



## Cosmopolitanization of the Body: Kazuo's Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

LIU Tingxuan<sup>[a],\*</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup> Faculty of Foreign Languages, Huaiyin Institute of Technology, Huaian, China.

\* Corresponding author.

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### Abstract

The concept of cosmopolitanization, introduced by German sociologist Ulrich Beck, is intended to represent a global inequality. It is a by-product of global capitalism, which is different from an ideal cosmopolitanism attempting to convey that “we are all connected”. When people live in an intertwined, contradictory and complex “risk society”, those who are excluded from the world’s political system, their fates are still closely linked. The study is going to explore the cosmopolitization of the body of clones in Ishiguro’s *Never Let me Go*, revealing a relationship of bodily inequality, a physical exploitation by one group over another, in order to widen the discussion scope of identity dilemma of those who cannot be generalized to a certain group.

**Key words:** Cosmopolitanization; Body; Kazuo Ishiguro; *Never Let Me Go*

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Postmodernists have sought to describe diaspora and migration as a productive way of constructing identity, emphasizing its variability and creativity for the metropolis rather than a secular community. These metropolitan ghettos, normally scattered in the slums of the big cities as London and New York, are on the margins

and periphery of the state and society, but they are keen to rebuild the “nation” that they have idealised. They have been portrayed in the works of Naipaul, Selvon and other writers, as the natural anarchistic Trinidadians and Cantonese. Their state of community has been described by Homi Bhabha as “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (Chang, 2013). Julia Kristeva called it “a wounded cosmopolitanism” (Chang, 2013). Due to the homogeneity of languages, religions and aspirations, they formed a utopian-like community in the form of an embryonic cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism, like identity politics, is also creative and fluid. Please replace that with “As we enter the post-globalisation era, cosmopolitanism, which is reserved for immigrants, mobility and exile could also be redefined in the neoliberal era to reflect the groups that are swept up in the mobility of global capital markets. Ulrich Beck has mentioned the concept of “cosmopolitization” in his *Der Kosmopolitische Blick Order: Krieg ist Frieden* (2004). He emphasizes that cosmopolitization is a by-product of global capitalism. It represents a global inequality, which is different from cosmopolitanism who is attempting to convey that “we are all connected”. He further explains in his *World at Risk* (2013) that, when people around the world live in an intertwined, contradictory and complex “risk society” (Beck, 2013), those who are excluded from the world’s political system, their fates are thus closely linked. “We are not living in an age of cosmopolitanism, but in an age of cosmopolitization.”

As an immigrant writer of Japanese descent, Kazuo Ishiguro’s ability to move freely between cultures is not only reflected in his exotic novels as *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *The Unconsoled* (1995) and *When We Were Orphans* (2000), but also in the way he constantly constructs a world body that speaks for the “marginalised”. In his early works, the protagonists are often confronted with the myth of belonging, and Ishiguro himself conducts his own search for his role in a multicultural society in the process of writing. In both *A Pale View of*

*Hills* (1982) and *An Artist of the Floating World* (1986), he downplays the anxieties of national and communal identity and gradually alienates himself from his Japanese identity, albeit with a faintly oriental air of humiliation. In *The Remains of the Day*, he writes from a British perspective. Cutting through traditional symbols of British culture such as the “butler” and “Darlington Hall”, he recounts Britain’s post-war trauma in a nostalgic but impersonal tone, detailing how the empire was divided and how cultural authority was lost, in which he redefines Britishness and dissolves the central narrative without appearing overly indifferent or intimate. Ishiguro’s concern for the desire of minority groups to survive and create is also evident in *Never Let Me Go*, in which he goes beyond ethnicity to create a fictional community of clones, Hailsham. Although the novel sets in England in 1990s, it is based on a reality where neither historical, geographic or cultural factors have actual influence. Unlike post-apocalyptic science fiction with a Cyberpunk style, Ishiguro’s writing is humanistic. He portrays his protagonists as fully human individuals with touching pathos, as he does in *Klara and the Sun* (2021), where he records psychological activities of Klara, an Artificial Intelligence in the first person. The emotions and thoughts of the individual are able to evoke empathy in a broader range of readers, regardless of nationality or race, which echoes his philosophy of writing “for Norwegians”. The clones, excluded from human society, are just like the marginalised groups that exist outside the sight of the privileged elite. Through this novel, he raises ethical issues and emotional appeals closely related to cultural differences and social discrimination, namely, acceptance and exclusion, dignity and humiliation, and through the construction of clone communities, he accomplishes a kind of decultural writing, thus making his cosmopolitan claim that transcends nationalities and communities.

As Ulrich Beck repeatedly emphasizes, cosmopolitanization is not an attempt to convey the political message that “we are all connected”. It is a by-product of global capitalism, which includes the relationships of the superpowers and, moreover, leads to a worldwide inequality and poverty. The groups that experience deprivation are excluded from the privileged but passively entangled with it, thus forming “bio-political citizen of the world”. Homi Bhabha has also described a similar phenomenon called “a global cosmopolitanism” in his *The Location of Culture* (2012), as an “imagined community”, which is “a world of plural cultures and peoples located at the periphery, so long as they produce healthy profit margins with metropolitan societies” (Bhabha, 1994), like the situation of Australian Aborigines behind the country that practices cultural pluralism, and the outsourcing sweatshops behind high-tech parks such as Silicon Valley, which is in essence a privilege based on a progressive vision. This unequal symbiotic relationship that embraces and excludes various groups of “global citizens”, finds

expression in *Never Let Me Go*. The novel follows the life of Kathy and her friends Ruth and Tommy, as they wait to “donate” and after their donation they will die young. In the novel there are two parallel worlds: the world of clones, either organ donors or carers, and the human world from whom they are cloned. Their lives and thoughts do not intersect, but they are closely linked biologically and by fate, presenting a pathological symbiosis.

The cosmopolitanization of body intrinsically reveals a relationship of bodily inequality, the physical appropriation and exploitation of strangers either by one group over another or by one nation over another. Despite the fact that modern society has left behind the direct physical assaults of the colonial era and during warfare as the slave trade and genocide, the cosmopolitanization of body brought about by the refugee problem, illegal labour employment, the organ trade on the black market, transnational prostitution, etc., perpetuates the exploitation. What’s more, increasing advances in transport, technology and medical care have made it easier and more widely available for such exploitation. In the interview with *the China Academic Journal* in 2011, Ulrich Beck further explained the cosmopolitanization of body by citing organ transplants as an example: “In a cosmopolitan body, continents, races, classes, nations and religions become irrelevant. The kidneys of the Muslim purify the blood of the Christian, the white man breathes from the lungs of the black man, the blond manager gazes at the world through the eyes of some African street urchin, the Protestant bishop survives thanks to the liver cut out of the body of some prostitute in the slums of Brazil. All these excluded people whose organs are accepted by the richest people in the world.” (Zhang, 2011)

*Never Let Me Go* is a dystopian novel reflecting the cosmopolitanization of body, and Kazuo Ishiguro also touches on the ethics and morality of life in a “high-tech low-life” society by laying out the issues of organ ownership and human anxiety about the body in the novel. Out of their desire for health and longevity, humans reproduce and breed clones identical to them. The clones are then strictly managed and under “gaslighting” control to ensure their physical perfection and mental manipulation. The suitability of the organ for donation comes first, so in Hailsham, they have been watched closely by the guardians. Smoking is treated as a taboo. Although they are biologically indistinguishable from humans, they are subjected to multiple physical and psychological afflictions. Their life span is compressed to less than forty years and they will die young because their bodies and organs age. They cannot marry or have children of their own. Throughout their short lives, they have to keep donating until their lives fail, experiencing extreme pain and spasms during each donation and finally waiting for death in mutilation. And in the meantime, humanity completes its self-optimisation and self-evolution in the biological sense. Then biologically

speaking, when the clone completes its donation and dies, whose body does the surviving human, survive in? Is it their own body, or is it the body of the clone? When two people co-exist in this physical form, they are intertwined in the same body.

Although humans resist and fear them, they do not resist the transplantation of their organs into their own bodies. What they resist is the fact that clones are living, breathing individuals who have consciousness so that they cannot rationalize this behaviour. What they fear is facing their own cruelty in depriving them of life, whose bloody nature is no different in essence from killing and maiming. So at the beginning of the story, when Madame sees Kathy singing along the song "Oh baby, baby, never let me go..." (Ishiguro, 2005c), holding an imaginary baby to her breast, she just "went on standing out there, sobbing and sobbing, staring at me through the doorway with that same look in her eyes she always had when she looked at us, like she was seeing something that gave her the creeps. Except this time there was something else, something extra in that look I couldn't fathom" (Ishiguro, 2005c). The clones, in turn, have not only swallowed the "legitimacy", but have also been trying to find their own connection to humanity. For example, Ruth's curiosity about her "possible", a woman who resembles her and thus could be the woman from whom she was cloned, and her disappointment and anger at finally believing that she was cloned from "human trash". And the rumour that spreads that a couple can have their donations deferred if they can prove that they are truly in love. This very false expectation is also sadly a psychological projection of their own obsession that they, as Hailsham students, who have artistic tastes, are more like a human being. One can speak out about the illness and inequality of his fellow human beings, but once the subject of suffering is a clone, their suffering is selectively ignored and their right to life is "justifiably" denied, which is essentially exploitation. Although the donee as "subject" is not directly described in the novel, it is clear through Kathy's experience that there is no interaction between the two, nor does the donee want to know about the other being who is the "alternate" to their body, even though they are aware of their existence and final destination. All the work of taking care of donors before they "complete" is assigned to carers like Kathy, who witness each of their companions struggling to leave, undergoing immense psychological torture.

In the normal construction of identity, the self and the other are in a mutually indispensable relation. Yet in a top-down structure like Hailsham, the clones at the bottom of the hierarchy do not have the chance to talk to other groups and their voices are not heard. Hailsham is a closed world, surrounded by wire fences, and haunted by dreadful rumours about escaping. They do not have a strong self-identity, and their concept of "I" in their identity rests on their subjects in the real human world, so Ruth wonders

about the real "she" when she hears that resembles her. Their education in Hailsham has constantly emphasized that they are different from humans, but at the same time they are required to learn to imitate humans in various scenarios. Their identification has been misplaced as a result. Hailsham is originally created to encourage their creativity in order to prove that clones also have souls, and are not mere organs or machines. But it has overly reinforced their quest for the human world and diluted each individual's own identity, so that even when they leave Hailsham for the cottages and are allowed in the outside world, they still do not escape. Rather, they settle for the rules and try to claim their waiver in accordance with them, exhibiting a powerlessness and submissiveness in this hierarchy. Nonetheless, the experiment fails and this is why Hailsham and other schools are closed. In a civilisation order built up in a top-down manner, a large number of mutilated bodies and lonely souls arise, and this group will eventually be abandoned. This structural inequality of cosmopolitanisation is reflected in the fact that one person's body is tied to another, but his/her joys, sorrows, thoughts and gifts are irrelevant to him/her. This is not a case of indifference and lack of empathy, it is a case of two groups that are clearly interdependent but completely separated, with those at the top receiving a non-stop flow of resources and those at the bottom losing out until they "complete". In the biological sense, they are citizens of the world as well as humans, a kind of biological "citizen of the world".

Cosmopolitanism is concerned with fragmented people, as those who cannot be generalized to a particular country, who are on the margins and periphery of society and do not wish to be integrated into mainstream society. When cultural identities at the national and ethnic levels do not fully represent the subtle and nuanced losses and anxieties in the emotions of those who have actively or passively embarked on the path of mobility, and those who are fully and partially wrapped up in the mobility of global capital markets, portraying the emotional desires of marginalized people and various entrapped groups, which cannot be singularly defined geographically, ideologically or culturally, the traditional discourse analysis of globalization can no longer cope with this neoliberal "fragmentation", but needs to be placed under cosmopolitanism. Through this novel, Kazuo Ishiguro broadens contemporary understanding of the living conditions of different groups. The concepts of cosmopolitanism and world citizen also provide a collective discursive option for contemporary people at a time when relations between people, different citizens and different groups are becoming increasingly complex and insecure, and provide us with a path to construct an identity under the constraints and dilemmas of existing conditions, in today's paradoxical cultural flow where nationalism and globalization coexist.

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