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By: [Chiaki Takagi](#)

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Third Space Wonderland and the End of the Modern: Representation of Tokyo in the Works of Murakami Haruki

CHIAKI TAKAGI

University of North Carolina at Greensboro

Chiaki Takagi examines modern Japan's cultural formation from a new theoretical perspective by applying postcolonial theories to modern Japan. The author's goal is to rethink Japan's modernity, including its long-lasting "sengo" 戦後 (postwar) period, by examining the works of Murakami Haruki 村上春樹. His works suggest that postwar Japanese society has been informed by a peculiar version of colonization. Takagi calls the application of postcolonial theories to Japanese society the "Japanization" of the postcolonial as well as of the postmodern.

Introduction

Postwar Japan's cultural stance may be considered that of the postmodern. However, post-modernity in the Western sense does not always fit non-Western societies simply because their trajectories to modernity are not the same as those of the West. For this reason, localization of the modern as well as the postmodern in Japan's cultural situation is necessary. In this paper I examine modern Japan's cultural formation from a new theoretical location by applying postcolonial theories to Japan's modernity. I am aware that Japan is not a postcolonial society in the usual sense, and therefore, my attempt challenges the historical and geographical particularity of postcolonialism. I recognize the postcolonial as a localized version of the postmodern and think that the application of postcolonial theories also localizes Japan's cultural situation. My goal is to rethink Japan's modernity including its long lasting "sengo" 戦後 (postwar) period through examination of works of Murakami Haruki 村上春樹, which represent post-war Japanese society as a peculiar example of colonization. Simultaneously, the application of postcolonial theories offers a more localized theoretical framework to read Murakami's works than that of the postmodern. I call this process the "Japanization" of the postcolonial as well as the postmodern.

My discussion focuses on the formation of Tokyo because Tokyo symbolizes Japan's modernity and postwar prosperity. I reconstruct this metropolis in the framework of the postcolonial based on the premise that postwar Japan has been colonized by its modern ideology. As the symbol of modern Japan, Tokyo has established not only economical but also cultural dominance through its center-periphery power structure. The formation of this power structure can be viewed as a version of colonization, although its material wealth keeps people from realizing their lack of subjectivity. In reality, what Tokyo represents is cultural and linguistic chaos that may be comparable to postcolonial situations. In order to explore the struggles of the individuals caught in the middle of Tokyo's chaos, I examine Murakami's representation of Tokyo in *Sekai no owari to hādoboirudo wandārando* 世界の終わりとハードボイルドワンダーランド (*Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, 1985) and *Noruzwei no mori* ノルウェーの森 (*Norwegian Wood*, 1989).

Internal Colonization in Pre-modern Japan

Since Meiji ki 明治期 (the Meiji period 1868–1912), Japan has embraced the West, and, not surprisingly, modern Japan has become a hybrid cultural space the symbol of which is Tokyo. Tokyo is a simulated cultural “situation” in which materialistic wealth is identified as freedom of choice and American cultural icons and English loan words are confused with cultural sophistication. Simultaneously, the construction of Tokyo has produced center-periphery differences between the capital and the rest of the country. This centralism, however, is not spontaneous. It is a result of the pre-modern feudal society. Furthermore, I identify the formation of feudal Japan (the Tokugawa 徳川 period) with that of an empire in which Edo 江戸 (pre-modern Tokyo) colonizes the rest of the nation economically, culturally, and later linguistically.

The formation of Edo-centeredness is comparable to Michel Hechter's model of “internal colonialism” or “the political integration of culturally distinct groups by the core” that concerns existing inequality between the center (the core) and peripheral regions (Hechter 1999, 32–3). Although Hechter's discussion is based on national development in Ireland, his idea is highly applicable to that of feudal Japan, in which peripheries become internal colonies and are exploited by the center. In the Tokugawa period, each fief was called *han* 藩 (clan) and remained autonomous by having its own administrative unit modeled after the structure of the Shogunate in Edo; however, autonomy of a fief was strictly controlled by the central regime (Kitagawa 1990, 135–6). Urban culture (consumer culture) flourished in Edo, while its economy relied heavily on the tax yield of the peasants on the peripheries.

Edward Said defines imperialism as “the practice, the theory and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” and colonialism as “the implanting of settlements on distant territory,” which is a consequence of imperialism (Said 1993, 9). If we regard Edo as one nation, it can be contended that Tokugawa’s feudalistic centralism is the formation of an empire whose internal colonization was operated by Japan’s indigenous imperialism. Simultaneously, this analysis confirms that Japan’s imperialism already existed prior to its exposure to Western imperialism, and in this regard, Japan was already modern before its interaction with the West. This also supports the idea that Japan’s post-modernity is a cultural situation that can be theorized in the context of the postcolonial.

Birth of the Nation, Birth of Tokyo

In this section I discuss Japan’s modernization/Westernization as symbolized by the transformation of Edo into Tokyo, grounding my argument in the idea that Japan’s modernization/Westernization was promoted by its indigenous imperialism. Tokyo is a Japanese version of the West, and its cultural dominance is produced through self-Westernization, which I regard as self-colonialism. The construction of Tokyo reflects Japan’s acceptance of both Orientalism and Occidentalism. Tokyo-centeredness has been simulated by the state-system’s modern ideology of “Wakon Yōsai” 和魂洋才 (Japanese Soul, Western Talent). Moreover, during Japan’s rapid Westernization, as the Japanese began competing with the West as one people, nationalism was mingled with its indigenous imperialism. It was expanded into the desire to colonize other countries and became identical to Western imperialism.

Postwar Tokyo is a contact zone between Japan and the West and it is still the space for the state-system to realize its modern ideology of “Wakon Yosai.” This also means that Japan’s imperial energy continues to “modernize” the space by importing the West, Japanizing it, and then, distributing the Japanized-West (J-West) to the rest of the nation (and now even to the world including the West) via Tokyo. In addition, Tokyo-centeredness is established all the more through the emergence of the Tokyo accent as the standard Japanese accent, while imagined cultural unity is distributed through the Tokyo-controlled mass media.

Tokyo as the Third Space Wonderland

Tokyo-centeredness is actually cultural de-centeredness, which is similar to a postmodern condition of schizophrenia. Murakami regards this cultural condition as sterile for individuality, and in his works his characters struggle to find an exit from the city. In *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the*

World, Tokyo (the “Hardboiled Wonderland”) is depicted as a place without human freedom and the walled town (the “End of the World”) as a utopia for identity-less people. Both places represent Tokyo and, in a broader sense, Japan. While people are given an illusion of living and choosing, they are actually “mind-less.” The walled town’s perfection represents the shrewd control of the state-system; however, Murakami does not let the protagonist live as a contented person in the walled town. In fact, he is going to live in the woods with other exiles who still control their own minds.

I contrast Murakami’s Tokyo with Homi Bhabha’s idea of the “third space of enunciation” in terms of identity formation. While Bhabha presents his third space as a site of new identity formation, Murakami thinks that Tokyo is the place where individuality is denied. Moreover, Murakami suggests that Tokyo-centeredness itself is a simulacrum that one must overcome in order to attain his/her subjectivity. I read this novel as Murakami’s attempt to change the J-West from a place of ready-made identity to a border space. In this way, he remakes Tokyo as a productive site of new identity construction for those who refuse a ready-made identity. Thus the novel ends on a note of hopefulness, though the protagonist’s life ends in Tokyo.

Lost in Norwegian Wood

In *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*, Murakami uses a futuristic plot and magical realism to depict the maze-like aspect of Tokyo. In his realist novel, *Norwegian Wood*, he continues to depict Tokyo as a maze, in which his characters experience “disorientation” and struggle to find the exit. The protagonist, Watanabe and his girlfriend, Naoko, were born in Kobe, and now both attend college in Tokyo. Naoko makes it a habit to walk around Tokyo without any specific destination. After she has a nervous breakdown, she retreats from Tokyo into the special treatment facility, Ami ryō 阿美寮 (the Ami Hostel), in the suburbs of Kyoto. The Ami Hostel is a sort of utopia for those who cannot adjust to society. There, people seek healing by honestly verbalizing their feelings. By this means, Naoko finds peace. Despite this temporary respite, she eventually kills herself. She is a victim of the cultural chaos of modern Japan, and she suffers from a feeling of disorientation, which is the side effect of the media controlled self-colonization of the Japanese language. Symbolically, the Ami Hostel has no TV or radio. Murakami apparently contrasts the ancient capital, Kyoto, with the urban city, Tokyo. Kyoto’s urban design is as simple as a chess board, in which one can easily find the exit.

The novel is largely concerned with language. Naoko is the colonized who does not possess a language of her own. While Naoko is dominated by the junction between language and what it represents, the Tokyo girl, Midori, challenges the fixed meaning of language. Midori’s attitude seems

identical to the native's resistance to the colonizer's language. Watanabe's dorm mate, Nagasawa, who represents the colonial elite, is depicted as a master of language who uses his excellent speech skills to seduce women. Watanabe speaks like a translation (or dubbed version) of Humphrey Bogart, and his linguistic habit can be interpreted as colonial mimicry that parodies the colonizer. In other words, he represents cultural hybridity, which is, for Murakami, sterile. If Watanabe chooses to have real communication with others, he must lose his Americanism, which is represented by Tokyo. In the last scene, Watanabe is not able to tell Midori where he is. What is significant is the fact that he is not able to say the word "Tokyo" or any proper names to indicate places in Tokyo. This also means that he discards the cultural hybridity of Tokyo. The ending, then, is as hopeful as that of *Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World*. In these works, Murakami asserts postwar Japan is still controlled by its imperialistic state-system. Both novels celebrate individuals' detachment from the state-system, including its symbol (Tokyo) and its language.

Conclusion

In Japan, the "newness" (the West) entering its cultural space does not open up new space for identity formation. In its long modernization period, Japan keeps Japanizing the newness, and the West remains a reward for giving up individuality. In his works, Murakami presents Tokyo as a sign of modernity; however, his Tokyo is not a productive site for identity construction or communication. He reveals the communication deficiency among postwar Japanese who are thrown into Tokyo's cultural as well as linguistic chaos created by the modern ideology. His protagonists must detach themselves from Tokyo when they seek their own language.

Murakami's novels can be read as a kind of ethnography of modern Japan. Considering his popularity in Japan and Asia, Murakami is himself the medium of Tokyo culture. Murakami is often called an Americanized writer because of his open devotion to American culture and his allusions to American cultural icons (mostly by their proper names). By using American cultural icons to depict Japan's urban space, Murakami demonstrates not only the level of penetration of American culture in Japan but also the level of Japanization (or to be more specific, Tokyoization) of America. All the more, his novels of Tokyo hybridity can be read as his striking back at Japan's long lasting "post-war empire."

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