

# A STUDY OF THE FEMALE IMAGE OF MIDORI IN *NORWEGIAN WOOD* IN CHINA

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*Abstract: This article aims to analyze and clarify why the image of Midori in Haruki Murakami's best-selling novel Norwegian Wood is attractive as a "new female image" in China, based on China's historical and social background. With distant reading as the research method, the author of this article analyzes the mode of reading in China by using the article database China National Knowledge Infrastructure. As a result, the author proposes that the image of Midori in China synchronizes with the trend of the feminist movement and the political situation in China, which are causes of the mode of reading Norwegian Wood in China even though it is said that the world literature has to do with cosmopolitanism.*

## Introduction

This study aims to analyze and clarify why the image of Midori in Haruki Murakami's best-selling novel *Norwegian Wood* is attracting attention as a "new female image" in China, based on the country's historical and social background.

*Norwegian Wood* has been widely distributed throughout the world. In particular, the storyline centered on the love triangle between Watanabe, Naoko, and Midori has attracted much attention. The novel's theme is death and gloom, with Watanabe as the male protagonist, Naoko as the female protagonist, and Midori as a less remarkable character. However, in Chinese studies of *Norwegian Wood* to date, more attention has been paid to Midori than to Naoko, and many evaluations of Midori's feminine image as modern, progressive, and new have emerged. In Japan today, Midori is not particularly noted as a "new" woman. Even in the Western world, especially in the U.S., no studies focus on Midori and point out her newness, at least not to the author's knowledge.

David Damrosch refers to world literature as literary works that circulate across cultures of origin, whether in translation or language (Damrosch, 2003). He also points out that literature read across cultures of origin has a different reading mode. Midori also manifests itself based on the different modes of reading. Therefore, in this article, the author analyzes the different modes of Midori in China based on previous research and social reality to find why Midori is focused on being a new woman in Chinese studies of *Norwegian Wood*.

## 1. Background and Method

### 1.1 Background

Research on Haruki Murakami and *Norwegian Wood* by Chinese scholars is active, and many academic papers have been published. The most comprehensive study of the reception of Murakami by the Chinese is the book *Murakami Haruki and China* by Hailan Wang (2012). In her book, Wang attributes the popularity of Murakami's works in China to the country's economic and publishing environment, questioning the reason why there was no immediate response when *Norwegian Wood* was published. She also asked why there

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was no immediate response to *Norwegian Wood* when it was published and stated that people's minds were liberated with the reform and opening-up policy. However, sexual culture had not yet been liberated, and the numerous sexual depictions in *Norwegian Wood* were considered vulgar pornography at the time. In other words, according to Wang, *Norwegian Wood* was not even popular literature when its Chinese translation was first published, but merely an underground pornographic novel with no future.

However, *Norwegian Wood* gradually gained readers, and its reputation changed with the development of feminism in China. In particular, reactions to elements that had tended to be avoided, particularly the depiction of sex, have changed dramatically over the past 15 years or so. A straightforward manifestation of this phenomenon can be seen on the publishing side, with *Norwegian Wood* first published by Lijiang Publishing House in 1989, having many sexual descriptions removed due to publishing restrictions at the time (Wang, 2012, 120). On the other hand, the so-called "complete translation" of the book, translated by Lin Shaohua and published by Shanghai Translation Press in 2001, had the sexual descriptions restored according to the opinion of the State Publishing Bureau. Since then, interest in *Norwegian Wood* has gradually increased in the Chinese academic community, especially in studies on the changes in the book's translation. Various social factors contributed to this change. For example, Wang argues that the adjustment of China's publishing policy and the innovation of publishing philosophy, the liberation of people's minds due to the reform and opening-up policy, China's entry into the World Trade Organization and market opening in 2001, as well as the further development of the publishing industry with the development of consumer society that accompanied these changes, plus the influence of small-town taste and the one-child policy on the youth of the country. In particular, Wang points out that the novel's protagonist resonates with a sense of loneliness and loss. In particular, Wang notes the influence of one of the characters in the work, Midori, on the younger generation. Many girls imitate the love between Midori and Watanabe in *Norwegian Wood*, and through selfishly annoying and tormenting their own lovers as Midori does, they come to experience how happy their love can be (Ibid., 65).

In light of this, it can be said that Wang also sees Midori as a presence that female readers cannot afford to ignore. However, regarding the changes in the translated editions of *Norwegian Wood* and Midori's influence, Wang does not mention at all the essential factors of the development of feminist thought in China at that time. Regarding the phenomenon that the character Midori in *Norwegian Wood* is perceived as a new type of woman in China, which will be discussed in this paper, a gender perspective or a feminist perspective is unavoidable to clarify why she is regarded as a "new woman" in China. In this regard, we believe that a gender perspective, or a feminist perspective, is unavoidable. If the author of this article puts Chinese feminism into perspective, it could be said that the shift from the lousy evaluation of "vulgar pornography" at the time of the first publication of the translated book to the positive evaluation of "Midori is a new type of woman" occurred with the change in mode of reading from "pornographic novel" to "feminist novel."

## 1.2 Method

This study uses Franco Moretti's theory of distant reading as a methodology for studying world literature. Distant reading, a concept as opposed to close reading, is primarily a method of utilizing the results of corpus linguistics, information retrieval, and machine learning in studying literary history at the macro level (Du, 2020, 190). However, instead of carefully reading each literary text and interpreting its meaning, we consider how the text is perceived based on trends in the research results, and we view the text as material that emerges depending on the mode of reading. For such consideration, paying attention to the

society in which the texts are distributed is also essential. In other words, literary history is not merely a history of literature but is also a part of social history. Moretti, a Marxist literary critic, focuses on the relationship between literary form and social forces, examining how aesthetic forms structurally respond to social contradictions (Ibid., 186).

In this article, the author will apply these methods of distant reading to conduct a comparative study by using a database of articles and then summarize what was read about Midori.

## 2. Research on Midori in China

Through the article database China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the author will search the literature using the keyword “挪威的森林, 村上春树” (“Norwegian Wood, Haruki Murakami”) and collect and negotiate academic articles. On this basis, we will examine how Midori is read in China. I will also discuss the development of the feminist movement and the political situation regarding the causes that shaped this mode of reading.

### 2.1 Academic Article with the Keyword “挪威的森林, 村上春树” in CNKI<sup>2</sup>

Looking at the overall situation, the number of papers began to increase in 2005, peaked in 2015, and then gradually declined. This phenomenon is interesting, but since this paper focuses on the perception of “newness” regarding the image of Midori as a woman in China, I will not analyze the causes or other factors here.

Before analyzing the data from the above 232 papers and examining the direction of Chinese researchers’ discussions on Midori, the author first organizes and categorizes the data from the papers surveyed. The 232 academic papers, but not all of these studies, were related to the depiction of female characters. Studies on *Norwegian Wood* in mainland China can be broadly classified into five types: translation studies, narrative studies, comparative studies with other novels, thematic studies, and character studies. Among them, ten studies focus on character studies, and nine focus on female characters.

The few articles on character studies or women’s character studies can be attributed to the following factors. First, *Norwegian Wood* is a novel set in 1960s Japan. The novel reflects two significant movements of the time: the second-wave feminist movement and the New Left student movement. In analyzing the characters specifically, it is necessary to touch upon the historical background. If so, it is essential to examine the characters from both the feminist and political perspectives of the time. However, given the situation in China, it is challenging to analyze political movements in depth, and relatively conservative methods of “internal research” close to the text, such as translation research and narrative research, are preferred as research. For this reason, it is believed that few researchers squarely discuss character studies and female characters in *Norwegian Wood*. In addition, as mentioned earlier, *Norwegian Wood* was not so highly regarded in China when it was first published because of its depiction of sex. The novel was regarded as a “vulgar, pornographic novel” because of its many sexually explicit scenes. It can be said that the depiction of “sex” and the discussion of “sex” in literary works are regarded as something to

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<sup>2</sup> A search on CNKI for “Norwegian Wood” articles shows that 232 articles have been included in academic journals as of September 2022. If we indicate by year, 1 in 2000, 3 in 2001, 10 in 2002, 2 in 2003, 4 in 2004, 3 in 2005, 8 in 2006, 11 in 2007, 9 in 2008, 20 in 2009, 20 in 2010, 14 in 2011, 19 in 2012, 12 in 2013, 16 in 2014, 28 in 2015, 9 in 2016, 12 in 2017, 9 in 2018, 10 in 2019, 5 in 2020, 4 in 2021, and 3 in 2022.

be avoided. Therefore, it is probably not advisable to discuss “sex” straightforwardly in literary studies. For this reason, studies of people, including Midori, who often depict sexuality, are likely to be avoided.

However, as will be discussed in detail later, as feminist thought developed in China, readers (researchers) who were sexually liberated by feminist thought came to regard Midori as a figure that matched their ideal image of a woman, and articles with a feminist perspective gradually appeared, focusing on female characters. It is important to note here that feminist thought in China has hardly liberated women sexually, and “sex” is still not mentioned or discussed as a matter of course, whether in society or literary studies. Therefore, studies of the female characters in *Norwegian Wood* in Chinese academia must be limited in quantity. Nevertheless, in those studies, there is a commonality in the way they view Midori. Chinese scholars commonly regard Midori as a new type of woman.

Why do they see her that way? In the next section, the author will discuss the phenomenon of Chinese researchers regarding Midori as a new type of woman by summarizing all previous studies on female characters in the novel.

## 2.2 The “Newness” of Midori

### 2.2.1 Midori’s Strong Independent Character

Now, regarding Midori as a “new type of woman,” it is necessary first to confirm what her newness means. When Midori is regarded as “new,” Naoko, a character in the work, tends to be regarded as an “old” character by comparison from the viewpoint of independence. For example, Cai clearly states that Midori is entirely independent. (Cai, 2009, 198) Indeed, Midori, who bears the burdens of life, takes a critical view of reality, and works on her own to stabilize her family’s finances, is an independent woman, unlike women dependent on their families and men. Meng also points out that, unlike Naoko, who has a mental illness, Midori’s tough character allows her to approach Watanabe and eventually win his love (Meng, 2005, 39).

Naoko is presented to the reader as a woman who relies on a man and continues to feel depressed about the loss of her boyfriend, making the opposite character of Midori seem even more “new” to the researcher.

### 2.2.2 Loves of Watanabe, the Source of Life Force

The female protagonist of *Norwegian Wood* is commonly seen as Naoko. However, a look at Chinese studies reveals a perception that differs from the general perception in the world, with not a few people saying that Midori is the novel’s female protagonist or that she is the true love of Watanabe’s life. More specifically, it is pointed out that Midori not only saves Watanabe from being surrounded by the smell of “death” but also is a “bright force” in the novel itself, which is surrounded by this atmosphere (cf. Liu 2020, 132). Hua (2013, 95) also believes that Midori is the woman he truly loves, giving several examples of Watanabe and Midori’s behavior during their relationship. Xiao and Zhou (2016, 49) make it clear that Watanabe undeniably loves Midori, noting that during the period when he lost her, his love for her was far beyond his expectations and out of control and that through his awareness that she was manipulating him, he learned that he had avoided her for a long time. Yui (2018, 51) states that Midori is the one who has the power to redeem Watanabe. From the above, we can see that not a few researchers have a favorable view of Midori.

In addition, about the point that the novel itself is “alive,” Liu states, “In Haruki Murakami’s novels, the central character is a woman like Naoko, but it is Midori, a completely different type of character, who gives life to the novel” (Liu, 2011, 22). Zhai

also points out that “Midori, as its name implies, is full of rebellious spirit, full of vitality and vigor. It gives bright colors to the dark tone of the novel” (Zhai, 2021, 89).

To sum up, in this novel, which is a tapestry of solitude, sadness, fantasy, and remembrance, the presence of Midori stands out as a stark, unequivocally positive, life-affirming force, contrasting the prevailing themes.

### 2.2.3 An Existence Different from the Traditional Image of A Woman in Japan

Midori has had a different influence on Chinese scholars from the Japanese. Though it might be their bias, the Chinese tend to have the traditional image of *Yamato Nadeshiko*, a gentle, submissive, and virtuous woman, as a representative female in Japanese culture. It is also a typical image of women in Japanese literature before *Norwegian Wood*. Hence, in the Chinese mind, Midori deviates from the traditional image of women. For example, Wei says, “Midori, with her bright personality, was not a male appendage, but a very independent female image, which was very different from the common image of women in Japanese literature of the time” (Wei, 2018, 89). Zhu and Tao (2015), as well as Wang (2001), also note the absence of the traditional virtues, gentleness, and classical beauty of Japanese women in Midori.

Thus, Chinese researchers consider Midori to be a woman who can be described as the opposite of the traditional image of a woman in Japan or Japanese literature, namely *Yamato Nadeshiko*. This is one reason why Chinese researchers see Midori as a “new” woman who differs from the traditional image of Japanese women.

### 2.2.4 The Image of a Vital, Urban, Modern Woman

In addition to the view of Midori as an anti-traditional and heterogeneous woman, previous studies in China have repeatedly pointed out that she is a “modern woman.” What “modern” means changes. Thus, we can gain a deeper understanding of Chinese reading patterns by exploring the meaning of “modern” as used by Chinese researchers about Midori.

For instance, Fu and Chai point out that Watanabe’s interest in Midori is due to the fact that she is characterized as a “modern woman” as follows:

Indeed, a woman like Midori is more attractive to people. She is the symbol of the modern woman. She has cooked alone since she was a child, taken care of her sick father, lived alone, and could do everything well on her own. And she is very open about sex and her body. (In addition to this, Midori has her own way of thinking. She is well aware of the nature of the school’s club activities, which do not respect women without their own opinions. However, Watanabe is different from those guys who are active in club activities and so on. Watanabe and Midori are attracted to each other in these mutual respects. Therefore, it is not surprising that Watanabe has fallen in love with Midori. (Fu and Chai, 2018, 181)

Other researchers have consistently defined Midori as a modern urban woman. Some researchers, including Yang (2015), point out that such an image of women is the realistic image of women in Japan today. Wu also writes, “Passionate, youthful, and beautiful, Midori represents the precious vitality, optimism, and strength of the real world. She is bold, straightforward, and representative of the independent, modern urban woman” (Wu, 2014, 272). Wang notes that “vibrant, bold, and independent, Midori is representative of the real world of Japan, a modern urban girl who was full of passion and vitality, and is Watanabe’s point of contact with the outside world” (Wang, 2007, 37). One more point that Guo makes is worth mentioning.

It is precisely because of Midori's presence that the protagonist, Watanabe, is able to break free from the emptiness and pain of his spirit and lead a life filled with truth and happiness. Her relationship with the male protagonist had already moved away from the sticky, pulling relationship common in Japanese literature, and reflected the sentiments of modern Japanese women in real life, making it more acceptable to modern female readers. (Guo, 2012, 47)

As we have seen, Midori has been identified as a "modern woman," but I would like to point out the definition of "modern woman" in the eyes of Chinese researchers. In the history of Chinese literature, the 1919 Five-Fourths Movement to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 is classified as "modern." However, this historical division of time is entirely different from the context of the novel, and the definition of "modern" here is not meant to be used in that historical sense. Instead, the researchers point out that "modern" means "contemporary" as an antonym for "traditional," that is, traditional Japanese women and modern Japanese women. In other words, it has strong economic, cultural, and social connotations. In the Chinese cultural context, a modern woman means a woman who is not dependent on men, actively seeks herself, and dares to pursue her freedom and liberation. If the setting in which Midori lives is the 1960s, then Midori was already a modern woman in a different sense from the traditional image of women at that time. On the other hand, in 2000 or even after 2010, she is a person of the past, yet Chinese scholars of this period consider her a modern woman who is readily accepted by female readers of her time. It means that the female image of Midori overlaps with the "modern female image" that is currently considered desirable in China. Midori is now considered a "modern" woman in China in the 21st century.

#### 2.2.5 Midori and Feminism: Interest in Sex and Voracious Desire

*Norwegian Wood* is set in the late 1960s when the second-wave feminist movement began to develop in Japan. Midori can be seen as a representative figure of that era. There have been many discussions of new images of women focusing on that point.

The foremost of these is the focus on Midori's sexuality. One of the features of *Norwegian Wood* is that not only female characters such as Midori, Naoko, and Reiko but also male characters such as Watanabe are deeply involved in sex. However, Midori's attitude toward sex, in particular, is so bold and uninhibited that it is sometimes even called abnormal. However, there are relatively positive opinions about such Midori sexuality. For example, Cao (2007, 124) sees Midori's intense curiosity about sex as saving Watanabe. According to Cao, Midori's ability to talk openly about sex is a sign of her optimism and her realism. It makes Watanabe happy. Closer to this view is the following argument by Zeng and Yang (2011, 71), who state that it is believed that a sexually liberated woman is the one who can save a man.

Some early studies, including that of Du and Xu (2004), have focused on the sexual liberation movement that took place in the 1960s, the period of *Norwegian Wood*, and have affirmed Midori and her attitude toward sex, believing that this movement unleashed human nature, and in terms of her sexuality that as a result, Midori is healthy and lively. In contrast to Du and Xu, Lu (2008, 53) focuses on the present and points out that the Midori taking the initiative in male-female relationships reflects feminist consciousness in a consumer society. Midori shows a very straightforward interest in sex. While sex emphasizes patriarchal notions such as virginity and chastity, Midori breaks those stereotypes and is seen by researchers as "pleasant, healthy, and realistic." Both such a view of sexuality and the opinions of researchers can be considered to have been influenced by feminism.

### 2.2.6 Awakening Female Consciousness

Several researchers who focus on Midori from a feminist perspective look less at sex and more at the awakening of a consciousness that is comparable to that of men. Zhu and Tao state as follows:

In love, Midori has a great longing for it, a perfect impression of affection is realized, embodies subjective feelings, expresses the awakening of feminine consciousness and feminine attraction, and is a craving for survival. It emphasizes the perfection of one's own spiritual world while pursuing beautiful love. In other words, this is a kind of awakening of feminine consciousness. (Zhou & Tao, 2015, 95-96)

Wu sees Midori as an example of a woman who is hardworking and free-spirited and thus represents the very survival force that is as strong as a man's (Wu, 2013, 39). Jiang focuses on the strong spiritual force that can compete with men (Jiang, 2013, 256). Li decodes Midori from a feminist perspective as follows:

Focusing on the character of Midori, we can see that Murakami was influenced by the awakening of women's consciousness in the 1960s, a time of major changes in daily life and thought in Japanese society, when second-wave feminism was born and the women's liberation movement transformed the world from one dominated by men to one where women were the focus of attention in various aspects. *Norwegian Wood* and especially the character Midori. (Li, 2006, 37)

According to Li, the social context seems to have a key to clarifying the interpretation of Midori.

## 2.4 The Development of the Feminist Movement in China

### 2.4.1 Development of Feminist Literature in China

The author of this article looks at research on *Norwegian Wood* in China and, in particular, how Midori is perceived. It can be seen that Midori has received attention and appreciation from a feminist (gender) perspective. To historicize these interpretations of Midori, I consider the development of the women's movement and feminism in China after the publication of the Chinese translation of *Norwegian Wood*.

*Norwegian Wood* was first translated and published in China in 1989. It was translated by Lin Shaohua and published by Lijiang Press. However, as mentioned earlier, it only attracted a little attention when it was first published. In July 1996, the second edition of *Norwegian Wood* was published by Li Jiang Publishing House. The first research article on *Norwegian Wood* was published in 2000. In other words, about ten years after its publication, this book began to attract attention as mainstream literature in China.

Wang (2012) focuses on the sales performance of the work, and based on the distribution and transition status of translation and publication, she divides the reception of Murakami literature into the following four stages: budding period (1989-1995), rising period (1996-2000), peak period (2001-2006), and stable period (2007-). Wang's classification covers all of Haruki Murakami's works, and she says that the trend in sales of *Norwegian Wood* is almost identical to this classification. Wang attributes the trends appearing in this classification to the economic and publishing environment in China. In particular, when *Norwegian Wood* was first published, there was no immediate response, which she attributes to the fact that with the reform and opening-up policy, people's minds were liberated, but the degree of liberation of sexual culture was not yet as high. The numerous sexual depictions in *Norwegian Wood* were considered vulgar pornography at the

time (the budding period). However, as noted at the beginning of this article, Wang is not at all aware of the development of feminism in China.

From Wang's classification, one would expect the sales of *Norwegian Wood* to be in line with the stage of development of feminist literature in China. It is because it coincides with how the works of three women scholars, Simone de Beauvoir, Hannah Arendt, and Susan Sontag, were translated and distributed into Chinese. In response to this phenomenon, Huang states:

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), and Susan Sontag (1933-2004), three of the most important women intellectuals in the modern West, were influential from the 1950s through the 1970s. As women writers, women scholars, and women thinkers, their writings were published and they propelled the thought process of the second wave feminist movement in the West from the 1960s onward. Subsequently, their books were translated and published in China in the mid-to-late 1980s and again in the 1990s and 2000s, as China's political, economic, and cultural development stages progressed since its opening up. They arrived in China as feminist writings and interacted with the Chinese context. (Huang. 2013)

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir clarified the differences in the ways of being and power relations between men and women, with men as the subject and women as the object. In particular, she points out that the alienated person who has no sense of self or is at the mercy of others or the environment is wholly objectified (Beauvoi, 1998, 5). A woman, as "the other," has no independent views and cannot express her desires. Beauvoir's definition of female gender and his recognition of women as the other provide the theoretical basis for feminist critique and the starting point for the struggle against patriarchal cultural traditions.

Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was published in 1995 by Taiwan's Jiwen Publishing Enterprise Co. Due to the political context in China then, the simplified Chinese translation of the book was not sold in mainland China. In other words, no official book translation has been published in China. However, from the mid-1990s to the dawn of the Internet era in the 2000s, Arendt attracted attention in China as a female political philosopher who greatly influenced the West. As a political philosopher, Arendt did not specialize in feminist theory. However, her intervention practice has laid the practical foundation for feminist literature in the 20th century and beyond. She also introduced the concept of totalitarianism into gender relations. Arendt says that because the relationship between men and women is essentially a struggle between the strong and the weak, and because in the world of emotions, men are "totalitarians" who can own or discard women at will without guilt, women often lose themselves in relationships and their ability to think independently and their lives atrophy. Although Arendt was a political philosopher, it is clear that her dual identity as a Jew and a woman, and her parochial position, kept Arendt's thinking focused on women's lives, experiences, and self-understanding, and in this aspect, influenced the development of feminism in China.

Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was published in 1995. However, Arendt also emphasizes political movements. When one is more concerned with the world than oneself, one acts politically, no matter what the character of that action might be in other circumstances. Chinese feminists are interested in the implications of such behavior, and even in *Norwegian Wood*, Midori participates in the political movement through the New Left Movement.

One day we were supposed to go to a political rally at midnight, and all the girls were told to make and bring twenty rice balls each for the evening meal. No kidding, that's



totally sexist. But I didn't want to make waves, so I made 20 onigiri without saying anything. I put dried plums in them and covered them with nori seaweed. And you know what he said to me later? They said that Kobayashi's onigiri only had pickled plums inside and no side dish. The other girls had salmon, cod roe, and omelette on theirs. It was so ridiculous that I couldn't even speak. Why do people who are discussing the revolution have to make a big fuss about onigiri (rice balls) for dinner? If it has dried plums in it, it's good enough. Think about the children in India. (Midori, 121)

This participation in the political movement makes Midori seem to Chinese scholars to be an attractive new woman.

Susan Sontag emerged in the era of second-wave feminism. Her feminist ideas can be found in her commentary on erotic literature in her most crucial collection of criticism in 1966, *Against Interpretation*. She writes that the erotic imagination, as a form of human imagination, is full of obscurity but still has the function and means to reveal the truth and should escape the limits of morality, secularism, and religion and that when this truth of sensuality, sexuality, individuality, despair, and limits is self-projected in art. When this truth of sensuality, sexuality, individuality, despair, and limitation is self-projected in art, it can be shared (Sontag, 1966, 75).

When the ideas of these three women were gaining attention in China, *Norwegian Wood* was also gradually gaining attention. In other words, attention was focused on the liberation of oppressed women (Beauvoir), political participation (Arendt), and sexuality (Sontag), all of which are embodied by Midori. It is why *Norwegian Wood* gained popularity with a focus on Midori. In other words, *Norwegian Wood* can be considered a kind of feminist literature in China: *Norwegian Wood* has transformed from an erotic to a feminist novel.

#### 2.4.2 The Reform and Opening-Up Policy and Feminist Thought

As mentioned earlier, *Norwegian Wood* was unpopular when the translation was first released in China. Ten years after its publication, it began to attract attention. Moreover, it began to attract attention from the perspective of the awakening of women's consciousness and sexual liberation. It is because it is linked to the changes in the view of women and the women's liberation movement in China during the ten years since *Norwegian Wood* was released.

To explain this, we first need to focus on the reform and opening-up policy. Beginning with this policy, ideas from around the world, especially those related to the women's liberation movement gaining momentum in the West, began to flow into China.

The development of feminism in China did not begin with the reform and opening-up policy, but even before that, Marxist feminism existed and was strictly practiced in real life. In China, no one can interpret any Marx-related theory without permission (Akiyama et al., 1998, 12-13), so everyone followed Marxist feminism without criticism. However, after the end of the Cultural Revolution, the policy of "both individual and common policy" based on Mao Zedong's ideology was revised. Then, the reform and opening-up policy laid the foundation for developing Chinese women's studies, with a gradual shift from a single ideology to a pluralistic one.

Then, during the three years from 1977 to 1979, the "Thought Liberation Movement" took place. By the spring of 1978, a "Democracy Wall" simply west of Beijing emerged. With these events came the emergence of a space of freedom of expression and the demand for a democratic right to speak. Such liberation of ideas and demands for freedom of expression contributed to the reception of Western feminist thought and the inauguration of new women's studies in China.

The following points have been made about the relationship between the reform and opening-up policy and women's studies.

In the 1980s, when the reform and opening-up policy started, and with the simultaneous influx of ideas from around the world of the same era, there was a movement among Chinese women, who prided themselves on being the leading country in opening up to women, to reconsider their own problems. Li Xiaojiang, who taught literature at Zhengzhou University in Henan Province, questioned the absence of "women" in conventional scholarship and thought since her university days, and in 1983 published her first article on women's issues, "Human Progress and Women's Liberation" (Marxist Studies, 1983, 2nd term). Thereafter, in parallel with publishing articles and writings with the aim of founding women's studies in China, she created a network of women's studies research in China through concrete actions such as the establishment of a private women's studies research organization (1985), the establishment of the Women's Studies Center at Zhengzhou University (1987), and the compilation of a women's studies book series. (Chinese Women's History Research Association, 2004)

The pioneer of women's studies in China in the reform and opening-up policy is considered to be Li Xiaojiang, who, in *The Search for Eve: Essays on Women's Studies*, argued that women's studies in China must break through the three taboos, namely sex, class, and traditional feminism. She distinguished herself from the traditional official women's studies (Akiyama et al., 1998, 4). In terms of the development of feminism in China, it was at this point that discussions about women's "sexuality" began to take place in the public sphere. In addition, as Huang (2013) points out, the early 1980s was also the first stage of feminist literary thought in mainland China. At the same time, Chinese feminist literature was also beginning to develop. In other words, a new feminism and feminist literature appeared tangible.

Furthermore, as feminist thought spread throughout the world, the perception of heterosexuality between a man and a woman also changed during that period. Evans describes "love" in the 1980s as follows:

By the mid-1980s, the metaphors and expressions used to describe premarital love had come to completely disregard the principles of revolutionary orthodoxy that they had followed a few years earlier, and the new attitudes toward love and premarital relationships consciously distanced themselves from the discourse that had dominated people for the past three decades. This has meant that love and sexuality have come to be specifically endorsed as personal experiences. (Evans. 1997, 90)

The traditional taboo of premarital relations between a man and a woman, in other words, premarital sexual activity, was broken in China. This liberation of ideas created a favorable consumption environment for the circulation of novels that developed free expression and thought. At the same time, in China, the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995, and around that time, in the late 1990s, women's studies research in China began to expand and show remarkable development, including the introduction of gender concepts and the development of feminist literary criticism (Chinese Women's History Association 2004). It was in the year 2000, when the development of feminism, including ideas such as the liberation of oppressed women, the breaking of sexual taboos, and free love, and the penetration of feminist thought into society, that *Norwegian Wood*, especially Midori, which had been on the market for ten years, came to the forefront

of attention. As mentioned, the first research papers on *Norwegian Wood* appeared in 2000. Moreover, with the focus on Midori, *Norwegian Wood* began to be widely read.

### Conclusion

Through the study of the image of Midori in *Norwegian Wood* in China, the author of this article has examined the modes of reading in a country other than the birth country of the novel and analyzed the causes of Midori's being seen as a new female image in China in terms of historical and social factors such as the development of feminism and political issues.

China's unique reading mode, influenced by its specific cultural context, is crucial. The 1960s, when Midori was introduced, was marked by the second-wave feminist movement in Japan, the rise of the New Left Movement, and the student movement. As *Norwegian Wood* was translated and imported to China, the country also cultivated its own feminism. Midori's portrayal of women is aligned with the objectives of this Indigenous feminism, piquing readers' interest and elevating her to a significant figure for researchers.

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