

## **Source Packet Two: Post-War Japanese Identity**

### **“Haruki Murakami’s Storytelling World”**

Welch, Patricia. “Haruki Murakami’s Storytelling World.” *World Literature Today*, vol. 79, no. 1, 2005, pp. 55-59.

In the 1980s the Japanese economy was booming. Japan loomed in the world’s and its own imagination as an unstoppable economic machine. To many, Japan was a suitable model for economic and social development: the economy was great, schools were good, and violence nearly nonexistent. Its successes were spoken of in almost Utopian terms (though occasionally as an economic threat not to be ignored). Some negative aspects of Japanese society were even spun as positives, internally and abroad. And in Japan, many seemed supremely confident as they viewed the future. Perhaps however, their bravado masked ambivalence about society’s direction. [...]

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[Murakami’s work] seemed to capture the sense of disillusionment, disconnection, and confusion that lingered close to a placid surface even during halcyon days. In recent works, Murakami no longer seems content to simply capture these feelings; rather, he attempts to explore their origins and demands greater engagement from his still somewhat passive characters.

Murakami’s characters appear content, though they are portrayed ironically. They commute to ordinary jobs, drink whiskey and beer, and listen to American music. Solitary creatures, they shut out the world with psychological barriers and self-imposed isolation. Nothing is obviously wrong with their lives, but something is amiss. Many try to fill their only vaguely sensed longing through mindless repetitive action and consumerism, not realizing that what they believe to be “identity” is largely a by-product of ideology that supports the interests of the state and capitalism. Then something traumatic rattles their complacency, triggering a quest in which they struggle to plumb the deep wells of personal and cultural memory for meaning. [...]

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These words encapsulate the struggle that Murakami’s protagonists face. Lonely and isolated, they must nevertheless battle to forge an authentic identity in a dystopic world. Though his protagonists are ordinary individuals, they can do extraordinary things if they live their lives meaningfully, use knowledge responsibly, and caution themselves not to follow blindly another’s questionable Utopian narrative. Above all, they must choose to act but also to accept that in some circumstances they might be their own worst enemy. Over the course of Murakami’s career, the second part of his message has grown stronger. He has begun to create characters whose struggle, though lonely, is not in vain-- characters who do, in fact, try to forge meaningful connections in their lives and with others around them.

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## “Critical Responses to Murakami in Japan”

Strecher, Matthew Carl. *Dances with Sheep: The Quest for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki*. The University of Michigan, 2002.

A remarkable variety of secondary writing on Murakami Haruki exists in Japan, and the number of essays and separate volumes devoted to him increases yearly. Some of the more exceptional works come from literary and intellectual historians such as Kuroko Kazuo (1990, 1993) and Karatani Kōjin (1990b), both of whom have been instrumental in situating Murakami in the general history of postwar Japanese literature. Others, such as Kazamaru Yoshihiko (1992) have made contributions to our understanding of the cross-generational reception of Murakami's fiction. Katō Norihiro and Kawamoto Saburō have both approached Murakami as a contemporary, and their works focus on the author's role as a potential spokesman for the younger members of the defunct Zenkyōtō movement of the late 1960s, a movement that ended inconclusively when, one by one, the various political justifications for a left-wing opposition in Japan were eliminated.

Still others, particularly members of the older generation of writers such as Ueno Chizuko and Ōe Kenzaburō, have been ambivalent about Murakami's work and rise to fame. Ueno described Murakami's 1987 bestseller *Noruei no mori* (Norwegian Wood) as “epoch-making” for the strongly contemporary sensation of the book's passive hero. A fellow commentator, Ogura Chikako, on the other hand, claimed that the hero's egotism had made her sick.” Ōe, meanwhile, although acknowledging that Murakami has brought welcome attention to Japanese literature in ways that he himself has not, feels that Murakami represents a trend among Japanese writers away from literary expression, critical thinking, and intellec-

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tual responsibility (Ōe 1989). Ōe's concerns, it should be noted, while often directed against Murakami's works, may be more broadly applied to Japanese postmodern literature in general, which, according to him, represents a massive break, a catastrophic rupture, between contemporary writing and the dialectical literature of the postwar written between 1945 and 1970 (which he identifies as *junbungaku*, or “pure literature”); “any future restoration of *junbungaku*,” writes Ōe, “will be possible only if ways are found to fill in the wide gap that exists between Murakami and pre-1970 postwar literature” (Ōe 1989, 200).

But in the main, Japanese secondary literature on Murakami, though voluminous, is often less than satisfactory. With few exceptions, the bulk of such writing focuses on simple (or, occasionally, astonishingly complex) interpretive pieces on individual works” Few scholars in Japan have concerned themselves with the historical and theoretical groundwork that underlies the author's narrative strategies, or the broader question of why a writer such as Murakami is necessary to Japanese literature. [...]

Rather than concerning ourselves too much with what Murakami read as a student, it seems probable that more is to be gained from examining who reads Murakami, and why. This is another aspect of Japanese criticism that has been fairly widespread, and that does reveal some interesting facts about the author's work.

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Some of those drawn most to the author's early works, 1979-82, were members of Murakami's own generation-those born in the first ten

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years of the postwar era, who reached adulthood between 1965 and 1975. The reasons for this are not too difficult to find: these early works deal with the shared experience of growing up amid the increasing affluence of the 1950s and 1960s, of witnessing-- and later participating in-- the various counterculture movements that had been active since the beginning of the postwar, and finally, of watching those movements fall silent in the face of an increasingly systematized, controlled society after 1970. Such readers, encountering the cultural markers of the time-- particularly the popular bands of the time such as Deep Purple, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones-- could hardly have failed to recall the demise of the student counterculture movements in Japan known as Zenkyōtō, a movement in which many college-age Japanese grounded their identities as young adults. The collapse of the various counterculture movements shortly after 1970 was a traumatic experience that Murakami's first three major works-- *Kaze no uta o kike* (Hear the Wind Sing, 1979), *1973-nen no pinbōu* (Pinball 1973: 1980), and the above-mentioned *A Wild Sheep Chase*-- permitted them to revisit, reexamine, and reevaluate. Such a reevaluation may well be a part of what Baudrillard (1994) points out as our endless fascination with re-constructing the past as we approach the *fin de siècle*. In it lies our "mania for trials," our obsession with escaping the judgment of the twenty-first century by frantically rewriting the preceding one.

But I think it is more than this. The desire for closure of the 1960s is also grounded, and not only in Japan, in the common perception of a collective failure. This is not dissimilar to efforts to "confront" the Vietnam War, another great failure, to understand what the experience meant to those who were there. In both Japan and the United States, especially, much literature has been devoted to understanding the counterculture movement, particularly because it disappeared so suddenly, and its members, for the most part, seem to have abandoned their youthful idealism so completely. Tim O'Brien, an American contemporary of Murakami's known for his writings on the Vietnam War, writes fearfully about his generation's atrophy:

What happened to them? All of us? I wonder about the consequences of our disillusion, the loss of energy, the slow hardening of a generation's arteries. What *happened*? Was it entropy? Genetic decay? And who among us would become a martyr, and for what?  
(1985, 127)

The same could just as easily be asked of the masses of Japanese "radicals" who swarmed into the streets in 1969 brandishing staves (*gebabō*), then abandoned radicalism and joined mainstream culture only a year later. It

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was not so much that the student radicals grew up and joined society- most eventually do-- but the suddenness of the transformation that seems to bewilder Japanese writers and critics. [...]

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Whereas Kawamoto and Katō , among others, are excited by Murakami's abstraction of the Zenkyōtō period, however, another group of readers, only a few years younger, latched onto Murakami's writing at precisely the same time, but for very different reasons. This is the readership described by Kazamaru Yoshihiko, who defines his generation as "people born around or a little before 1960," who "dreamed of escaping the System, and just wanted to get through the 1970s without anyone bothering them" (Kazamaru 1992, 204). Obviously, this initial desire for withdrawal comes about partly as a result of the failure of Zenkyōtō. Displaying the scorn of the young toward the failures of their elders, Kazamaru goes on to note that "we thought all those Zenkyōtō activist types were complete morons" (ibid.).

Essentially, this generation appreciates Murakami for his portrayal of what Nakano Osamu terms the "indecisive lifestyle" (*hikettei no jinsei taido*), ideally suited to those who "linger in some middle ground where they can go on living indecisively forever" (Nakano 1989, 41). For purposes of contemporary literature it is a particularly important readership, however, for this was the first generation to abandon the idealism that had been feeding Japan's (indeed, the world's) counterculture movement, and to face the issue of identity in the near absence of political resistance. They were the first to accept the (state) ideology grounded in affluence, and to commit their resources, energy, and futures to that ideology. Most important of all, while it was the first generation to do all this, it was by no

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means the last. In fact, I would argue that the appeal of Murakami's writing-- especially among readers aged twenty to thirty (Murakami and his protagonists age, but his readership does not!)-- continues precisely because the identity crisis in Japan to which the author's work has always spoken so directly is not solved; it remains unchecked, or worse.

Interestingly, Kazamaru's definition of this readership has the effect of placing Murakami into a rather awkward historical position, his literature interposed precariously between the high-minded idealism of Ōe, Oda Makoto and (rather more cynically) Kaikō Takeshi, and the political lethargy of the post-1970 generation represented by Kazamaru himself. This, I believe, is an apt description of the author's works in general; light, humorous, and to return to Katō's expression, often seemingly "nonsensical" (*kōtō mukei*) yet never without a certain idealistic and ideological grounding. It is why Murakami literature appeals to such a wide variety of readers (as, say, Ōe's does not), yet is wholly satisfying to none. [...]

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The Murakami "hero" is always portrayed as a self-absorbed loner. As Kawamoto points out. despite having a job, "in the course of his work the protagonist interacts as little as possible with society" (1986, 48). Clearly this phenomenon, what Marilyn Ivy (1993, 250) has termed as the "'micro-ization' of the nuclear family into constituent monads (individuals) ... "has become endemic to society. Murakami's heroes are not unique; they are representative of their readers, of each successive generation that has had to confront its

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identity in a society grounded (perhaps solely) in “a coordinated effort on the part of industry and the mass media to create a permanent body of mass consumers” resulting in “a new social atmosphere of materialism and self-absorption which gradually progressed to smaller and smaller social ‘units,’ ending with the individual” (Ivy 1993, 250). As will be shown below, however, the extent to which that “individual” understands itself beyond its role in the contemporary atmosphere of materialism is highly problematic. Murakami’s fiction suggests that materialism-- what will later be examined in terms of Jameson’s “late-model capitalism,” or as “rapid capitalism” in the author’s own texts-- has indeed destroyed the *soul* of the Japanese, preventing them from interacting with one another beyond (or outside of) that system.

This is, perhaps, the inevitable result of a world that has lost so much of its oppositionality. The collapse of counterculture in Japan and the West between 1970 and 1975 was only the beginning, Baudrillard may have said it best when he pointed out that the collapse of the Warsaw Pact was the final denouement of meaningful political activism, perhaps of meaning itself. [...]

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As we see in every Murakami text and in reality itself, a severe conflict within the self-- perhaps a more dangerous conflict, after all-- results from the lack of an external adversary. In simplified terms, when “us versus them” becomes simply “us,” then it becomes paradoxically difficult to define what “us” means. This is echoed in Honda’s castigation of the Japanese press, whose function of checking up on the government has long since been discarded, fatally undermined by the media’s partnership with the political center. “The mass media’s connection to the powers that be is a frightful thing indeed. Given the tendency of power to corrupt, it is necessary for journalism to continue to criticize the powerful almost as a matter of course. There cannot be a coincidence of interests” (Honda 1993, 219). Arguing that the media has been corrupted, transformed into a mere tool of government, Honda likens Japan to a Soviet-type state, and claims that there is no division of power in Japan today (Honda 1993, 219-20).

Within such a context, Murakami’s heroes have little choice but to create a new mode of dissidence, to proclaim their difference while proclaiming their solidarity with others who spend their existence, paradoxically, being “isolated together.” This is the madness of contemporary urban society, whose peculiar paradigm is the kind of loneliness one can only experience among twenty million people. Murakami’s protagonist has been called in some contexts *jiheiteki*-- a medical term meaning “autistic,” but in this context closer to the expression “self-absorbed” used by Ivy above. This is basically true, and it is indeed alarming how little he interacts. However, I am inclined to be a little skeptical of Kawamoto’s contention that, as a result, “there is no scent of life about the Murakami hero” (1986, 46). Quite the reverse, Murakami’s narrator is all too real; he is emblematic, perhaps more than any literary character today, of what it means to live in

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urban Japan at the end of the twentieth century. It might be more accurate to say that there is no scent of life in contemporary urban Japan. [...]

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historical reality we can say that the trend of events from 1970 onward toward stability, heterogeneity, peace and prosperity (marked by the end of the Vietnam War, and later the Cold War), systematically obviated the need, even the possibility, of meaningful political counterculture. In terms of aesthetics, we may say that the expression of these realities has taken on new, multiple forms that are tolerant of former differences; genres are transcended, styles mixed, former oppositions deconstructed,

One might add in this regard that representation becomes a critical issue, and that this, in the context of multiplicity, is one area that remains politically charged. That is to say, as we open the door to a multiplicity of realities (or histories, narratives, always plural), we admit simultaneously that reality itself is a construct, a question of representation, of textualization. Thus postmodern literature, including Murakami's, is not, and *cannot be* nonpolitical. Ultimately it comes down to a matter of what is represented, how, and why.

At the same time, I feel that one further step is required in approaching the issue of "reality" (or *realities*) in the Murakami text. It is not enough simply to say that the decisions made about which realities to narrate or how to do so is at issue. Rather, in order to approach the rich textures of Murakami's literary universe, and to appreciate the controversy it generates, we must be prepared to consider "reality" itself in less concrete terms.

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## **"Peace and Democracy in Two Systems"**

Dower, John W. "Peace and Democracy in Two Systems." *Postwar Japan as History*.  
Edited by Andrew Gordon, University of California Press, 1993.

Where the actual structures of postwar power are concerned, two additional and uniquely Japanese phrases command attention. One is the "San Francisco System," which refers to the international posture Japan assumed formally when it signed a peace treaty with forty-eight nations in San Francisco in September 1951 and simultaneously aligned itself with the cold-war policy of the United States through the bilateral Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. To the end of the Shōwa period<sup>1</sup>, which effectively symbolized the end of the "postwar" era for Japan, the country continued to operate within the strategic parameters of the San Francisco System, although its global role and influence changed conspicuously after it emerged as an economic power in the 1970s. The second phrase, coined to designate the nature of domestic power relations, is the "1955 System." Here the reference is to a concatenation of political and socioeconomic developments in 1955, including the establishment of the Liberal Democratic Party

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<sup>1</sup> the period of Japanese history corresponding to the reign of the Shōwa Emperor, Hirohito, from December 25, 1926, through January 7, 1989

(LDP) which governed Japan uninterrupted over the ensuing decades. More generally, “1955 System” signifies a domestic political structure characterized by an internally competitive but nonetheless hegemonic conservative establishment and a marginalized but sometimes influential liberal and Marxist opposition.

Like all fashionable political phrases, “San Francisco System” and “1955 System” obscure as much as they reveal. Both Japan’s incorporation into U.S. cold-war policy and the triumph of the conservative elites were evident from the late 1940s, when U.S. policy toward occupied Japan underwent a so-called reverse course, in which emphasis was shifted from demilitarization and democratization to economic reconstruction, rearmament, and integration into the U.S. anticommunist containment policy. The real genesis of both systems is thus much earlier than a literal reading of the popular labels would suggest. Moreover, the domestic as well as international milieu in which the Japanese operated changed

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constantly during the postwar period, and dramatically so after the early 1970s. From this perspective, it is argued, both “San Francisco System” and “1955 System” have an anachronistic ring when applied to the years after the mid-1970s or so. And, indeed, they do.”

Still, the two phrases remain highly suggestive for anyone who wishes to recreate postwar Japan as history. They reflect a worldview, looking both outward and inward, that was defined and described (and criticized) by the Japanese themselves. And, like all popular phrases that survive for more than a passing moment, they capture-- certainly for Japanese analysts-- a wealth of complicated and even contradictory associations. They are code words for the peculiar capitalist context, overseas and at home, in which postwar Japan developed. They are closely associated with the impressive international and domestic prosperity Japan attained between the 1950s and 1980s. At the same time, they evoke the internal schism and tension and even violence that accompanied Japan’s attainment of wealth and power. For Japanese, “San Francisco System” and “1955 System” vividly symbolize the intense political conflicts over issues of peace and democracy that characterized Japan’s emergence as a rich consumer society and powerful capitalist state .

Essentially, these conflicts pitted liberal and left-wing critics against the dominant conservative elites. At the peak of their influence in the 1950s and 1960s, these critics constituted an effective minority, capable of capturing popular imagination and influencing the national agenda. By the mid-1970s, though, the Left appeared spent as an intellectually compelling political force. Partly, the opposi-

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tion simply had lost some of its most fundamental arguments: prosperity at home undermined the critique of capitalism, and economic superpower status abroad discredited the argument of subordination to the U.S. economy. Partly again, however, the anti-establishment critics had won some of their arguments or, more commonly, had seen their positions on social and geopolitical issues effectively co-opted by the conservatives. Despite polemics of the most vitriolic sort, postwar Japan never was split into completely unbridgeable ideological camps. The pro-American conservatives nursed many resentments against the United States, for example, while the liberal and leftist “internationalists” were susceptible to nationalist appeals. Schism in both camps, as well as accommodation between the camps, were thus persistent sub texts in the debates over peace and

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democracy. This ideological softness, as it were, helps explain the transition to the less polemical decades of the 1970s and 1980s.

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## **The Other Japan**

Moore, Joe. *The Other Japan: Conflict, Compromise, and Resistance Since 1945*. East Gate, 1997.

In the late 1960s a stormy student revolt erupted in Japan. Though issues varied from tuition hikes and dormitory autonomy, through school management's corruption to exploitive internship systems for medical students, the struggles came to share a com-

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mon stance of confronting the power of relationships and structures on the campuses themselves. This entailed strongly moralistic dimensions-- fundamental questioning of the entrenched values of educational institutions. The logic of the revolt thus bore a striking resemblance to French students' "contestation" during their May 1968 struggle. This movement was distinct from the previous student movement in that it found culpable the existing social relationships justified by conventional values and ideologies, while the earlier student movement had confronted only the external political power of the state. It was contended particularly at the prestigious University of Tokyo that since dominant "bourgeois" values had permeated the students themselves, the students should negate themselves as students. The fiercest confrontations occurred at the University of Tokyo and Nihon University in 1969. At the height of the movement in 1968-1969, more than 70 university campuses were occupied and barricaded by students. These struggles were conducted by numerous spontaneous action committees, which coalesced on an all-campus basis. "Zenkyoto" means the "all-campus joint struggle committee"-- hence the Zenkyoto movement.

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## **"Geographical and Generational Patterns"**

Sugimoto, Yoshio. *An Introduction to Japanese Society*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., Cambridge University Press, 2010.

### The Wartime and Postwar Generations

The wartime generation went to school under the prewar and wartime education system, which placed an emphasis upon emperor worship, jingoism, and austerity. Many men in this group fought in battle and still

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justify aspects of Japan's wartime aggression. Others carry feelings of remorse, guilt, and shame for their actions, and have committed themselves to pacifism. While politically split, the wartime generation has little choice but to collectively face the realities of post-retirement life.

Those of the postwar generation had their childhood in the most turbulent years of change in the last century. In their primary and middle school years they witnessed the breakdown of their value system and became skeptical of the war generation and the insecurity and inconsistency of its militaristic philosophy.

The oldest of the postwar generation began school life during the war. City pupils in this group were evacuated to the countryside under the supervision of their teachers, grew up separated from their parents, and at the end of the war were primary school children. They remember a time when their teachers, who previously had preached imperialistic, militaristic, and totalitarian values, suddenly began to lecture on the importance of democracy, equality, and freedom.

The middle group of the postwar generation comprises those who were born in 1939 and commenced their primary schooling in April 1946 as the first batch of pupils to receive postwar education without exposure to wartime state propaganda. These children have memories of their teachers telling them to blot out militaristic and nationalistic sentences from their textbooks.

The final group of the postwar generation are those born in the so-called baby boom period of the late 1940s. They faced intense competition at all stages of their lives-- entrance examinations to schools and universities, job applications, and promotions-- because of sheer numbers. The media have popularized the phrase 'clod and lump generation' to describe the great size of this group. Following the social anarchy that prevailed immediately after the war, this age group grew up in a milieu of reaction, when school life began to show signs of increasing rigidity and control.

The postwar generation grew up in an environment in which every traditional value was questioned, liberal values were encouraged, and democratic principles were inspired. When members of this generation reached their late teens and early twenties, they spearheaded the nation-wide protests against ratification of the US-Japan security treaty in the late 1950s and 1960s and social movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s against the Vietnam War. The baby boomers also led campus protests around the country, which challenged all forms of academic and cultural authority.

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When the tide of these movements subsided, however, most of the activists became company employees and public bureaucrats seeking to climb the occupational ladder, with some turning into 'corporate soldiers' devoted to the dictates of their firms. With regard to their internal value system, those of the postwar generation are skeptical of collective dedication to organizational norms and bureaucratic mandates. In their actual behavior, however, they have inherited the style of the wartime generation and worked hard as 'working ants', 'workaholics', and 'economic animals' who toil for their organizations at the cost of personal pursuits. This discrepancy is perhaps partly attributable to a variety of powerful sanctions imposed upon individual employees against lazy work styles, as delineated in Chapter 4: employers and managers tightened control over workers under devastated conditions in postwar years. Employees also had strong incentives to work hard because Japan's economy could

provide tangible rewards in return for their toil during the high-growth period until the early 1970s and during the bubble economy period in the 1980s.

These wartime and postwar generations remember how penurious the whole country was, during and immediately after the war. Some experienced food shortages, even acute hunger, and shortages of cloth and other basic daily necessities. Others recall the days when people burned wood to cook rice and heat baths, warmed their hands and rooms in winter with charcoal braziers, and used newspapers as toilet paper. These generations witnessed-- and were themselves the engine of-- the spectacular transformation of Japanese life into the one in which satiation, oversupply of automobiles, and over-consumption of paper, pose national problems.

### The Prosperity Generation

The Japanese economy recovered fully in the 1960s from wartime and postwar destruction, bringing new affluence to the young. The prosperity generation that emerged in this economic environment has become increasingly open in expressing self-interest and defending private life. This generation has been brought up in the context of three trends resulting from Japanese economic success: information revolution, consumerism, and postmodern value orientation.

First, the prosperity generation has grown up in the beginning phase of the information revolution. The Japanese now live in a highly advanced information environment, which is dominated by such electronic devices as car telephones, vending machines for food and tickets, satellite and cable television networks, compact disk stereos, the internet, fax machines, and word-processors. With Japanese electronics companies dominating international and domestic markets, the lifestyle

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of the Japanese is increasingly automated, their social relations being influenced by electronic media, and their mass culture being presented through the medium of electronic devices. As high-tech manufacturing and knowledge-intensive industry have come to occupy a central position in Japan, the prosperity generation has taken it for granted that incessant innovations in the information environment constitute part and parcel of their daily reality. They diversify their approach to media. Television plays a major role in their lives as a means of acquiring news and assessing social issues. This generation has not abandoned print media in general but gives attention to a wide range of publications other than established newspapers and magazines.

Second, the prosperity generation has matured after Japanese society underwent a fundamental change of economic motives from production orientation to consumerism. Sociological analysts maintain that what drives affluent Japanese is not the deprivation motive of people who are working to free themselves from economic hardship, but the 'difference motive' which prompts them to purchase luxury goods and services that give them a sense of being different from other people. 25 In this respect, Japan has attained a level beyond the stage of development in which consumer conformism dominated. In post-postwar Japan, it is argued, consumer preference is diversified, and the distribution market is segmented in such a way that a wide range of individual consumer choices can be met. The consumer conformity of industrial Japan has been transformed into consumer diversity in postindustrial Japan.

A third aspect of the subculture of the prosperity generation concerns a decline in both progress orientation and political radicalism, a trend which is said to characterize postmodern societies. Unlike older generations, the prosperity generation is not interested in pursuing knowledge for the progress of society or in succeeding in the corporate world. Nor is it interested in organizing a revolutionary movement to fight the injustice of the existing order. For this generation, the dominant themes are playfulness, gaming, escape, tentativeness, anarchy, and schizophrenic differentiation, in contradistinction to the rigidity, calculation, loyalty, fixity, hierarchy, and paranoid integration of modern society.

The prosperity generation shows a marked departure from the work ethic of preceding generations, the cornerstone of Japan's economic 'miracle'. Far from being loyal to corporate imperatives, those who belong to this generation are willing to change from one job to another. In their youth, this generation could afford to have little interest in 'organization man' careers in large corporations, and chose to work for corporations only if they provided good salaries and sufficiently long paid holidays. Members of this generation enjoyed being 'free casuals' working at a

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specified task for a short period, moving from one temporary job to another with no clear direction in life and with a strong sense of tentativeness and uncertainty. Their primary aim was to lead a playful life

(travelling abroad, mountain climbing, enjoying marine sports, and so forth) after saving a certain amount of money. Observers of the prosperity generation have characterized it as the 'new race' (*shin jinru*), which has qualitatively different values from the old, or as the 'moratorium' generation, which hesitates to make long-term decisions or life-plans.

Now in their middle age and in the middle of their occupational life, however, members of the prosperity generation now have family responsibilities and cannot enjoy the kind of lifestyles that they used to relish in their youth. Compared with other age groups, they spend the largest amount of time working, commuting and doing household chores and the least amount of 'leisure time'. Yet, their priority is not devotion to the company but open pursuit of their individual self-interests, with some people attracted to the performance-based workplace model while others seeing work as a way of facilitating a fun-loving existence outside the world of production and service. This generation continues to enjoy *manga* (Japanese comics) even in their middle age and sustain the playful visual culture that pervaded their childhood and adolescence. These tendencies are further enhanced in the cohort that follows the prosperity generation.

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## **“Murakami Haruki and Contemporary Japan.”**

Tamotsu, Aoki. “Murakami Haruki and Contemporary Japan.” *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*. Translated by Matthew Strecher. Edited by John Whittier Treat. University of Hawai'i Press, 1996.

Murakami's protagonist is always more stoic than is strictly necessary. Less confused than stubborn, he merely stands his ground, displaying a degree of self-control that creates specific parameters for his behavior. Within those confines, the protagonist may move more or less freely, but his essential character is one of self-denial. In this way he is perhaps suited to the fairy-tale world in which Murakami portrays him. Yet on a more sophisticated level, Murakami's moral-

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istic hero displays a rugged individualism that ultimately proves satisfying to the reader. In his afterword to a translation of short stories by Raymond Carver, Murakami suggests that such individualism, expressed here as solitude, is the way of things to come.

There is no need for me to explain the contents of these works. The world is as you have read it, and the events are just as you have seen them. The one motif to which I might direct the reader's attention is the violence that erupts at the moment when the fundamental solitude of a human being attempts (or attempts not) to interact with another person. The rugged natural scenery of the northern West Coast (Ken Kesey, by the way, is also a native of Oregon), and the inflexibility of the middle class background, combine to form the stage upon which the works are played out. In Japan, of course, such a combination is unlikely, for the middle class existence there is not yet so rigidly defined. However, this collection of Carver's stories might well be read as a foreshadowing of things to come.

From Carver's casual portraits of daily life, something radical, fiercely deviant, quickly emerges. It is something discernible in virtually any of his texts. At the same time, while Murakami examines this as a definitive trait in Raymond Carver, one comes to understand that, with certain modifications, it is a central element in his own work as well.

Yet even as Murakami portrays the isolation and morality of a man living in the twenty years of Japan's 'rapid growth' period, his protagonist's isolation is more a matter of self-restraint than of actual deviance. The Murakami hero is content with the isolation that is so much a part of contemporary life. His solitude at the end of the story, however, is neither wholly a matter of choice nor wholly one of circumstance, but a combination of the two. That is to say, circumstances naturally guide him in such a way that his own morality is maintained in the face of social pressures. He selects a manner of living which permits neither collapse nor pleasure-seeking. It is in the nature of this self-restraint that Murakami's protagonist never attempts to extend his own standards to govern others. He may attempt to interact with them, or not to do so, but his efforts are always non-violent. He lives in a world in which it is not only possible, but desirable, to avoid interference with others, and this is precisely the character of Japanese society during the twenty years of rapid growth. [...]

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In addition to Carver, Murakami has translated Fitzgerald's *My Lost City*, a work which combines Fitzgerald's waning desire to live with his disillusionment toward New York City. Murakami's view of Tokyo never quite reaches the depths of despair found in *My Lost City*, but in 'A Slow Boat to China' he permits the reader to glimpse his own disillusionment,

his inability to locate a place for himself.

Tokyo.

One day, riding on one of the Yamanote Line's heavy railcars, even the city of Tokyo lost its reality... this was no longer a place for me. Someday all my words will disappear, my dreams will collapse, just as that bored adolescence I used to think would last forever had finally vanished. Everything dies, and I guess once the physical form is gone, all that remains is heavy silence and gloom.

Here, surely, is an omen that like Fitzgerald's New York, like Carver's 'fixed' middle class, the world in which Murakami's hero lives is growing increasingly inflexible and desolate. This is not, however, precisely the same disappointment of Fitzgerald's 'lost city', for in his assertion that Tokyo is 'no longer a place for me', the protagonist's disillusionment is not the result of facing outward toward the city; rather, it reverberates with the disenchantment of his own introspection. But all hope is not lost.

Even so, I will lock away that tiny pride of the once devoted outfielder in the bottom of a trunk. I will go out to sit on the stone steps of the wharf, and wait for that slow boat to China to appear on the empty horizon.

All of which seems to amount to little more than the portrayal of an aimless lifestyle amidst a constantly shifting middle class. Murakami presents a self-portrait of the Japanese that is both piercing and sophisticated, of a people emerging from the 1970s shaped by rapid growth and development, yet grounded firmly in

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the 1960s. His is a portrait of a people born from the moderation of contemporary Japanese society. [...]

He permits his readers to experience the cycle that fluctuates between quiet solitude, and bustling urban existence. To this extent his pleasant sentimentalism is not a bad thing. If, however, Murakami's intention is to chronicle a lost era, a lost generation, then the terms 'pleasant' and 'sentimental' take on entirely new significances which may not be at all positive. Murakami unquestionably portrays the everyday life of the average Japanese citizen; one is equally certain that his portrayal reflects both the maturation *and* the forfeiture of modern Japanese culture.

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