

Analyzing the Spiritual Connotation of Japanese Pop Culture from the Course of Modernization Based on Contemporary Japanese Writers

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Abstract. The development of pop culture in Japan has long historical roots. Since its post-war modernization, Japan has successfully transformed itself from an old culture-importing country to a culture-exporting country. The article focuses on a number of epochal points since Japan's post-war renaissance, analyzing a number of representative Japanese authors and their works from 1945 to the present, and understanding the birth and spread of Japanese popular culture. Studies have shown that the development of Japanese popular culture has been heavily influenced by European and American culture, but has also demonstrated rebellion and reflection on past cultures and ideologies, ultimately opening up a wide range of cultural areas on this basis. The article takes the representative writers and works of contemporary Japan as the blueprint for research, and finds that Japanese pop culture has a unique rebellious character and humanistic sentiment in its spiritual connotation. In the present day, the Japanese national psyche, on the other hand, interacts and influences popular culture.

Keywords: Pop Culture, Postwar Japanese literature, Haruki Murakami, Masahiko Shimada, Keigo Higashino.

1. Introduction

The rapid economic rise of Japan has been accompanied by the global expansion of Japanese pop culture. Japan has successfully transformed itself from a traditional cultural importer into an international exporter of popular culture. However, while most scholars have chosen to study the spiritual connotations of Japanese popular culture in terms of Japan's cultural products exported to the outside world, very few have analysed it from the field of literature. The article will analyse and study the authors and the creative core of their works in the historical process of Japan's modernisation, in order to explore the connection between the authors and the modernisation era, as well as the spiritual connotations that the era has given to their works, which are unique to Japanese popular culture.

The article's study of the field of Japanese literature in terms of popular culture takes as its point of departure the post-World War II historical period, from which the historical process of Japan's transformation from a traditional cultural importer into an exporter of its own popular culture began. In order to better understand this process, the article will be analysed in relation to literature associated with popular culture. As a cultural flag-bearer in the field of Japanese literature, Haruki Murakami's works are nowadays representative of Japan's traditional literature and were earlier used as part of Japan's popular literature. Norwegian Wood has published 3 million copies so far, and even in Hong Kong and Taiwan, the term 'Murakami' has been coined to describe this writing style [1, 2]. Haruki Murakami's works are a good example of the innovation and characteristics of modern Japanese literature, and he himself has even inspired the creation of contemporary Japanese light novels. Through his creations, Haruki Murakami reflects the post-war Japanese society's betrayal of its cultural traditions and its break with mainstream values in the midst of the radical process of modernisation. Since then, whether it is the leftist author Masahiko Shimada, who was connected with the previous generation, or Keigo Higashino, who is now gaining fame, their works and creative concepts have provided this paper with valuable research samples on the spiritual connotations of Japanese popular culture, which have helped this paper to look at the historical process of the

dissemination of popular culture and the mapping of the development of the society from which it has come.

As a matter of fact, in the study of the spiritual connotation of national culture, popular culture is not only regarded as synonymous with entertainment, it is also a mirror image of the spirit of the times and social development. In this paper's research, attention will be paid to the missing parts of previous studies in the field of Japanese literature on the presence of the work's audience and the role of its feedback. Moreover, it is this two-way interaction between writers and readers, between culture and audience, that allows popular culture to both reflect the dynamic changes in society and to have an impact on social development. By analysing the above in depth, this paper can better understand how Japanese pop culture has gone from local to global and become an important trend-setting force.

The process of spreading Japanese popular culture is not only a witness to history and cultural development but also a vivid example of cultural exchange and integration in the context of globalisation. An in-depth exploration of this process will help researchers in this field to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the development of Japan's cultural industry, the mechanisms of popular culture's dissemination, and its interaction with audiences, and will also provide valuable references and insights for academic research and practice in related social science fields.

2. Rebellious New Age Literary Flagellants and Incipient Pop Culture.

When it comes to Haruki Murakami, who has been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature several times, it is difficult for even literature lovers to associate him with pop culture at first glance. Indeed, as a major figure in contemporary literature, his work has reaped widespread attention across the globe, as his style and themes coincided with popular trends in the cultural market at the time.

The themes of Haruki Murakami's work focus more on the inner world of modern urbanites, loneliness, the search for identity, and the exploration of non-traditional outlooks on life and values. Therefore, Haruki Murakami, who made the implementation of his own writing style his first priority, consciously distanced himself from the Japanese cultural background in the process of literary creation [3]. This makes his work a far cry from the tone of traditional Japanese literature. It can be argued that Haruki Murakami's success is not the result of a compromise with commerciality or traditional literature, but rather the result of a creative fit with the psychology of the audience under the development of Japanese popular culture.

Pop culture is a culture with commercial characteristics [4], and Haruki Murakami's literary works became the pop culture symbols of that period. In addition to possessing the universal genes of pop culture, Japanese pop culture also displays a rebellious character towards local traditional culture. Japanese pop culture works will deconstruct serious, solemn traditional values with humour, lightness and even parody, challenging traditional themes and values and exploring the inner world of modern urbanites. This shift in creative style also responded to the national psychology of Japan's post-war economic revival and democratisation, reflecting the post-war generation's rebellion against traditional culture and their desire for modernisation.

The rebellion of Japanese pop culture against traditional culture that developed after the war had a deep background in the times. On the one hand, the fact of defeat developed into a national psychological stigma in post-war Japan, and on the other hand, the low tide of the communist movement was brought about by the total control of the United States over Japan in the post-war period and the strong suppression of leftist organisations by the Japanese government. By the time of the post-war economic take-off, the Japanese nation's emotions of facing the reality of defeat were eventually distorted into an appeal to Western popular culture and a rebellion against pre-war authoritarianism. Moreover, it is in this historical stage that the Japanese pop culture industry has developed.

As a writer who grew up in post-war Japan and was uninhibited by tradition, Haruki Murakami dared to touch the stigma of the Japanese national psyche about the war with his literary creations. Take Haruki Murakami's work "Abandoning a Cat" as an example, Haruki Murakami does not write

about the anti-war theme in a clear-cut manner, but gradually expresses his father's experience of war in the form of metaphors. In the end, however, Murakami's narrative themes of rebellion against the Japanese monarchy and criticizing populism are similar to those of Kenzaburo Oe, the flag-bearer of post-war literature, in that they both subvert the old system and reconstruct a new one [5].

Haruki Murakami, unlike previous Japanese writers, has been able to become a flag bearer for new-age literature, which means he is able to empathise with people under the capitalist narrative while remaining rebellious in his work. With his work "Dance! Dance! Dance!" as an example, the article vividly describes the reality of the 1980s in Japan, when people had to accept the values brought by capital, which led to the distortion and alienation of human beings, and expresses the author's deep reflection on and criticism of the phenomenon of alienation of human nature within the "highly developed capitalist society" [6]. Literature responds to the characteristics of the times through creativity and ultimately becomes a symbol of contemporary culture. As a literary flag-bearer of the new era, Haruki Murakami's creative philosophy fits the rebellious nature of the birth of Japanese popular culture and the national psychology of post-war Japan. The dissemination of culture requires empathy with the audience, and based on Murakami's work, it is possible to get a glimpse of Japanese pop culture connotations that seek to rebel and empathise at different times.

3. Postmodernist Flagellants and Pop Culture in the Lost Thirty Years

Haruki Murakami's works are closely related to the direction of Japanese literature, and he is regarded as the flag-bearer of Japanese literature in the 1980s. However, pop culture, as a culture with the characteristics of commercial culture, has similarities with the market of pop culture in terms of pioneering. Obviously, pop culture is constantly updated to ensure that it distances itself from the past. With the end of the bubble economy, Japanese society entered the "Lost Thirty Years". The economic myths shaped by capitalism no longer exist, replaced by a cycle of confusion and spiritual emptiness. Haruki Murakami, who was the flag-bearer of the new era of literature, gradually lost touch with the later popular culture, so that neither his works nor his creative concepts could reflect the later development of Japanese popular culture.

However, the development of literary genres always advances in repetition; there is no complete break. At a time when the old and the new are changing, there are still creators in the Japanese literary world who can inspire Japanese writers to make the transition between modern and contemporary literature. This author's creative concepts, on the one hand, were able to connect with the rebellious nature of Japanese pop culture as represented by Haruki Murakami, and at the same time, inspired later creators in the Japanese literary world. This author is none other than Masahiko Shimada.

Masahiko Shimada, who entered the Japanese literary scene as a newcomer in 1983, is one of the leading figures among contemporary Japanese writers. Because of the postmodernity of his works, he is regarded as the "flag-bearer of postmodernism" in the Japanese literary world today. In Shimada's representative works, "Yasashī sayoku no tame no kiyūkyoku" (A Divertimento for a Gentle Leftist) and "Bomei ryokosha wa sakebi tsubuyaku" (Cries and Murmurs of the Refugee Travelers), he uses parody to deconstruct the meanings of "Leftist" and "unpatriotic individual" in the traditional Japanese discourse and expands two new literary concepts: "Gentle Leftist" and "unpatriotic individual" [7].

The concept of "leftist" has deep political connotations in Japan, originally referring to the anti-war, anti-militarist Japanese communist progressives, and later to the political activists of the New Left movement of the 1960s. In Japanese, the term "unpatriotic individual" refers to Japanese people who are anti-war and against the Japanese monarchy, contrary to the "national character" of their country. Masahiko Shimada chooses to dissolve the meaning of these politically sensitive words in his works, using "Gentle Leftist" to resist radical ideology, and "unpatriotic individual" to resist the derogatory judgement of the individual by the language of power of authority and nationality, and ultimately embracing the pure joy and liberation of humanity after escaping from all ideologies and discourses of power. Through his creations, Shimada goes on to reflect the fact that in postmodernist

literature, the shattering and collapse of old beliefs become instead a sign of freedom and liberation [7].

In fact, Masahiko Shimada is not a representative author of Japanese pop culture, but his creative concepts can find a new meaning for Japanese pop culture in the "Lost Thirty Years" period. Postmodernism, as represented by Masahiko Shimada, opposes and attempts to dissolve all modernist narratives. This is opposed to pop culture, which is pioneered by capital and has a commercial character. However, mainstream culture has always drawn its vitality from subcultures, and the culture of modernism can draw its development from the postmodern culture that has dissolved itself. Shimada's postmodern literature and concepts have gradually become a cultural symbol, which fits the anti-authoritarian and anti-traditional characteristics of Japanese pop culture at the beginning of its birth, and the concepts of human liberation and humanistic care in the cultural symbols also fit the contemporary Japanese pop culture represented by Keigo Higashino, which aims to create empathy and small happiness.

4. Orthodox Detective Authors and Pop Culture in the New Century

As Japanese society moves into the twenty-first century, the contemporary Japanese literary scene and popular culture need to explore new directions. Masahiko Shimada, who had earlier focused on writing postmodern literature, also physically shifted his creative direction after the millennium by writing the mobile phone novel *Prince in Vain* [8].

After the "Lost Thirty Years", it became a consensus among Japanese writers to embrace the new era. With his creative ability, Keigo Higashino has made his works a pop culture symbol in the new century.

Pop culture, as the true culture of the masses, needs to satisfy the entertainment needs of the audience first. Take Keigo Higashino as an example, as a best-selling author, after 1999, Keigo Higashino had the reputation of being the "money printer of the publishing world" [9]. His speculative fiction focuses more on unearthing social conflicts and analysing the motives rather than the facts of the crime than traditional speculative fiction. He focuses on the psychological changes of the perpetrator, the victim, the pursuer, and those who have nothing to do with the case but are related to the characters in the whole process of the crime, as well as the behavioural characteristics and social commonalities behind. At the same time, Keigo Higashino's novels create a delicate emotional experience for the readers while combining literary weight and realistic sharpness [10]. While satisfying the needs of readers' sense of view, Keigo Higashino chooses to promote universal values and humanistic concern as the core content in his works. Unlike Haruki Murakami's rebellion against tradition during the period of economic recovery, or Masahiko Shimada's confusion about ideology and social culture, Keigo Higashino, who calls for humanity and creates bestsellers, has truly become a symbol of Japanese pop culture in the new era.

The direction of Japanese popular culture remains highly connected to the contemporary Japanese literary scene. Haruki Murakami ushered in a new era of literature in post-war Japan, writing about the rebellious nature of pop culture at its birth. Masahiko Shimada wrote about the confusion and defiance of the Japanese national psyche during the bubble economy and the early part of the "Lost Thirty Years". Keigo Higashino has emerged from the confusion of his predecessors and has thoroughly embraced the concepts of new-age literature, becoming a well-deserved "bestseller" in the world of Japanese literature as well as in the world of film and television adaptations [9]. From the creative concepts of these three Japanese writers of different periods, scholars have the ability to glimpse the direction of Japanese popular culture under the wave of globalisation, as well as the silhouette of the times as reflected in Japanese literature. Since its inception, Japanese pop culture has resisted traditional culture and authoritative narratives, displaying a clear rebellious character. With the twists and turns of the changing times, Japanese pop culture has chosen to try to empathise with its audience and promote universal values while not dissolving its rebellion against national traditions and authority. The development of Japanese pop culture is a good inspiration for academic research

in the field of pop culture. Any pop culture work that serves the local community should maintain its own characteristics at the beginning of its birth, and converge with the market and other pop culture characteristics in order to open up the right choice for the future.

5. Conclusion

With the help of Haruki Murakami's works, it is possible to understand the lineage of the emergence and development of popular culture in Japan since the post-war period, as well as its unique rebellious character. Based on the creative concepts of Masahiko Shimada and Keigo Higashino, it also reveals the direction of development of Japanese pop culture, which has shifted from following the example of Europe and the United States and rebelling against tradition to empathising with the humanistic concerns of the general public and propagating universal values. This reflects the fact that Japanese pop culture has been deeply influenced by the post-war nation and the times, and that while it has ensured the rebellious character of its birth, it has had the vitality of self-development and a mature development plan. Japanese pop culture reflects the two sides of the contemporary Japanese national psyche, the rebellious and the empathetic. In the future, Japanese pop culture will also take the lead in drawing on the connotations given to society by the times, retaining the mark of rebellion and continuing to innovate. The unique development of Japanese pop culture may provide a reference model for other local pop cultures as they expand into the overseas arena, and the article also draws on experience from the easily overlooked field of literature to provide a reference for research on pop culture, which will be beneficial to subsequent researchers as they continue to analyse and study the spiritual connotations of pop culture from the field of literature. As a matter of fact, the article does not analyse Japanese pop culture from the fields of postmodernism and subculture, and the analysis of the spiritual connotation of Japanese pop culture is still lacking, so it is necessary for researchers to conduct in-depth studies on Japanese pop culture from the fields of philosophy and ideology in the future.

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