Cloven Hoofs)*, Ouchi Teruo points out the noticeable relation between modernization in Japan and sheep raising.²³ Just before the Russo-Japan War, the government ordered increased efforts in raising sheep for self-sufficiency in thermal wool for the upcoming campaign on the continent. After the end of the Russo-Japan War in 1905, Japanese imperialism rapidly spread in the Asia, especially centring in Manchuria ceded from Russia. That is, the end of the Russo-Japan War was just the beginning of another wartime. Russia was a big threat for Japan, and the military authority expected another war with Russia. So, at that time, self-sufficiency in wool production was a first consideration.

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, a strange man who visits Boku's office explains to him about the history of sheep in Japan. According to this man, there were no sheep in Japan before they were introduced to Japan in the Ansei reign, just before the Meiji era. He also explains that every variety of sheep in Japan is still fully accounted for, and he shows sympathy towards them;

Sheep were imported at the state level from America, raised briefly then promptly ignored. That's your sheep. After the war, when importation of wool and mutton from Australia and New Zealand was liberalized, the merits of sheep raising in Japan plummeted to zero. A tragic animal, do you not think? Here, then, is the very image of modern Japan.²⁴

A man called the Sheep Professor that Boku meets in Sapporo has the same opinion about modernity. Since the sheep entered his body, the Sheep Professor begins research on ethnological studies and folklore related to sheep. He also interviews locals and checks old writings in Manchuria. He finds it not uncommon to hear of sheep entering people's bodies in parts of Northern China and Mongol territory. According to the Sheep Professor, it is believed that sheep entering the body is a blessing from the gods, and in the Yuan dynasty, a star-bearing white sheep entered the body of Genghis Khan.

²³ Teruo Ouchi. *Yotei-ki: Ningen to yomo no rekishi. (The Story of Cloven Hoofs: History of Human being and Wool.)* Tokyo: Heibon-sha, 1991.

²⁴ *A Wild Sheep Chase*. 111.

Genghis Khan dreamed of the conquest not only Mongolia and China, but also other Asian countries. Hence, after his death, his grandson Kublai Khan, who had built a new Chinese capitol, Daidu, tried to conquer Japan, in the time period 1274-1281. At that time, Kublai Khan sent 140,000 soldiers on 4,500 battleships to Kyushu, the Southern part of Japan; however, most of his battleships were seriously damaged by the unpredictable windstorm. The Japanese called this storm *Kamikaze*, meaning a divine wind. They believed that Japan was not conquered because of a divine nation. Hundreds years later, the name of *Kamikaze* became the name of Japanese suicide squad during the Second World War. The sheep in the novel, so to speak, comes to Japan, with a similar ambition to that of Genghis Khan's family.

The Sheep Professor, who insists on the importance of the sheep, is labelled 'mentally unfit' by the Japanese commanding officer. The Sheep Professor criticizes an arrogant Japanese officer's attitude;

The basic flaw of modern Japan is that we've learned absolutely nothing from our contact with other Asian peoples. The same goes for our dealing with sheep. Sheep raising in Japan has failed precisely because we've viewed sheep merely as a source of wool and meat. The daily-life is missing from our thinking. We minimize the time factor to maximize the results. It's like that with everything. In other words, we don't have our feet on solid ground. It's not without reason that we lost the war.²⁵

In *A Wild Sheep Chase*, the sheep had been sleeping in the cave near the Manchuria-Mongolia border for hundreds of years, until the Sheep Professor woke it up in 1935. Although *A Wild Sheep Chase* is a fiction, the story of the Sheep Professor matches with the real world history. In the preceding year, the last Emperor of China, Pu Yi, was enthroned as the first Emperor in Manchuguo. The Japanese already occupied all of Manchuria in 1931 and created the puppet state of Manchuguo in 1932. In 1935, the sheep entered inside the Sheep Professor, and came to Japan with him. However, the Sheep Professor is just a means of transport, and in Japan, the sheep enters the body of a rightist youth in prison at this time. After the war, this person becomes a major right-wing figure and grabs enormous power. That is, the sheep itself controls the post-modern Japanese society.

²⁵ *A Wild Sheep Chase*. 188.

5. The depiction of the Asian in Murakami's Works

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami focused on the Nomonhan incident, which had happened in May 1939. The Nomonhan incident started, as the Mongolians crossed the border, the river Halha, to enter Manchuguo. Japan would not let the Mongolians, and Russia came to the assistance of the Mongolians. That is, it was substantially the battle between Japan and Russia. About four months later, Japan was completely defeated by Russian force with tanks. However, in Japan, as propaganda, the Japanese victory was reported, and the truth was sealed for years. In order to write the novel, Murakami referred some books regarding the Nomonhan incident, such as *Nomonhan: Japan against Russia, 1939* by Alvin Coox. Murakami also visited Mongolia in 1994 to collect data for the novel.

The Wind-up Bird Chronicle is the memorable novel in Murakami's works, as it was published during his stay in the U.S.A. from 1991 to 1995. Murakami sometimes experienced difficulty with living in a different culture, even though he, born in 1949, was raised under the influence of American culture. In particular, during the Gulf War, as a representative of Japanese intelligentsia, he was required to give a specific answer about Japanese uncooperative diplomacy towards the United Nation. After this experience, Murakami showed the different literary theme in his works. Besides, in 1995, two disasters struck Japan: the earthquake in Kobe and sarin (poison) gas attack in the Tokyo subway. These astonishing tragedies made Murakami more socialized, rather nationalistic. In an interview in 1998, Murakami says that he should write something related to 'Japan', because he is a Japanese author.²⁶ That is, for Murakami, his commitment to contemporary Japanese society has become more important.

In the novel, the Nomonhan incident is told as a narrative of Lieutenant Mamiya, an aging war veteran. Lieutenant Mamiya is a witness of Japanese campaign during the War. With a special assignment, Mamiya crosses the river Halha to Mongolia with the agent Yamamoto. However, beyond the river, they are caught by

²⁶ Haruki Murakami. "Murakami Haruki Kuronikuru. (Murakami Haruki Chronicle.)" *Kitarubeki sakka-tachi. (The Shape of Literature to Come.)* Tokyo: Shincho-sha, 1998. 181.

the Mongolian. After that, how a Mongolian officer skins Yamamoto alive to make him confess is explained in detail. The Russian officer orders the Mongolian officer such a cruel behaviour. He explains that an excellent slaughter is like an excellent meal, and the Mongolians, as shepherds, can take a man's skin off the way they would skin a sheep or peel a peach, without a single scratch. This skinning scene is extremely lurid and nauseating. Meanwhile, other Mongolian soldiers watch the procedure, showing neither disgust nor excitement nor shock. After skinning, the skin of the agent is spread out to dry like a sheet. The skin of the torso is like clothes, not a human body, even with the nipples instead of buttons. The Mongolian soldiers exchange opinions on the finer points of the skinner's technique.

According to Kawamura Minato, the skinning scene in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is a complete fiction, rather exaggerated.²⁷ On the depiction of non-Japanese within Japanese literature, Tsuruta Kinya concludes that the non-Japanese easily become exaggerated or stereotyped, especially in literature before the Second World War, because they are physically different from the Japanese. Tsuruta argues that such differences help readers accept the incomprehensible personality of foreign characters and their unbelievable behaviours.²⁸ Regarding the cruelty of the Mongolian officer may be based on ignorance or prejudice towards the shepherds in Mongolia. They use their sheep in many ways; they eat their flesh, shear their wool and take their hides. Besides, the Mongolian are physically different from the Japanese. That is, Murakami's readers would accept taking a man's skin off believable, if the Mongolian did it.

Murakami grew up under the influence of American culture after the Second World War. He often alludes to the names of American popular music and novels in his works. The influence of Americans culture is obviously mentioned in his novels. Conversely, Murakami hardly ever depicts characters from Asia. The exceptions are a Chinese bartender named J, in his early works such as *Pinball, 1973*, or a Korean

²⁷ Minato Kawamura. "Nejimaki-dori Kuronikuru no buseki; gendaishi toshite no monogatari - Nomonhan jihen o megutte. (The Analysis of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*: the Story as the Modern History – The Meaning of Nomonhan Incident.)" *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to Kansho (Japanese Literature: Interpretation and Appreciation)* Mar. 1995: 57-63.

²⁸ Kinya Tsuruta, "Kindai Nihon Bungaku no Naka no Seiyo-jin (Non-Japanese within Modern Japanese Literature)." *Eikkyo-sha ga yonda kindai nihon bungaku (Modern Japanese Literature Analyzed by A Migrant beyond Border)*. Tokyo: Shinyo-sha, 1999. 10-56.

businesswoman named Miu in *Supuutonikku no koibito (Sputnik Sweetheart)* in 1999. J, is a nickname given by some GIs on the base where he worked after the war, as his real name is unpronounceable Chinese polysyllable. He is very special for the main character and his friend Rat in *Pinball, 1973*. In particular, for Rat, who drops out of the university, J is a precious partner. They are huddled together, just like an elderly couple. That is, the homosexual relationship is essentially indicated in their intimacy.

On the other hand, in *Sputnik Sweetheart*, Miu is *Zainichi-kankokujin*, meaning a Korean expatriate in Japan. Like J in *Pinball, 1973*, she is asked to have an intimate relationship with her female friend. Miu's complex identity can explain her unusual experience such as doppelgangers. However, in both novels, they have no necessity to be non-Japanese characters. According to Komori Yoichi, after the Russo-Japan War, Japanese society strengthened tendency of homophobia.²⁹ Regarding Soseki's works, Stephen Dodd argues that the use of Western characters serves to divert the reader's attention from Soseki's tendency towards homosexuality.³⁰ In the same way, the non-Japanese nationality probably helps Murakami's readers accept their homosexual relationship, as Japanese society is fundamentally heterosexual and homophobia society still now.

Conclusion

In *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, after the lynching the agent Yamamoto, Lieutenant Mamiya jumped into the deep well to save his life. In the novel, the well is metaphor of Japanese history, connecting the wartime in 1939 to the present time in 1984. Murakami, himself, says that the Gulf War in 1990 influenced the statement of the Nomonhan incident in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*.³¹ Compared with Murakami's early works such as *Norwegian Wood*, the main character of *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle* is active. Coincidentally, in both novels, the name of the main characters is Toru. In *Norwegian Wood*, Toru, a twenty year-old youth, never falls into the well, which is hidden somewhere on the meadow. On the other hand, in *The Wind-up Bird*

²⁹ Yoichi Komori. "Teikoku daigaku to homososhariti. (Imperial University and Homo-sociality.)" *Soseki Kenkyu*. 2 (1994): 25-27.

³⁰ Stephen Dodd. "Kokoro ni Okeru Nikutai no Judaisei (The Importance of the Body in Kokoro)." *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to Kansho (Japanese Literature: Interpretation and Appreciation)*. Month 1997. 121-128.

³¹ "Murakami Haruki Kuronikuru. (Murakami Haruki Chronicle.)" 185.

Chronicle, after listening to the Mamiya's story, Toru, a thirty year-old married man, climbs down the old well in his neighbourhood.

Norwegian Wood is a youth novel, depicting the complex and sensitive feeling of young people. In the beginning of the novel, Naoko talks to Toru about a deep well that nobody knows where it is, however, it is around somewhere on the meadow they are walking together. Afterwards, Naoko suddenly finishes her life, as if she fell into the well. In other words, the youth is like a walker on a meadow, facing the danger of falling into the deep well. However, they don't intend to climb down the well by themselves. On the other hand, in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, Toru continues to sit at the bottom of the well for days. Due to an awkward position on the well floor, every part of his body hurt and he feels hunger pangs. Nevertheless, he means to find something connecting the past and the present.

In an interview with a psychologist, Kawai Hayao, Murakami explained that after staying in America for four and half years, he has strongly realized that he had changed very much during his stay in America.³² Murakami also says, in the United States, needless to say, individualism is important. However, American citizens seem to consider more how they can contribute to their society. For Murakami, it also became more important how he commits himself to contemporary Japanese society. This is paradoxical because Murakami had left Japan strongly attracted to the individualism he saw in American Culture.

Metaphorically speaking, to climb down the well is to get responsible for every thing that has happened to Japanese society, including the war that had occurred before Murakami was born. Unfortunately, the relationship between Japan and other Asian countries, however, has not been discussed enough in his novels, although Murakami has enormous number of Asian readers. He should have written how inhumanly the Japanese military treated the Asian body during the war, such as Nanjing Massacre in 1937 that occurred two years earlier than the Nomonhan incident.

³² Haruki Murakami. *Murakami Haruki, Kawai Hayao ni aini iku. (Murakami Haruki Comes to Meet Kawai Hayao.)* Tokyo: Shincho-sha. 1999, 14-24.

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