A Visual Theory of Natsume Sōseki: the Emperor and the Modern Meiji Man

by

Nicole Belinda Go

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of East Asian Studies
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Nicole Belinda Go 2010
A Visual Theory of Natsume Sōseki:  
the Emperor and the Modern Meiji Man  

Nicole Belinda Go  
Master of Arts  
Department of East Asian Studies  
University of Toronto  
2010  

Abstract  

This thesis explores the affect of the emperor-centred visual culture on Sōseki’s use of visual methodologies in his travel writing in London and Manchuria, as well as his novel Sanshirō. In Part I of this thesis, I argue that Sōseki’s anxiety and ambivalence was in part due to the visual culture created around an imperial image infused with symbolic power. Part II of this thesis is almost a reversal of the first, as it discusses Sōseki’s use of deliberately visual methodologies to express his anxiety and ambivalence towards modernity. In light of my discussion of these complex visual techniques, I conclude by briefly addressing the allegations of Sōseki’s complicity in Japanese imperialism and the (non-)politicization of his work. While Sōseki’s anxiety and ambivalence may have been caused by the extremely visual culture centred on the emperor, it also provided him with a means and methodology for expressing his pessimism.
Acknowledgments

This thesis would not have been possible without my family, friends and teachers. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family—my parents, Joseph and Cynthia Go, and my sister Monika—for their unconditional love, support and indulgence.

I owe a great deal of thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Atsuko Sakaki, whose teaching and support has opened so many intellectual doors for me, and whose almost saint-like patience with my procrastinating ways surely deserves an award of some sort. I would also like to thank Mr. Erik Spigel for encouraging me to apply to graduate school in the first place, and Dr. Jesook Song for restoring my faith in my academic abilities when I was on the verge of giving up on school altogether. I also wish to thank Dr. Thomas Keirstead and Ms Ikuko Komuro-Lee for their kindness and support throughout the years.

The U of T EAS graduate student community has not only provided me with great colleagues, but wonderful friends with whom I spent countless hours laughing and commiserating with in the MA room: Christina Han, Derek Kramer, Dwight Kwok, Cat Lapointe, Jennifer Lau, Lin Ling, Mark McConaghy, Sara Osenton, Yusei Ota, James Poborsa, Baryon Tensor Posadas, Jon Roberts, Erik Sand, Sang Ik Song, Darryl Sterk, Wang Jing, and Lidu Yi.

I would also like to thank my two “crews,” the Unusual Suspects (Thuy Ho, Cindea Okamura and Wojtek Rab) and the RJ:TNG (Enrico Iskandar, Danny Wijoyo, Irene Wijoyo and Khanh “Jimmy” Tran) for consistently making me laugh to the point of vomiting. Special thanks go to my dear friend Melissa Luz, who always finds the time to listen to my rants, no matter how trivial they may be.
Lastly, I would like to thank my partner Darcy Gauthier for keeping me well-fed, well-caffeinated, and generally sane during the whole thesis-writing process, but mostly for being the best person in the universe.
Table of Contents

Title Page.......................................................................................................................i
Abstract.........................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgments........................................................................................................iii
Table of Contents.........................................................................................................iv
List of Figures...............................................................................................................v
Introduction...................................................................................................................1

PART I
Chapter 1: The Separation of Emperor and State.........................................................6
Chapter 2: The Blueprint and the Avatar.....................................................................13

PART II
Chapter 3: The Fact of Yellowness..............................................................................21
Chapter 4: The Unpleasantness of Bodies and the Visual Intellect.................................34
Conclusion..................................................................................................................47
References....................................................................................................................49
List of Figures

Fig 2.1: Albumen silver print of the Emperor Meiji in full court dress by Uchida Kuichi, 1872.

Fig 2.2: Photograph of portrait of Emperor Meiji by Edoardo Chiossone, 1888.
Introduction

Civilization favors us with so little peace of mind that, if we consider the added anxieties thrust on us by competition and the like, our happiness is probably not very different from what it was in the stone age. If we add to that what I just now said about the nervous breakdown we experience from trying not to skim the surface as our civilization is forced to change mechanically because of the unique situation Japan now finds itself in, we Japanese come out looking pretty miserable, or—shall I say?—pathetic: our situation is simply appalling. That is my only conclusion. I have no advice to give, no remedies to suggest, because I do not believe there is anything anyone can do about it. I am simply lamenting the sad fact of it all. (Natsume 1992: 81)

Though someone of Natsume Sōseki’s genius and stature could hardly be considered a typical person of his era, he embodied the anxiety and ambivalence of the modern Meiji man. This man, as described by Sōseki in both his fiction and travel writing, finds himself straddling cultures, dislocated both from Japan’s past as well as from its future. [He] is divorced from the innocence and moral integrity connected with Japan’s neo-Confucian past, and at the same time is inexorably attracted to modernity, the West, material success, and conspicuous consumption. (Brodey 2000: 5)
Sōseki’s own sense of dislocation was perhaps the result of a tumultuous upbringing. Born to aging parents, young Kinnosuke was given to a local greengrocer to raise, but was brought back to his birth family after one of his sisters found he was being left to sleep outside in the cold. A year later, he was shipped off to a former servant and his wife, but domestic troubles and his adoptive father’s indiscretions led to the couple’s divorce and once again, Sōseki returned to his birth family. Even then, Sōseki did not realize who his real parents were until the secret was revealed to him by a nursemaid (2000: 5). The constant shifting and movement in his childhood undoubtedly contributed to a sense of displacement not only in foreign lands, but within the new framework of modernity.

However, this alone cannot account for the huge sigh of resignation that he seems to heave at Japan’s fumble towards modernity. For Sōseki, the Meiji era was marked by anxiety about Japan’s new place in the world alongside other international powers, but also by ambivalence and pessimism towards its scramble towards modernity. In January of 1901, Sōseki wrote in his diary about watching Queen Victoria’s funeral procession pass through London. To Sōseki, the monarch’s death signaled the decline of the British Empire, and because it had provided a model for Meiji Japan’s “civilization and enlightenment,” Japan, too, was doomed to the same process of decay (Komori 1999: 21). Even after the death of Japan’s own monarch in 1912, the anxiety about Japan’s future still manifested in a “malaise and… general feeling of displacement” among the populace (Fujitani 1996: 147), a sentiment expressed by Sensei in Sōseki’s Kokoro:

It felt as though the spirit of the Meiji era had begun with the Emperor and had ended with him. I was overcome with the feeling that I and the others, who had been brought up in that era, were now left behind to live as anachronisms. (Natsume 1957: 245)
While *Kokoro*, his most famous novel, may be a more obvious point of departure for a debate on Sōseki’s relationship with the emperor, in this thesis I will explore the affect of the emperor-centred visual culture on Sōseki’s use of visual methodologies in his travel writing in London and Manchuria, as well as his novel *Sanshirō*.

In Part I of this thesis, I will argue that Sōseki’s anxiety and ambivalence was in part due to the visual culture created around an imperial image infused with symbolic power. Chapter 1 discusses how the separation of emperor and state came about, and its relation to Sōseki’s ambivalence. However much the people resented the state he ostensibly represented, the emperor remained a beloved figure. They were regarded as separate entities, and the emperor was able to “remain unsullied by the unpopular actions of his officials” (Gluck 1985: 200). Sōseki’s ambivalence, while directed at modernity, may have arisen in response to these conflicting feelings. Despite being a direct ruler in theory, the Meiji emperor was by many accounts little more than a figurehead who followed the machinations of the oligarchy, an assessment likely due to the fact that it was also during his reign that so many of the symbolic trappings of the imperial institution were implemented. “By the middle of the 19th century the political ground of imperial legitimacy had become routinely symbolic—a situation in which power flowed from the charisma of an institution rather than an individual” (Washburn 2002: 9). The emperor in effect became little more than a symbol of his era, construed particularly in visual ways, and his power was rooted in this symbolism. This symbolism, combined with the lack of personal information available on the emperor, meant that the government was able to fill in the gaps, impressing on the minds of the people a particular image. However, as Carol Gluck argues, this was not the result of a top-down ideological force that turned the people into blindly submissive subjects; rather, state values resonated with a variety of existing ideological discourses during the Meiji era. The emperor was also endeared to the people through the
promotion his more “human” aspects, which allowed the people to identify more closely with him in his evolution from Confucian sage-king to modern military leader, eventually forming a kind of imperial blueprint for the modern Meiji man.

Chapter 2 explores how this blueprint, the centerpiece of an extremely visual culture, came to be internalized by the citizenry, forming the roots of Sōseki’s particularly visual methods. Imperial pageantry and national monuments formed displays of power, and the emperor was often credited, at least by officially encouraged accounts, with being the “architect of modern Japan” (Crump 1989: 55). The push towards modernity was not only visible in the landscape through such monuments, but also constantly visualized in the figure of the emperor: his image transformed from a more “traditional” one to a “modern” one—that is, masculinized, militarized, Westernized. These traits came to be conflated with a figurative “whiteness” in Sōseki’s work, a direct result of the emperor’s own racial performance. Through his public presentation as an omniscient, all-seeing, ever-present entity, Takashi Fujitani argues that the emperor functioned as the invisible Overseer, creating what Michel Foucault refers to as a “surveillance society.” By internalizing the emperor’s gaze, the people also came to internalize the imperial image as a blueprint for the modern Meiji man. This internalized surveillance and image led to Sōseki’s anxiety about his visibility and racial performance in a rapidly modernizing and Westernizing world.

Part II of this thesis is almost a reversal of the first, as it discusses Sōseki’s use of deliberately visual methodologies to express his anxiety and ambivalence towards modernity. Chapter 3 deals with these visual methodologies as they pertain to racial performance. The imperial blueprint became an ideal so lofty that the average man could scarcely hope to emulate it, and it was the failure to live up to this ideal that formed the root of the modern man’s anxiety. A conflation of Westernness and modernity, though easily achieved by the emperor through
symbolic power, escaped the likes of his avatars, such as Sōseki in London. Sōseki renders this conflation as a physical and figurative “whiteness” of skin in his texts, to emphasize the impossibility of this mimicry as well as the visual senses. In Sanshirō, a hierarchy of whiteness is created between the urban centre and rural periphery—the colonizing culture and the colonized—that recall Meiji theories of caucasianization emerging after Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1905). While Sōseki’s inferiority complex about his “yellow” body reflected an anxiety about Japan’s new place among Western colonial powers, his body image anxiety disappears on Manchurian soil when among the similarly “yellow” bodies of the Chinese. His bodily schema is therefore dependent upon what Frantz Fanon calls a “historical-racial schema,” which in Sōseki’s case was his physical location in the colonies, which provided a new relative position of power. In Manchuria, therefore, racial difference is asserted through language rather than skin colour. At the same time, speech as a marker of difference is inherently visual due to a perceived authenticity or mimicry of the language performance, which Sōseki also renders visually in the physical text.

Sōseki’s contrasting use of the visual senses versus bodily senses and how they express his ambivalence towards modernity is discussed in Chapter 4. In Travels in Manchuria and Korea, Sōseki’s extremely physical reaction also recalls Sanshirō’s shock response to the noise of the city, but is more about his discomfort with “progress.” Rather than being the “shockee”, he is arguably aligned with the “shockers” through his association with the side of the colonizers. However, his emphasis on the bodily senses and experiences as unpleasant contrasts the visual pleasure derived from the beauty of the Manchurian landscape, particularly while it is still untouched by industrialization. While modernity encroaches on the land like death, Sōseki expresses his discomfort with the process. His constant focus on his physical ailments also documents the inevitable death of Sōseki’s own physical body, again privileging the visual
sense. As he demonstrates in *Sanshirō*, the favouring of visuality reflects the intellectualization of modern life as a response to the shock of modernity as described by Georg Simmel—another kind of death as the bodily senses are dulled as a protective measure.

While Sōseki’s anxiety and ambivalence may have been caused by the extremely visual culture centred on the emperor, it also provided him with a means and methodology for expressing his pessimism. In light of my discussion of these complex visual techniques, I will conclude by briefly addressing the allegations of Sōseki’s complicity in Japanese imperialism and the (non-)politicization of his work.
Chapter 1
The Separation of Emperor and State

‘It is really very hard luck to be born a crown prince. Directly he comes into the world he is swaddled in etiquette, and when he gets a little bigger he has to dance to the fiddling of his tutors and advisers.’ Thereupon Itō [Hirobumi] made a movement with his fingers as if he were pulling the strings of a marionette. (Keene 2002: 31)

The Meiji emperor himself might have shared Sōseki’s sentiments towards his age: perhaps he, too, felt that he was not in a position to give advice or suggest remedies as he ascended the throne an awkward teenager, swept along by events out of his control. But whether Meiji felt the same pessimism as Sōseki did is unknown. There is very little record of what he thought or how he felt; if he accepted his role wholeheartedly or merely resigned himself to it. Historians have expressed frustration at the lack of information available on the emperor’s personal thoughts and feelings. Access to existing records is often blocked by the “chrysanthemum curtain,” and much of what is available, such as court diaries written by others, are restrained by reverence and decorum. Biographical works are largely speculative on his personality, and most scholarship on Meiji’s reign tend to focus on the characters surrounding him and how they alternately encouraged, influenced, and exploited him to make their own visions of modern Japan come to life. Due to the intense drama created by such vivid and often clashing personalities, it is not surprising that one comes away with the impression that the emperor was little more than a puppet to be manipulated by his advisors. Again, this raises the question of who holds actual
power in Meiji Japan, but even the strongest arguments for the emperor’s sovereign power sets him against his advisors.

Similarly, the state is often seen as a sinister force, inculcating the masses with an insidious ideology to which the people were helpless to resist. However, this often betrays a moralizing, post-WWII bias that strives to create logical links between one ideological period and another. To place agency squarely in the hands of the oligarchs is a mistake: although the state undoubtedly had an enormous influence over how the public saw the emperor, it was not a simple matter of selling the emperor to a public who bought it. As Carol Gluck argues, the masses had their own reasons for accepting the state’s official orthodoxy. That the people considered the emperor and the state as separate entities demonstrates they were not merely passive absorbers of imperial ideology, utterly convinced of the invented traditions surrounding the emperorship. Thus, the emperorship in Meiji Japan must be looked at from three points of agency: the emperor himself, the state, and the people.

The Emperor vs. the State

How much actual power Emperor Meiji held is still a question of debate among scholars. In *Emperors of the Rising Sun: Three Biographies*, Stephen S. Large focuses on the emperor’s adaptability: having grown up while the shogunate still held sway, Meiji was forced to adjust to a great many changes during his lifetime. He was born mere months prior to the appearance of Commodore Matthew Perry’s black ships in 1853. Perry’s arrival, and subsequent success at forcing open Japan to trade, set off a series of sweeping changes. After six hundred years of shogunate rule, the feudal system’s weaknesses were exposed, causing it to collapse. Imperial rule was then restored in 1868, although this hardly meant that the 15-year-old Mutsuhito, who had grown up sheltered from the social and political upheaval during the last years of his father’s
reign, suddenly took control of the land. Meiji may have reigned, but for all intents and purposes, it was the members of the oligarchy comprising the new government that actually ruled. Despite this, Large stresses that it was emperor’s sense of moral responsibility for what the government did in his name that constrained his actions. These and other considerations were likely to make Japan’s modern emperors more politically cautious than bold. In the last analysis, how far a given emperor would assert himself or resist constraints upon his powers depended essentially upon his own personality, temperament, political style, and political outlook. This is why it is best to see Japan’s modern emperors not solely as ‘incarnations’ of an idea or as ‘sacred figureheads’ but also as individuals whose political choices reflected the distinctive personal attributes they brought to the throne. (Large 1997: 11-12)

Although the oligarchy started off with a rallying cry of sonnō jōi (revere the emperor and expel the barbarians), they soon looked to the west to provide them with a model for a modern constitutional monarchy. The Meiji Constitution itself was a controversial document from the start: it gave the monarch an ambiguous amalgamation of both limited and absolute power. Although sovereignty clearly lay with the emperor, his chief political function was to legitimize the new government’s policies, regardless of whether or not he agreed with them personally. His prerogatives were delegated to bureaucrats, and although he “resented being treated like a puppet,” he also “clearly believed that as an emperor who transcended political conflict it was his duty to foster elite unity based on what was best for the nation as a whole” (48).

Donald Keene shares Large’s opinion about the agency of the emperor in *Emperor of Japan: Meiji and his World, 1852-1912*. Keene does not offer much in the way of theoretical
analysis or speculation about Meiji and his legacy, but provides a hefty tome chock full of
detailed biographical information, framed by a chronological political history beginning from the
birth of Meiji’s father, Emperor Kōmei, until Meiji’s death. Keene draws heavily on Records of
the Meiji Emperor (Meiji tennō ki), the official chronicle of Meiji’s day-to-day life, and even
makes use of some of Meiji’s own poetry. Still, Keene clearly expresses a frustration with the
lack of personal information on his subject; the emperor kept no diaries and did not often express
himself in letters, forcing historians to look at Meiji through the writings of those around him, an
image reflected in mirrors.

It is precisely because so little is known about Meiji’s own thoughts and feelings that
Keene argues against any definitive claims about his being a figurehead emperor: Meiji may
have cooperated with his ministers, but he also actively contributed to the creation of a modern
tennō. Meiji’s first major act as a young emperor was the promulgation of the Charter Oath in
Five Articles in April of 1868, a statement of idealistic yet vague principles upon which the new
government was to be based. Although he was not likely consulted in the preparation of the
Oath, Keene posits that the emperor was undoubtedly moved by it: “[c]ertainly during the early
part of his reign, he showed himself to be sympathetic to the tenor of the oath he had sworn to
observe” (2002: 140). Keene further takes the emperor at his word in his analysis of a letter
written in Meiji’s name, released on the same day of the Oath promulgation. It expresses a
desire for closer contact with his people, and states his intention to “leave behind the passive role
of the emperor and take positive action on behalf of his country” (142). Although Meiji may not
have been particularly active in government and policy-making, he did occasionally disagree
with or act against the counsel of his advisors. Keene stresses that the emperor himself believed
in the policies and reforms adopted by his ministers, and took his responsibilities seriously,
 further demonstrating that he was not a mere figurehead. Meiji was assigned to play a particular
role of emperor by forces out of his control; and although much of it was a scripted performance, he did bring his own personal touches to the part. Thus, Keene claims the assumption that the emperor was merely a passive player in the Meiji drama is hardly a fair assessment.

But whether Emperor Meiji was more than a figurehead, or was merely an unwilling tool whose image was contrived for political advantage, he is always set in opposition to the state—or rather, the state is set in opposition to him, and the people. There is a common view of the state as forcing its orthodoxy onto the masses, with an “emphasis on fraudulence that was central to Marx and Engels’ definition of ideology as an inversion of reality and a product of false consciousness” (Gluck 1985: 7). The state’s officially-produced version of the emperor was not accepted unreservedly by the people—in fact, it was the state’s own ideological presentation of the emperor as having a direct relationship with the people that enabled them to divorce the emperor from the state and form separate and even conflicting opinions of the two.

The People vs. the State

Carol Gluck attempts to debunk the “modern myths” of tennōsei ideology in *Japan’s Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period*. The usual arguments run thus: once the constitution was established in 1889 and a new parliamentary government brought into effect, the oligarchs set Japan on a course towards becoming a world power, both in terms of capitalist development and colonial expansion. The modern system gave rise to an ideology centered on the emperor, in which a state orthodoxy was created and imposed on the people. This took the form of the invented traditions; looking at the emperor every day in the form of a glorious portrait indoctrinated the masses with a sense of nationalism, and loyalty and state orthodoxy was thus inculcated into the submissive citizen. The state’s success at selling emperor-system ideology is
then often credited with giving rise to a legacy of militarism and ultranationalism in the years leading up to WWII.

Gluck argues that the state orthodoxy was not quite so effective and all-encompassing as this: rather than being singular and static, Meiji ideology was plural and dynamic. Up until the end of WWII, it was more of a cobbled-together effort than something “cohesive, purposive and effective from the start” (1985: 6). Official ideologies were produced from a number of sources in addition to the government, such as central bureaucrats and journalists, appearing in local newspapers and even popular songs. The divergence of the official view and what appeared in newspapers and local accounts suggests more blurring between the emperor, the state, and the people than is generally acknowledged. In fact, the people thought of the emperor as separate from the government (220), perhaps due to the state’s emphasis on the direct relation between the emperor and the people in its ideological presentation since the 1870s (73). Although the emperor was awash in ancient mystification and moralizing Confucian sagaciousness, these images paled in comparison with the portrait of the man with the moustache. [...] in the popular view the imperial institution seemed less the repository of Japanese traditions than the embodiment of Japanese modernity, less ancestral manifest deity than the regal symbol of the nation. (100)

By the end of the era and even well after his death, Meiji became the “quintessential imperial symbol” (100), associated with modernity, military success, and national unity. There was also a human and personal aspect to Meiji’s image: his involvement in education, his self-imposed soldierly stay in the barracks during the Russo-Japanese war, and his acts of social benevolence all served to endear him to the people as a modern monarch, not as a deified ruler at the centre of
an imperial cult to be worshipped. Although Gluck does not deny that the state attempted to mystify the emperor and present him in a certain light, she stresses that it is not clear whether they translated into the minds of the masses as they were intended to by the state that concocted them. Rather than imposing its orthodoxy from above in a simple top-down model of power, Meiji Japan operated more along the lines of Antonio Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, in which force does not greatly exceed consent. The consent, moreover, so permeates the society that to many it seems commonsensical, natural, and at times invisible. On the other hand, the means by which this permeation occurs are visible indeed. (7)

The state may not have had a monopoly on creating civic values, but it was able to easily disseminate its values because of its resonance with a wide variety of coexisting ideological discourses during the Meiji. The imperial cult is commonly viewed as having transformed the people into blindly loyal, submissive subjects, but Gluck argues that this and the tendency to study tennōsei ideology for “therapeutic reasons” (6) suggests a postwar bias, as “the view from 1945 backward across the imperial decades understandably exaggerated the power of ideological orthodoxy” (285).

Although the emperor purportedly represented the state, the two became separate in the minds of the people, the former beloved while the latter was resented. The people are often seen as having no choice in the matter of accepting ideology, but this moralizing view tends to emphasize the state’s victimization of the people. An even more insidious form of government, however, is suggested by Takashi Fujitani: he argues that the people did not passively absorb what the state told them through ideological means, but rather internalized the message through disciplinary means. The emperor was instrumental in the creation of what Michel Foucault calls a “surveillance society,” acting as the invisible Overseer whose constant visibility created self-
disciplining citizens. However, I would posit that the emperor is not the Overseer, but merely the central panoptic structure around which the surveillance society is built. The people thus internalized the state’s surveillance, while their sympathy for and identification with the emperor led them to internalize his constant visibility as their own.
Chapter 2
The Blueprint and the Avatar

Our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance…it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it. (Foucault 1995: 217)

Foucault believed that monarchical power was a temporal stage that needed to be overcome before a more modern surveillance society appeared, where the “power of spectacle” would be “render[ed] useless” (217) by the automatic functioning of disciplinary power. In Japan’s case, however, spectacle was used to create surveillance, and the development of a disciplinary society coincided with the reinvention rather than the decline of the monarchy.

Prior to the Meiji era, there was little evidence of a sense of nation: there was no flag, no anthem, and as Takashi Fujitani points out in Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan, “[t]he great majority of common people did not recognize the emperor as the central symbol of the Japanese nation; nor did they have a sense of national identity” (Fujitani 1996: 15). This was remedied by nothing less than the “power of spectacle,” imperial imagery deliberately constructed by the state in order to give the monarchy an aura of mystical, ancient tradition. National rituals and holidays were invented, and imperial pageants and monuments were used to manipulate the memory of the people into believing in a new, completely fabricated past. Fujitani refers to these as “mnemonic sites,” which he defines as material vehicles of meaning that either helped construct a memory of an emperor-centered nation past that, ironically, had never been
known or served as symbolic markers for commemorations of present national accomplishments and the possibilities of the future. (11)

Once the myth of an unbroken chain of succession dating back to antiquity was established, the oligarchs utilized the emperor’s supposedly divine and ancient origins to legitimize their power. Pageants and landmarks were among the many visual cues that created a two-way visibility between the emperor and his subjects: not only was the emperor more visible to the people, he was constantly watching them. The “effects of emperor’s gaze upon the people both diagrammed and helped to produce the suspicion that the nation’s subject-citizens might at any moment be objects of surveillance” (25).

While Fujitani aims to critique the modern imperial institution and modern nation-state through the fabrication of imperial tradition, I would like instead to focus on how visuality came to play a major role in Sōseki’s work in response to the visual means used by the state to present the emperor in a certain light. What is important to my purposes, therefore, is not so much the moral and political implications of a emperor-centred Panopticon, but the internalization of the emperor’s gaze, which led to an internalization of the imperial image as a blueprint for the modern man. Sōseki thus came to act as an avatar of the emperor during his overseas assignment to London. Meiji’s visibility also came to be internalized, and the subject-citizen became acutely aware of his own vulnerability due to his appearance in a foreign land. As I will discuss in further detail in Part II, this resulted in an anxiety that coloured Sōseki’s experiences abroad and informed his later work. Although his pessimism towards his era may indicate that he did indeed feel “amputated” and “repressed,” Sōseki was one individual “carefully fabricated” by a Meiji society in which an omniscient, omnipresent emperor dominated the visual landscape.
The Vision of the Emperor: Internalizing the Gaze

Fujitani compares the Meiji emperor to Foucault’s adaptation of Bentham’s Panopticon, a structure around which prison cells are arranged in a peripheric ring. The Overseer, housed within the Panopticon, has a perfect view of all the prisoners, but remains hidden from sight. All the prisoners are able to see is the structure, and with no way to tell whether they are being watched, they come to act as if they are always under surveillance.

The efficiency of power, its constraining force have, in a sense, passed over to the other side—to the side of its surface of application. He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault 1995: 202-203)

Early on in Meiji’s reign, imperial tours were taken to encourage a two-way visibility between the emperor and the people, who were largely unfamiliar with him prior to that era. The parading of the emperor before the public served to foster a sense of ubiquity and surveillance, which helped the Meiji government provide the people with a sense of national identity.

[T]he most spectacular and well-remembered war pageants of the age were those in which the emperor himself paraded through the imperial city in triumph, demonstrating the enormity of national and imperial military might while also representing himself as the monarch who subjected all to his disciplinary gaze. […] At the
same time these were ‘disciplinary ceremonials,’ fantastic spectacles in which previously unheard of numbers of soldiers, sailors, weapons, ships and crowds were brought together in the nation’s capital and made visible to the emperor’s disciplinary examination. (Fujitani 1996: 128)

Rather than an overt ideological spoon-feeding of state-sanctioned beliefs and values, therefore, Fujitani argues that an internalized sense of surveillance created a disciplinary society in Meiji Japan. In addition, this disciplinary society coincided with the reinvention of the monarchy—in fact, Meiji modernity was focused on the emperor. Foucault, on the other hand, places the monarchical society and all its trappings of imperial grandeur in the temporal past, as something to overcome in order to achieve modernity: in short, the monarchical system must decline in order for a disciplinary society to emerge. But when the emperor’s power is considered little more than symbolic gesture, it might be argued that actual monarchical power was never there to begin with. If one considers the emperor’s body as a locus of power, rather than something imbued with “strange material and physical presence,” it is not necessarily “at the opposite extreme of this new physics of power represented by panopticism” (Foucault 1995: 208). The emperor can then be seen to function as the Panopticon structure around which the surveillance society is built rather than the Overseer—that designation belongs to the state, which possesses actual power. This understanding further separates the emperor from the state: rather than working in collusion with the oligarchy, the Emperor becomes a victim himself, his body a tool used to achieve the goal of “civilization and enlightenment.” In this way, the imperial body becomes a site of colonization by the state, which would eventually lead to the colonization of the body of a subject-citizen that internalized not only the emperor’s gaze, but his image.
A Vision of an Emperor: Internalizing the Image

Foucault asserted that disciplinary power was anonymously driven, an imposing Panoptic structure that however “visible” is installed with an Overseer whose presence is “unverifiable” (1995: 201). In the case of Meiji Japan, however, power was centered on an emperor who was anything but anonymous. A proliferation of imperial imagery appeared in the form of colourful woodblock prints known as “brocade pictures” (nishikie), which often showcased the Westernization of the royal family. The emperor was featured in military dress and accompanied by his consort in the latest European fashions; he was also depicted on military reviews, promulgating the Constitution of 1890 and in other situations that showed his involvement in the creation of the modern Japanese nation. During the latter half of the Meiji, the emperor drastically reduced the number of his public appearances, but even though his physical body was kept sequestered, he was no less visible to the masses due to the wide dissemination of his image. The 1888 portrait by Italian artist Edoardo Chiossone was particularly ubiquitous, having been distributed by the state to be displayed in office buildings and schools across the country. The portrait had three layers of mediation between the original and the image: the emperor was first sketched, then painted, and the painting was then photographed. The change in the type of image produced was striking: the Mikado, who once blackened his teeth and painted his eyebrows, became more and more the very model of a modern major general, appearing in close-fitting military dress, his hair cropped short in the European style, masculinized by a sharp beard.

Chiossone’s portrait was often erroneously thought to be a photo, likely due to the close association of the emperor with modern technology. “Technology, in the form of the camera…provided new modes of documentation and ways of transmitting information, enhancing the way Japanese imagined Japan and how they visualised the emperor and the
nation” (Low 2006: 2). Earlier portraits, such as the 1872 photographs by Uchida Kuichi of Meiji and his consort, also conflated Western technology with the emperor’s nation building. No matter how deliberately imperial images were constructed, photography was believed to produce a true likeness. The effect of such imagery was similar to what Foucault wrote of the Panopticon, which “has a role of amplification… its aim is to strengthen the social forces—to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply” (Foucault 1995: 207-208). To this list we can add to “civilize and enlighten,” which would become necessary in creating a “rich country, strong military.” Imperial imagery and identity thus became “linked not only to the notion of a special relationship between the emperor and his subjects, but also with the effort to create a new imperial order in the Asia-Pacific region” (Low 2006: 14).

Fig 2.1 and 2.2: The Imperial Makeover: on the left is Uchida Kuichi’s 1872 albumen silver print of the Emperor Meiji in full court dress; on the right is the ubiquitous photograph of the 1888 portrait by Edoardo Chiossone.
To help Japan achieve the goal of civilization and enlightenment (*bunmei kaika*), the Meiji government sent students abroad on reconnaissance missions to learn modernity from the West and bring that knowledge home. Acting as extensions of the emperor’s eyes and ears, these students were also avatars of the emperor, carrying forth to distant lands the message that Japan was now a global player. Rather than a mere ruler-subject relationship, therefore, the Meiji emperor’s symbolic power created a complicated blueprint-avatar relationship with the people.

The internalization of surveillance and the imperial blueprint inscribed upon the avatar self-consciousness about his attempted mimicry of an ideal of Westernness, always incomplete and doomed to fail. As Homi Bhabha points out,

> [C]olonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not *quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually reproduce its slippage, its excess, its difference. […]

*Almost the same but not white.* (Bhabha 2004: 86-89)

But colonization began at home with the emperor’s own body, achieved through a pure proliferation of imagery and a by-product of the creation of a surveillance society. The emperor became the blueprint of the modern man of the Meiji, encouraging an ideal of Western(ized) modernity. This was the source of much anxiety for Sōseki during his travels to London, as he expresses in the introduction to his *Theory of Literature*:

> With humility I hereby pronounce the following to those Englishmen who present the model of the proper gentleman:

> please know that I did not head to London out of curiosity of for
During my sojourn I was unable to model myself after you or live up to your expectations. Even today I regret that I am unable to become the model character that you seek among the children of the Orient. But one who goes under official orders is not like one who goes by choice. (Natsume 2009: 48)

Sōseki’s anxiety was based on a combination of being watched and having to live up to the ideal of the modern man as embodied by the emperor. The burden of representation, thrust upon him and held in place by a sense of obligation, made him feel that he “must face without shirking whatever measure of unhappiness may prove necessary when it comes to upholding the honors and privileges due a sovereign subject of Japan” (49). Highly visible and therefore vulnerable, forced to perform race and modernity to the outside world without the benefit of hiding behind the Meiji equivalent of a Photoshopped image, the lowly subject-avatar could scarcely hope to imitate a sovereign whose station was charged with so much symbolic power.

Sōseki’s writings in London thus came to reflect the confusion, ambivalence and anxiety of encroaching modernity, but couched in visual terms. As the subject-avatar is transplanted to a place where he is among those he presumes to emulate, his body becomes a site of colonization. Westernness and modernity becomes conflated with a figurative “whiteness,” and his “yellow” face among the more genteel bodies of Westerners becomes cause for anxiety and self-consciousness.
Chapter 3
The Fact of Yellowness

‘Yellow people’ is well chosen. We are indeed yellow. When I was in Japan I knew I was not particularly white but regarded myself as being close to a regular human colour, but in this country I have finally realized that I am three leagues away from a human colour—a yellow person who saunters amongst the crowds going to watch plays and shows. (Natsume 2005: 62)

In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one’s body is solely negating. It’s an image in the third person. All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. […] A slow construction of my self as a body in a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of my self and the world—definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world. (Fanon 2008: 90-91)

Sōseki experienced an overwhelming shock of modernity upon arriving in Britain on government orders to study English. His writings about his experiences in London express how the extremely visual culture of Meiji society fueled his anxiety while at the same time causing his ambivalence. In contemporary accounts written during his unhappy two-year sojourn, such as
“Rondon shōsoku” (“Letter from London,” 1901) and “Jitensha nikki” (“Bicycle Diary,” 1903), Sōseki clearly struggles with the burden of representation forced upon him by the imperial blueprint. As an avatar of the emperor, he was expected and relied on to represent Japan and its monarch. Although the English were subject to his ethnographic gaze, he is also the object of theirs, becoming more and more anxious about his visibility as he realizes the impossibility of attaining the ultimate combination of Westernness and modernity.

During his time in London, Sōseki describes having an inferiority complex similar to one described by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, where the Black man’s feelings of dependency and inadequacy lead him to embrace and imitate the culture of his White colonizers. In *Sanshirō*, the colonizing culture for the protagonist is that of the Tokyo metropolis, yet the hierarchy of skin whiteness is still present. “Whiteness,” however, is meant to be understood figuratively: Sōseki’s body image in London, therefore, was not simply constructed through the inferiority of a yellow body in relation to a white body, but based upon what Fanon called a “historical-racial schema,” which in Sōseki’s case was a new relative position of power based on his physical location in the colonies. In *Travels in Manchuria and Korea*, Sōseki’s body anxiety disappears, and racial difference and “whiteness” is instead rendered through language, yet the physical Japanese text, peppered generously with English words, still construes this difference visually. Sōseki’s anxiety about his “yellowness” in London, therefore, represented an anxiety about Japan’s place in the international world order. Fresh from victories over both China (1895) and Russia (1905), foreign and domestic perceptions of Japan were quickly changing, giving rise to caucasianization and de-Asianization theories of the Japanese people, such as those by Taguchi Ukichi, which were used to explain Japan’s success at modernizing while legitimizing Japan’s colonial aims. In light of these theories, then perhaps the absence of skin colour in *Travels* demonstrates, as James A. Fujii writes, “a blindness to the connection between
Japan’s experience of modernity…and Japan’s extraterritorial activities” (1993: 150). While Sōseki’s complicity in the colonial project is beyond the scope of this thesis, I contend that it was not simply an “inability to transcend the prejudices of his time” (Fogel 1989: 582). Rather, what may appear to be blatant racism in his work (such as the use of the pejorative terms chan and rosuite in Travels) is instead part of a complex and deliberate overlapping of visual methodologies in order to express his anxiety and ambivalence towards modernity.

In “Bicycle Diary,” Sōseki details his failed attempts at learning to ride a bicycle, a metaphor for the modern, Western nation. He likens this failure to a “defeat” at the hands of his two old British landladies, who had encouraged him to take up this hobby to improve his mental health. His interactions with the British are framed in terms of gender, race and politics; it is his lack of national and racial “masculinity” that causes his attempts to fall flat. When a Western man offers him a woman’s bicycle that is better suited to his small Japanese frame, he becomes indignant, electing instead to use an old, worn bicycle that he is unable to ride comfortably or without looking absurd, and being so physically conspicuous, he is unable to hide his embarrassment. However, he almost revels in his own humiliation, using self-deprecating humour to flaunt his defeat in defiance of the imperial blueprint.

Here and there people stop and watch. Some grin as they pass.

Beneath the oak tree opposite, a nanny sits with a child on a bench
and for a while now has been greatly impressed watching me.

What exactly she is impressed with I have no idea. Probably she is
fascinated by the manly sight of me, dripping with sweat, fighting
furiously with the bicycle. (Natsume 2005: 62)

At the same time, the obvious inadequacy of his small “yellow” body and the incomplete mimicry resulting from his efforts cause him more anxiety. However, it is not simply his
inability to successfully mimic “whiteness”/Westernness, but to mimic *modernity* conflated with “whiteness”/Westernness. In “Letter from London,” Sōseki describes an incident of literal self-reflection:

> Once outside, everyone I meet is depressingly tall. Worse, they all have unfriendly faces. If they imposed a tax on height in this country they might come up with a more economically small animal. But these are the words of one who cannot accept defeat gracefully, and, looked at impartially, one would have to say that it was they, not I, who look splendid. In any case, I feel small. An unusually small person approaches. Eureka! I think. But when we brush past one another I see he is about two inches taller than me. A strangely complexioned Tom Thumb approaches, but now I realize this is my own image reflected in a mirror. There is nothing for it but to laugh bitterly, and, naturally, when I do so, the image laughs bitterly, too. (Natsume 2005: 61)

As if thwarted in his Lacanian mirror stage, Sōseki clearly sees himself as the abject Other, a “distorted outsider” in a Western world (Napier 2007: 43). Frantz Fanon claims “the true ‘Other’ for the white man is and remains the black man, and vice versa” (2008: 139); however, for the yellow man—or more specifically, for Sōseki and other modern Meiji men—I would posit that the Other is the emperor. However, it is not so much the emperor’s physical body that the modern man was to aspire to: while Sōseki sees his “yellow” body as inferior in comparison to white bodies, it is a figurative “whiteness” and its conflation with modernity—something personified by the emperor in his racial performance—to which he is comparing his own fragmented body, causing his inferiority complex. “Whiteness” is not strictly physical, but
a technique used by Sōseki to express modernity in visual terms. Although Sōseki laments the “yellowness” of his body among those of the English and his resulting misery in London, it is also a rumination on Japan’s modernity in comparison with the West. As Susan Napier suggests, “[i]t is as if Sōseki, despite his overt objections to England and his sense of Otherness within it, still finds himself drawn to aspects of English culture. Indeed, it is possible to speculate that it was not England so much as modernity in general which alienated Sōseki” (2007: 44).

In the opening chapter of *Sanshirō*, the protagonist notes the complexions of his fellow passengers turning lighter and lighter as he travels by train from Kumamoto to Tokyo, creating a hierarchy of whiteness between the urban centre and its fair-skinned inhabitants and the swarthy bumpkins of the rural periphery.

The woman had caught Sanshirō’s eye when she boarded in Kyoto.

She was very dark, almost black. The ferry had brought him from Kyushu, and as the train drew closer to Hiroshima, then Osaka and Kyoto, he had watched the complexions of the local women turning lighter and lighter, and before he knew it he was homesick. Then she had entered the car, and he felt he had gained an ally of the opposite sex. She was a Kyushu-color woman. (Natsume 1977: 3)

It is also on the train that Sanshirō first encounters Hirota, a “critic” from Tokyo whose nose—“so very straight it looked European” (10)—indicates that he is more Westernized and modernized than the average Japanese man. The appearance of attractive foreigners on the train introduces a relativity of whiteness that recalls Meiji theories of the caucasianization of the Japanese race, further conflating Westernness with modernity. In this scene, Sanshirō gawks at a foreign couple on the platform, thinking to himself that “[a]rrogance from people like this was
understandable. He went so far as to imagine himself traveling to the West and feeling very insignificant among them” (14). Hirota also admires the couple’s beauty, but adds,

We Japanese are sad-looking things next to them. We can beat the Russians, we can become a first-class power, but it doesn’t make any difference. We’ve still got the same faces, the same feeble little bodies. […] Oh yes, this is your first trip to Tokyo, isn’t it? You’ve never seen Mount Fuji. We got by it a little farther on. It’s the finest thing Japan has to offer, the only thing we’ve got to boast about. The trouble is, of course, it’s just a natural object.

It’s been sitting there for all time. We didn’t make it. (15)

Hirota’s comments are shocking to Sanshirō, but he soon realizes that “there were bound to be men like this everywhere in Tokyo” (16) and that he would do well to get used to this blasé attitude. Sanshirō’s initial outrage was perhaps a product of the “unequalled exuberance” produced in the Japanese public after Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, which was intensified by the fact that it came a mere ten years after China’s humiliating defeat at the hands of the Japanese in 1895 (Brodey 2000: 13). Sōseki’s mockery of Sanshirō and the general post-war celebratory mood here thus reflects an anxiety about Japan’s place in the world order. But part of his point, of course, is that these two feelings are very closely intertwined: the sense of glory and ambition was proportionate to the anxiety Japan felt about its international image. (Brodey 2000: 15)
Perceptions of Japan by both Western and Asian countries were also quickly changing. As a result of this anxiety about Japan’s worthiness to a place among Western colonial powers, theories of the caucasianization of the Japanese race emerged, for under Western eyes, the Japanese behavior appeared to be rather uncharacteristic for a ‘lesser’ race. Henceforth, on the one hand, Japan was to be considered a political threat to the balance of power in Asia, and on the other hand, it was soon to be bestowed the approbation of ‘honorary whites,’ and to join the ranks of colonial powers. (Ching 1988: 62)

Japanese intellectuals such as Taguchi Ukichi attempted to allay Western fears about the potential predominance of the “yellow” race over the white race, asserting that although the “yellow” race existed, the Japanese did not belong to it (Taguchi 1904, translated in Ching 1998: 62). Morris Low argues that foreign instructors employed in Japan also helped to “introduce the discourse of race into Japan. The cultural authority of their writings and teachings resulted in acceptance of the racial hierarchies they constructed” (Low 2006: 43). Foreign advisors such as William Elliot Griffis promoted Social Darwinism, encouraging the idea that due to interbreeding with the Ainu, the Japanese are actually an Aryan race, providing an explanation for their success at modernization.

Leo Ching argues that “it is this globalized imperialist structure and colonial endeavor that enabled Japan’s racial imaginings in the first place, and not the other way around” (1988: 58). Japanese imperialism did not come about due to a belief in Japanese whiteness born of scientific racism, but these “racial imaginings” of the Japanese bodily schema could only be possible through what Fanon calls a “historical-racial schema” (2008: 91), Sōseki’s own “racial imaginings,” as Ching puts it, of an inferior body image in England resulted from a colonization
of the body through the imperial blueprint. In Manchuria, however, his affiliation with the colonizing side changes his historical-racial schema, leading to a new bodily schema.

In Manchuria, the Japanese body is less conspicuous among other yellow bodies; Sōseki, finding himself much more empowered in a new geographical location where he is no longer the abject Other, thus did not suffer the same anxiety about his visibility as he did in London. As Fanon argues, when race is introduced to the mirror stage, the “historical and economic realities” must be taken into consideration (2008: 139): the realities of Sōseki’s abjection, then, depend on his physical, geographic location as it provided a different point of reference for his bodily comparison. Surrounded by other “yellow” people, his reference points for bodily comparison necessarily change; therefore, in *Travels*, skin colour is not the focus of racial difference.

Instead, Sōseki first expresses his disapproval of what he perceives to be foreign behaviour and customs, and then renders this difference through speech and language. During his sea voyage to Manchuria, he encounters the British vice-consul and his bulldog. Sōseki’s disapproval is limited to mentioning that the British man, after bringing his dog into the dining room, realizes that perhaps it would “show a lack of good breeding” and, carrying the dog under his arm, “beat a highly elegant retreat.” (Natsume 2000: 36). However, it is with the dog that Sōseki has something of an exchange with, and that he invests with almost human qualities:

As a bulldog, it already had an unusual face by virtue of its breed. Later, after we had put in at Dairen, the same young man entered the Hotel Yamato. In the course of the meal in the elegant dining-room, my gaze inadvertently met the dog’s and I started in surprise. […] As I have already mentioned several times, this dog had an extraordinary face; there was nonetheless a kind of majesty in its demeanour at this moment. (36)
This comment is particularly interesting in light of his first impression of Chinese coolies, who he first describes as “buzzing and swarming like angry wasps” (39) before making a canine comparison:

Of the horse carriages in particular it had been rumoured, at the time when the Russkis had evacuated Dairen during the Russo-Japanese War, that the Chinese had very carefully dug holes and buried the vehicles in order to prevent their falling into Japanese hands. Afterwards, the Chinks walked about everywhere sniffing the ground; when they found the right smell, they noisily disinterred one carriage, then another, in the same manner. Very soon, Dairen was teeming with growling, muttering diggers of holes. (40)

Despite producing a cacophony of bestial noises, the Chinese are almost mute in the presence of the Japanese. Sōseki describes a subsequent encounter with a Chinese woman he had met previously:

She was speaking in Chinese, so, needless to say, I could not understand what she was saying. She was vociferously scolding the coolies. Her vehemence amazed me. I would never have believed it of the woman who, the previous day, had smilingly given me a respectful bow and nervously passed close by my side. The evening before our departure, this woman introduced herself to us for the first time. In the light of the electric lamp, she appeared quite pale under her make-up. As usual, however, she did not utter a word. (100)
The woman’s silence recalls Sanshirō, whose “painful slowness of speech was comically mismatched with Yojirō’s patter” (Natsume 1977: 51). The bumpkin is struck silent in the presence of his “whiter” counterparts, as if intimidated by the deafening roar of modernity. The people of the urban centre are not only physically whiter in terms of skin colour, but figuratively “whiter”—that is, more modern, which gives them an increased ability to speak. Speaking is thus tied to modernity: as one acquires new powers of speech, one becomes more “modern” and vice versa. Both Sōseki and Fanon convey this transformation through a figurative “whiteness.”

According to Fanon, the returnee feigns ignorance of Creole and all things related to his native colonized land in order to prove his sophistication after having been in France for an extended period of time. Thus language performance becomes racial performance:

the more the black Antillean assimilates the French language, the whiter he gets—i.e., the closer he comes to becoming a true human being. […] All colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been committed to the grave—position themselves in relation to the civilizing language: i.e., the metropolitan culture. The more the colonized has assimilated the cultural values of the metropolis, the more he will have escaped the bush. The more he rejects his blackness and the bush, the whiter he will become.

(Fanon 2008: 2)

However, as Sōseki himself found, physical appearance still dictates the reception of one’s language performance. Upon returning to Japan from London, Sōseki was still beset by the

---

1 Yojirō is Sanshirō’s friend and classmate in Tokyo, a “modern” young man on whom Sanshirō relies for guidance.
inferiority complex that plagued him in England. Undoubtedly, there were heightened expectations of a yōkō gaeri’s (returnee from the West’s) increased language ability, although when Sōseki took over Lafcadio Hearn’s position at Tokyo Imperial University in 1906, some believed he “did not exude the perceived natural physical authenticity that his predecessor… was said to bring to the teaching of English” (Sakaki 2008: 38). To further underscore this incomplete mimicry, Sōseki “appeared obnoxiously Europeanized to his Japanese students. Now he sported a fashionable Kaiser moustache, ate beef and toast and wore a frock-coat” (Flanagan 2005: 12). This disconnect between perceived language ability and appearance echoes that of the Antillean that returns home after a long stay in France:

So here is our new returnee. He can no longer understand Creole; he talks of the Opera House, which he has probably seen only from a distance; but most of all he assumes a critical attitude toward his fellow islanders. He reacts differently at the slightest pretext. He knows everything. He proves himself through his language.

(Fanon 2008: 7-8)

Sanshirō often adopts a similar attitude as the Antillean returnee towards the people of his hometown, feeling as if his mother’s letters had “arrived from the musty past” and that he had “no time to waste reading such stuff” (Natsume 1977: 18). Although Sanshirō’s reticence reflects his backwardness in comparison to his city-dwelling friends, the novel interestingly makes no mention of the differences between provincial and urban language. Sanshirō’s friends are quick to mock his countryside manners and lack of sophistication, yet they are silent on the

---

2 Sōseki’s moustache was not unlike the Meiji Emperor’s own Bismarck moustache. Japan also looked to Germany as a model of imperialism.
existence of a provincial accent. A provincial accent would have marked Sanshirō as a transplant from the periphery as much as his dark skin, likely causing him as much grief as experienced by the Antillean returnee, who struggles with his newly acquired aural markers of difference:

Among a group of young Antilleans, he who can express himself, who masters the language, is the one to look out for: be wary of him; he’s almost white. In France they say ‘to speak like a book.’ In Martinique they say ‘to speak like a white man.” (Fanon 2008: 5)

To acquire the speech of the “metropolitan culture” is another mimicry of “whiteness.” In omitting Sanshirō’s accent, Sōseki stresses the visual of the dark-skinned body over the aural/oral senses aroused by speech, but language “whiteness” is still performed through the physical text, though the emphasis is placed squarely on Sōseki’s own language and racial performance. The injection of English words into the Japanese, such as the use of the phrase, “pity’s akin to love,” rendered in katakana as “ビーチーズ・アキン・ツー・ラップ” (Natsume 2010), creates a striking visual effect for the reader. This is more clearly defined in the text of Travels in Manchuria and Korea:

In contrast, Sōseki focuses on British accents in “Letter from London,” particularly through the boarding house maid Bedge Pardon, so nicknamed for the thick Cockney accent that both endears her and makes her irritating to him. Atsuko Sakaki argues that Sōseki’s critique of English variations indicate a switch in focus from ethnicity to class. While a discussion of class is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to note that in Travels, class difference is often represented through the use of Western and Japanese dress. In Manchuria, however, class is inextricable from race, as it is in the Antilles. Fanon’s remarks on returnees also imply class difference, as some are able to afford opportunities to study abroad while others are not.

Sōseki’s reasons for privileging visuality in Sanshirō will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5.

Although the use of English translation in Sanshirō is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is interesting to note that Sōseki “did not care much” for the art of translation, and “poured scorn on the contemporary Japanese vogue of employing a host of Western cultural references” (Flanagan 2005: 35).
後で本人に聞いて見ると、是公はその夜舞踏の済んだ後で、
多数の亜米利加士官（アメリカしかん）と共に倶楽部（クラブ）のバーに繰り込んだのだそうだ。そこで、士官連が是公
に向って、今夜の会は大成功であるとか、非常に盛（さかん
）であったとか、ロッパに賛辞を呈（てい）したものだから、
是公はやむをえず、大声（たいせい）を振り絞（しぼ）って
gentlemen（ゼントルメン）！
と叫んだ。すると今まではやがや云っていた連中が、総裁の
演説でも始まる事と思って、一度に口を閉（とじ）して、満場
は水を打ったように静かになった。是公は固（もと）よりゼ
ントルメンの後（あと）を何とかつけなければならない。と
ころがゼントルメン以外の英語があいにく一言（ひとこと）
も出て来なかった。英語と云う英語は頭の底からことごとく
酒で洗い去られてしまっているので、仕方なしに、急に日本
語に鞍換え（くらがえ）をして、ゼントルメンの次へもってき
て、すぐ大いに飲みましょうと怒鳴（どな）った。ゼントル
メン大いに飲みましょうは、たいていの亜米利加人（アメリカ
ジン）に通じる訳のものではないが、そこがバーのバーた
るところで、ゼントルメン大いに飲みましょうとやるや否や
、士官連がわあっと云って主人公を胴上（どうあげ）にした
そうである。(Natsume 2004)
Later on, I asked him about it, and he told me that after the ball he had burst into the bar of the Club, along with a large number of American officers. The officers were all praising him to the skies for the resounding success of his ball, the magnificence of the reception he had given them, and so forth. Then, under the pressure of events and with an enthusiasm born of desperation, Zekō roared in stentorian tones:

‘Gentlemen!’

The assembled company, which up to that moment had been very noisy, immediately became quiet, assuming that the President was about the address them. All of Manchuria, it seemed, had become enveloped in total silence. Zekō certainly should have added something after his ‘Gentlemen!’ Unfortunately, he could not utter a single English word. All English had been washed out of his brain by plentiful draughts of saké. There was nothing he could do about it, and suddenly switching over to Japanese, he followed up the ‘Gentlemen!’ with a shout of:

‘Let’s drink up!’

This phrase ‘Gentlemen! Drink up!’ was incomprehensible to most of the American officers. However, as soon as he had uttered it, the party of officers cried ‘Hooray!’ and acclaimed him with one accord. (Natsume 2000: 55-56)
Zekō’s proclamation of “gentlemen!” is rendered phonetically in *katakana* as *zentorumen* to emphasize his faulty pronunciation (Brodey 2000: 139). Despite his portrayal as having rough manners and lacking worldliness, he is able to make himself understood despite his awkward accent. His lack of self-consciousness stands in sharp relief to the Martinican who swallows his r’s. He’ll go to work on it and enter into open conflict with it. He will make every effort not only to roll his r’s, but also to make them stand out. On the lookout for the slightest reaction of others, listening to himself speak and not trusting his own tongue, an unfortunately lazy organ, he will look himself in his room and read for hours—desperately working on his *diction*. (Fanon 2008: 5, italics in original)

Sōseki, who once wrote that “socializ[ing] awkwardly in broken English is something I positively loathe,” (“Letter from London”, in Natsume 2005: 57) seems ambivalent about his English ability in Manchuria. His outright refusal to speak English in one scene reflects a redirection of the hierarchy of “whiteness”:

When we had lunch, I felt sorry for the English people who did not use chopsticks or eat rice. It was surprising that the British Consul, who had lived in China for eighteen years, was completely incapable of using chopsticks. On the other hand, he expressed himself remarkably well in Mandarin Chinese. Matsuda, who was very busy, left the table and was unable to return. The man who

---

6 The man referred to as Zekō in the text is Nakamura Yoshikoto, second president of the South Manchurian Railway Company. He was a good friend of Sōseki’s, though part of his motive for inviting Sōseki on the tour was publicity for the SMR in the *Asahi* newspaper (Brodey 2000: 140).
replaced him as our host had a difficult task, speaking to the
British people in English and to us in Japanese. However neither
Hashimoto nor I myself made use of our English. The English, by
nature, are stamped with arrogance, and unless they have been
introduced, are not very willing to talk to somebody from
elsewhere. That is why we showed the same arrogance towards
the British people. (Natsume 2000: 134)

In a different space, the Other can become “white” in terms of relative modernity and power. In
Manchuria, Sōseki’s language anxiety seems to disappear along with his body image anxiety,
although this does not indicate that he was suddenly at ease. Travels in Manchuria and Korea
spotlights bodily reactions and sensations, which Sōseki uses to express his discomfort with the
process of modernity. His focus on his physical ailments stand in contrasts sharply with the
visual pleasure he derives from the Manchurian landscape. In Sanshirō, however, the visual
senses are employed not simply for enjoyment, but a sense-dulling defensive strategy in response
to the shock of modernity.
Chapter 4
The Unpleasantness of Bodies and the Visual Intellect

While his foreign appearance caused Sōseki much anxiety in London, it was a much more empowered man that visited Manchuria as a guest of his high-powered friend Nakamura Yoshikoto (referred to as Zekō by Sōseki and hereafter for continuity), second president of the South Manchurian Railway company. In *Travels in Manchuria and Korea* (1909; hereafter, *Travels*), Sōseki’s body image anxiety has disappeared, but his body is still the source of great anxiety. Pain, gas and nausea are brought about by strange food, the weather, the jarring movements of a carriage. He devotes a great deal of ink to how physically ill the journey makes him, not simply due to his chronic stomach ailment, but as a reflection of his discomfort with the process of modernity in the colony. The intensely physical and bodily nature of this work is further emphasized through his harping on the “smelly” and “dirty” bodies of the Chinese people.

As discussed in the previous chapter, bodies in *Travels* are not racialized according to skin colour or appearance; rather, the focus on bodies here are through the bodily senses—a nauseating smell, the sour taste of vomit in the mouth, the oily feel of dirty hair. The visual senses, however, bring Sōseki with some relief from the stench of the colonies and his physical discomfort, even providing him with some enjoyment. He compares the beauty of Manchurian vistas still unsullied by industrialization to Chinese paintings, and even takes pleasure in watching coolies at their work. While bodily senses are deemed unpleasant, visual senses are presented as pleasant; this neat categorization in *Travels* draws attention to the privileging of visuality in *Sanshirō*, where it is conflated with intellect.
Visuality in Sanshirō is not merely a refuge, but a response to sensory overload. Walter Benjamin wrote of insulating oneself against the “shock” of modernity in a rapidly urbanizing landscape: the modern person is protected from the trauma of excessive stimuli by developing a “heightened degree of consciousness” that turns the intellect into the dominant mode of perception. Modernity thus creates what Georg Simmel in The Metropolis and Mental Life (2002) called the “mental life” in the big city, with its citizens adopting a “blasé” attitude in order to desensitize themselves against the overwhelming metropolis.

Sōseki’s documentation of his own physical demise in Travels through bodily senses further privileges the visual senses in their positive association with pleasure. However, when taken into the larger context of his work, particularly with Sanshirō, Sōseki’s use of visuality indicates the direction that society is heading: towards the intellectualization of modern life, and the blasé attitude of the critic.

Sōseki’s overriding impression of Manchuria seems to be that of stench and dirt. He dedicates numerous passages to his disgust at the poor hygiene of the Chinese, describing them through their smell: “the room gave off a strange odour. It was a clinging smell that the Chinese leave behind them on their departure and that persists, however hard the fanatically clean Japanese try to remove it” (Natsume 2000: 126). Senses of touch and texture in regards to the Chinese also fill him with revulsion:

At one moment, he decided to defend the Chinese pigtail custom. His arguments were that went the Chinese wore their traditional clothes of soft texture, it game them an extremely pleasant feeling to leave a long mane of hair draping down over brightly coloured material. For this reason, things should be left alone. Actually, I was quite surprised at Rokkotsu’s use of the expression: ‘give an
extremely pleasant feeling’. My surprise lasts to this day when I think back on his words. It may be because on one occasion, when I saw hanging down from the neck of a grimy old man something that resembled a spare moustache shaped like a slug, it case considerable doubt on the appropriateness of the phrase ‘extremely pleasant feeling’. (127)

However, Sōseki’s categorization of the body as unpleasant is not limited to those of the Chinese: his own body is unpleasant to him as well. Bodies in Travels are not racialized in terms of their smell and texture, just as they are not racialized in terms of their skin colour. As in his London writings, the Japanese body Sōseki describes the most in Travels is his own, though rather than ruminating on his “yellowness” and the anxiety it causes him, his dissatisfaction with his body is due to his stomach ailment. He frequently describes being disappointed by his body, as his illness prevents him from going out and thoroughly enjoying the local sights and food.

At that very moment, however, my stomach was causing me great pain, so I declined his offer with many apologies. In my room, I drank some broth and went to sleep. The next morning, I woke up certain that I would feel better. I concentrated my attention on my abdomen and probed the afflicted area with my finger to check my condition. There was no getting around it: something was definitely wrong. I felt anxious, since my stomach had been consistently letting me down. However, when I pressed various parts of my abdomen, it produced no particular local reaction. The dull pain only insidiously spread itself everywhere like clouds gradually gathering in the sky. (57)
Severely weakened and incapacitated due to his illness, his body likely would not compare favourably to those of the strong Chinese workers, which he describes with admiration. However, Sōseki makes no racial comparison in terms of bodies as in his London writings. As he is allied with the side of the colonizers (and therefore at the top of the hierarchy of “whiteness”), his body does not become a source of anxiety and is not even mentioned. Yet despite his newly appropriated colonial gaze, he finds himself feeling “increasingly oppressed” (61) at having to act as a factory inspector. Tired of “looking,” or perhaps in retaliation for being used to provide publicity for the SMR in the Asahi, Sōseki instead turns his eye inward and focuses on his personal bodily functions and sensations. He examines himself as a doctor would, poking and prodding his own body, but this examination is only privy to himself and his readers, to whom he deliberately chooses to disclose this information. His ability to hide his condition from his colleagues in Manchuria contrasts with the widespread rumours of madness and neurasthenia that circulated during his time in London; these new powers of disclosure reflect his new position as observer rather than the self-conscious object of the British gaze. With this, he directs his gaze towards the Chinese male body and its good, strong physique.

The coolies worked well. They were tractable, had strong physiques, and put energy into their tasks. Watching them at their work was thus a source of pleasure [...] With tremendous strength, they brought up their loads from the far reaches of the lower floors and discharged them on the second floor. As soon as one of them had finished, another came up and took his place. There was no doubt that quite a number had been allocated to this task of bringing up sacks of soy. Judging from the frequency with which they arrived, their attitude, the time they took to complete their
task, and the distance between them, one could have said they were all identical. […] Through the mist, one could see the coolies, their perspiring bodies glowing like red copper, labouring valiantly.

Looking at the physique of these naked men, I suddenly remembered the book entitled *The History of the Chinese Armies*. In olden times, the brave warriors who humiliated the vanquished by forcing them to crawl between their legs must have looked exactly like this group of coolies. (Natsume 2000: 65)

The coolies, however, are virtually identical and indistinguishable from each other, not scrutinized closely enough to notice any individual traits, but rather enjoyed for the rhythmic patters of movement they create as they work. The irony in comparing the colonized workers to conquering Chinese warriors of ancient times is further emphasized by Zekō’s effusive praise of the Chinese for their refinement:

> At that moment, two or three dirty-looking Chinese made their appearance, holding pretty birdcages.

> ‘The Chinese are a refined people, you know! Even if they are poor, with hardly a rag to put on their backs, they have birdcages dangling from their hands. They wander from the depths of the forest and hang the cages on branches, sit down underneath them and peacefully listen, even with empty stomachs, to the song of their birds. If there are two of them, they will even organize song competitions. Oh, they are really refined, you know!’ he proclaimed, repeatedly praising the Chinese to the skies.
I took some Gem\textsuperscript{7} from my pocket and swallowed it. (50)

While Sōseki makes no direct comment about having any moral qualms about the exploitation of such refined people for labour, his immediate actions following Zekō’s description hint at his unease. This may also reflect the discomfort felt by Sōseki, a scholar of Chinese classics, at the complex relationship between China and Japan, which “blend[ed] admiration for China’s grand cultural history with disdain for its current poverty, political upheavals, and mass confusion” (Brodey 2000:13). Industrialization brought about by Japan’s colonialism mars the vast Manchurian vistas, and it is only in imagining the land’s purer origins that he finds comfort. While riding the train in Chapter 38, he looks out the window onto a magical land: as the sorghum rooftops recede into the background, dusk falls on the endless plains, turning the grass a brilliant red. In this magical place lives a strange and wondrous beast (actually a Manchurian pig), somehow able to survive on barren soil. Suddenly, the ruins of a giant black castle appear on the horizon, small black figures patrolling the ramparts, guards on the Great Wall. Sōseki’s imagination continues to wander until he realizes the figures on the castle are merely telegraph poles backgrounded by a large black cloud. There is no room for imagination in this modern world, but compared to the modern cityscape of Tokyo, the relatively unsullied vistas of Manchuria provide Sōseki with a feeling of tranquility.

Very soon, the carriage left the houses behind and drove out into the vast plain. As it was the steppe, there naturally was no vegetation to be seen. But when one looked into the distance, a kind of bluish tint in harmony with the season seemed to burst forth from every spot as far as the eye could see, forming a

\textsuperscript{7} A type of Japanese medication used for digestion.
multicoloured shadow. Why was this stretch of land so empty?

For a native of Tokyo, for whom the view at home is blocked by countless houses, this question is bound to spring to mind. But this time, after having traveled through places peopled by stiff and starchy inhabitants, I found myself overcome by an impression of freshness instead of by this question. Needless to say, there was no route, in the usual sense of the word. It was a road crated by nature, stretching towards all four points of the compass simultaneously; the tracks of the carriages took directions according to their own imagination and to the fancy of travelers.

(Natsume 2000: 129)

The neat categorizations of body-unpleasant and visual-pleasant in Travels further supports Brodey and Tsunematsu’s argument that Sōseki does not give “consistent opinion regarding the Chinese—instead, the narrator’s opinion is marked by its ambivalence” (22). Unpleasantness is not the sole domain of the Chinese; it is more often Sōseki’s own queasy stomach that foils opportunities for enjoyment. Although pleasant visual senses provide comfort and a refuge from the overwhelming noise and stench of chaotic modernity, his privileging of visuality in Travels almost becomes a portent when taken in consideration with Sanshirō, where the privileging of visuality indicates the bleak direction in which society is headed.

As one who “lamented the sad fact” of modernity, Sōseki had a fairly pessimistic view of his era. The compression of time and rearrangement of space created by the introduction of modern technologies such as trains to Japan changed not only the physical and temporal landscape, but also necessarily affected the attitudes of the people learning to live with such modern vehicles. Despite the increased mobility that trains provide, passengers are passively
transported from one place to the next, becoming little more than human freight. Sōseki’s discomfort with this passivity is reflected in *Travels* through a description of being roughly transported by *toro*, a narrow-gauge railway carriage:

> The men propelling it were obviously Chinese. They pushed as hard as they could for about fifty metres, then suddenly jumped on to the wagon. Their light yellow pants, smelling of sweat, touched the hem of my jacket and gave me an unpleasant sensation. Then, when they thought the speed of the train had decreased sufficiently, they jumped bare-footed back on to the track and pushed the wagon, using their shoulders, hands, and voices. It felt much better when they were not pushing: altogether, the passengers’ entrails were tried severely.

> This narrow-gauge wagon seriously aggravated the state of my stomach, which was already in a bad state to begin with. Riding the wagon, I swallowed dose after dose of Gem and fervently wished we would arrive at our destination at the earliest possible moment. The greater the vigour shown by the Chinese, the more severe my ordeal. Then, when they no longer bent their legs to push us along, and rather let them dangle down outside the vehicle, comfort was again restored. (Natsume 2000: 95)

While Sōseki criticizes the Chinese carriage drivers for making his journey uncomfortable, it is not only their poor driving skills but the vehicle itself—a symbol of modernity—that make him uneasy. New technologies, though convenient, made people passive and lazy. In his lecture, “The Civilization of Modern-Day Japan,” Sōseki stated:
The conservation of energy is obvious in the ways we contrive to labor as little as possible, to accomplish the maximum amount of work in the minimum amount of time. These contrivances take amazing shapes: not only trains and steamships, but the telegraph, the telephone, and the automobile—all of which are, finally, nothing more than conveniences developed from an unabashed desire to avoid effort. (Natsume 1992: 265)

This passive attitude results from the shock of modernity as described by Walter Benjamin, who argues that the modern man builds a protective shield in response to the trauma of excessive stimuli. Based on the work of Freud, Benjamin’s theory states that this shield translates into a “heightened degree of consciousness,” where a shift from involuntary memory to voluntary memory causes the intellect becomes a dominant mode of perception.

The greater the share of the shock factor in particular impressions, the more constantly consciousness has to be alert as a screen against stimuli; the more efficiently it does so, the less do these impressions enter experience (Erfahrung), tending to remain in the sphere of a certain hour in one’s life (Erlebnis). Perhaps the special achievement of shock defense may be seen in its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents. This would be a peak achievement of the intellect; it would turn the incident into a moment that has been lived (Erlebnis). (Benjamin 1968: 163)

However, as Benjamin points out, “[w]ithout reflection there would be nothing but the sudden start, usually the sensation of fright which, according to Freud, confirms the failure of the shock
defense” (Benjamin 1968: 163). This “fright” is experienced by Sanshirō upon arriving in Tokyo: an expat from a rural world “still back in Meiji zero” (Natsume 1977: 57), Sanshirō is confused by modern streetcars, which are supposedly meant to make life easier but instead disorient and inconvenience him.

Tokyo was full of things that startled Sanshirō. First, the ringing of the streetcar bells startled him, and then the crowds that got on and off between rings. Next to startle him as Marunouchi, the busy commercial center of the city. What startled him most of all was Tokyo itself, for no matter how far he went, it never ended. Everywhere he walked there were piles of lumber, heaps of rock, new homes set back from the street, old warehouses rotting in front of them. Everything looked as though it were being destroyed, and at the same time everything looked as though it were under construction.

To Sanshirō, all this movement was horrible. His shock was identical in quality and degree to that of the most ordinary country boy who stands in the midst of the capital for the first time. His education could no more soften the blow than might some store bought remedy. He felt a large chunk of self-confidence simply disappear, and it made him miserable. (17)

Like Sōseki’s ride in the toro, the noise and confusion of the metropolis results in sensory overload, overwhelming Sanshirō. Sōseki describes another incident of sensory overload prior to his departure for Manchuria, when a sudden flare-up of his stomach condition delays his journey. With his shock defense weakened by illness, Sōseki experiences a similar “fright”: 
My stomach was filled with a sort of gas. The tinkling of a mug of tea filled me with fury. Why do people eat? They are animals who act contrary to reason. There is nothing wrong with just sucking ice cubes. Ice is innocence itself—and more than sufficient. Such, at least, was my impression at that moment. If someone at my bedside spoke to me, I felt he was a despicable and vulgar creature who obviously could not live without chattering. On opening my eyes, I glanced at the shelves and saw they were stacked full of books. Every volume had its own colour, and they all had different titles. There were so many of them that it left me quite bewildered. Had someone in a moment of madness made them all so different? How had Fate succeeded in juxtaposing all those titles, making them look so important? I was sunk in an unimaginably suffocating atmosphere. I wished I would die.

(Natsume 2000: 34)

While Sōseki is being melodramatic for humorous effect, it is not uncommon to have unreasonable thoughts in response to physical pain, and as he frequently experiences in Manchuria, his stomach condition often affects his ability to focus on what is being said to him and to make intelligent replies. The sharpening of bodily senses thus results in the dulling of the intellect; in Sanshirō, however, the reverse occurs as senses are dulled as the intellect becomes the dominant mode of perception.

Another result of the intellectualization of modern life is the desensitization to external stimuli. Similar to Benjamin’s theory, Georg Simmel posits that the inhabitants of the metropolis form a “protective organ for [themselves] against the profound disruption with which
the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten [them]” (Simmel 2002: 12) as a means of self defense. Intellectual distance is created not only in spite of the close physical proximity of people in the metropolis, but as a direct result of it. Too much stimulation from others (visual, tactile, olfactory, aural, or otherwise) creates the need for an emotional filter that isolates the individual. This causes the metropolitan citizen to develop a “blasé outlook” (Simmel 2002: 14), a development of the favouring of “mental life” over the “emotional life” that one finds in a small town environment. Sanshirō’s friend Yoshiko describes this inverse relationship of emotional reaction and intellectual reaction in relation to her brother, Nonomiya:

> Academics, she said, look at everything as objects of study, and so their emotions dry up. But if you look at things with feeling, you never want to study them because it all comes down to love or hate. As a scientist, her brother could not help viewing her as an object of study, which was a terrible thing to do, and unkind, because the more he studied her, the more his love for her should decrease. Great scholar though he was, however, Nonomiya still showed great love for his sister. He must be the best person in Japan.

Sanshirō felt that all this was perfectly reasonable, and, at the same time, wrong. Just where it went wrong, though, his muddled brain would not tell him, and he offered nothing by way of direct comment. He blushed to think that, in failing to criticize lucidly the remarks of a mere girl, he made such a feeble showing

---

8 Nonomiya Sōhachi, also one of Sanshirō’s friends in Tokyo, is a scholar who studies the “pressure exerted by light” (Natsume 1977: 20).
as a man. He realized, too, that one had to take these Tokyo school girls seriously. (Natsume 1977: 84)

Sanshirō seems to know instinctively the truth of Yoshiko’s statement, yet is disturbed by it, as if he realizes that he too is fated to develop a blasé attitude. Although Yoshiko is quite forgiving of her brother’s tendency to look at things through an intellectual lens, his detached reaction to the train suicide deeply disturbs Sanshirō:

In the circle of light lay part of a corpse. The train had made a clean tear from the right shoulder, beneath the breast, to the left hip, and it had gone on, leaving this diagonal torso in its path. The face was untouched. It was a young woman. […]

‘I heard there was a suicide on the tracks last night,’ he said. They had told him at the station. Sanshirō related his experience to Nonomiya in detail.

‘How interesting! You don’t get a chance like that very often. Too bad I wasn’t here. They’ve gotten rid of the body, I suppose. It won’t do any good to go for a look now.’

‘Probably not,’ Sanshirō answered simply, but Nonomiya’s coolness shocked him. Such insensitivity would have been out of the question last night. Only the daylight made it possible, he concluded, youthfully unaware that a man who experiments with light reveals that characteristic attitude in all situations, even one like this. (43-44)

In using a train, a form of modern technology, as a means of ending a young woman’s life, Sōseki echoes the discomfort he felt being pulled by the Chinese on the toro, which is
compounded by his discomfort at the blasé attitude created by modernity. In a scene that almost mirrors the train suicide in *Sanshirō*, Sōseki relates an incident in *Travels* where an old man is injured on the street:

> Over a stretch of slightly more than five centimeters, somewhere between the left knee and the foot, the flesh hung down from the bone and was shriveled up as though it had been violently torn off. It looked as if a pomegranate had been thrown at him and its seeds crushed. [...] Astonishing though it may seem, the Chinese who had crowded round in a dense mass all looked at the wound without uttering a word. They were all perfectly calm and made not the slightest movement. What struck me still more forcibly was the fact that no particular emotion was visible on the face of the old man, who supported himself by leaning with his hands on the ground behind him, displaying his wound to all around. He showed no sign of pain; neither did he show any sadness. This did no mean that he appeared apathetic. I noticed his eyes. There seemed to be a veil covering the eyes of this old man seated on the ground. [...] When I reached the entrance to the hotel, my hat and my suit were coated with yellow dust, and I felt relieved at having at last broken off all connection with those cruel Chinese.

*(Natsume 2000: 122)*
No one seems particularly concerned about his injury, and strangely, the old man himself seems to be passively accepting of his fate as a mere casualty of the hustle and bustle of Mukden. Although Sōseki attributes the cruel passivity of the onlookers to being Chinese, the same attitudes are found among the modern, presumably more civilized people of Tokyo in Sanshirō. While attending a chrysanthemum doll festival, Sanshirō and his friends come across a beggar, whose pleas they ignore while callously criticizing his begging techniques.

Listening to the others’ critiques of the beggar, Sanshirō felt that some damage was being done to the moral precepts by which he had been raised. But not only had it never crossed his mind to toss the beggar money, he had actually experienced a disagreeable sensation when he passed the man. The others were being truer to themselves than he was, he had to admit. They were people of the city who lived beneath heavens that were broad enough to enable them to be true to themselves. (Natsume 1977: 87)

While his friends are able to maintain their cool intellectual detachment, Sanshirō has a bodily reaction of disgust at the beggar, much like Sōseki’s own frequent “disagreeable sensations” at coming into contact with the Chinese in Manchuria. But where Sōseki prompts the driver to call a doctor, Sanshirō’s initial reaction is merely to criticize himself for not being more unapologetically shameless about his passivity in the situation, even though his friends’ blasé attitudes violate his sense of morality. In the end, however, the result is the same for both the beggar and the old man in Mukden: neither Sanshirō nor Sōseki do anything to help; Sanshirō

---

9 In 1905, the city of Mukden (known today as Shenyang) was the location of the last major land battle of the Russo-Japanese War. After Japan’s victory, Mukden became one of the major bases for economic expansion into southern Manchuria.
continues on to the doll festival with his friends, and Sōseki allows himself to be driven back to the hotel. The mirroring of these end results reflects the bleak passivity and the “unabashed desire to avoid effort,” as Sōseki puts it, that results from the intellectualization of modern life. Individuals become isolated, reluctant to help even an injured old man, or a beggar, or a lost child looking for her grandmother. As Sanshirō ultimately finds, there is no one to help him navigate the scary world of modernity, and a “stray sheep”, like the beggar and the lost child at the festival, inevitably and constantly finds itself “in the wrong place” (Natsume 1977: 87).

In addition to the overlapping visual methodologies discussed in the previous chapter, Sōseki employs the bodily senses as a point of contrast in *Travels in Manchuria and Korea*. Sōseki’s documentation of the demise of his physical body further privileges the visual senses in their positive association with pleasure. However, when taken into the larger context of his work, particularly with Sanshirō, Sōseki’s use of visuality at once warns against the intellectualization of modern life, yet reveals his pessimism about the inevitability of that future.
Conclusion

In light of my discussion of Sōseki’s complex and overlapping visual methodologies, I would like to conclude this thesis by briefly addressing one of the current debates amongst Sōseki scholars regarding, as James A. Fujii puts it, the “significant lapses in what might have been a more critical perspective on Japan’s presence in continental Asia” (1996: 222). As I have stated earlier, Sōseki’s complicity in Japan’s colonial project is beyond the scope of this thesis; however, I maintain that Sōseki’s alleged omissions are a subtle manifestation of his methodology.

Fujii insinuates that the publication of Travels in Manchuria and Korea in the Asahi newspaper, alongside ads for Western products like Lion toothpaste and Dunlop tires, hints at Sōseki’s complicity in Japan’s colonial activities in Manchuria (1993: 150). Sōseki, however, was well aware of the Asahi’s status as “purveyor of modernity” (150) and made full ironic use of it in expressing his views. A few years after Travels was published, Sōseki began writing a collection of autobiographical reminiscences called Omoidasu koto nado (Remembrances) shortly after the formal annexation of Korea in 1910. His stomach illness, now in a much more advanced stage than it had been during his travels to Manchuria, continues the documentation of his demise begun in Travels:

Sōseki’s gory, detailed piece about his haemorrhage, about his desperate fear of death, about his sense of weakness and helplessness in the face of ‘natural selection’, appears in the newspaper side by side with triumphalist reports about Japan’s status as an imperial power. Sōseki’s detailed descriptions of his illness, and the blood he vomited that sprayed all over his wife’s kimono, are a graphic contrast to the ubiquitous photographs
portraying the indomitable spirit of the Japanese soldiers. (Flutsch 2003: 247)

Komori Yōichi recalls Marshall McLuhan’s phrase, “the medium is the message” in his discussion of Sanshirō, noting that readers easily make connections between fiction and reality. The novel displays an overt awareness of Japan’s colonial activities through the importance placed on trains. The opening train scene is a reminder of the nationalization of railways, a major issue closely related to imperialist policies after the Russo-Japanese War, occurring a mere 3 years before the publication of Sanshirō in the Asahi (Komori 1999: 312-313).

While Fujii has also alleged that “the term ‘modern’ almost always erases Japan’s own reproduction of imperialist behavior and instead signifies the introduction of Western thought and material goods” (1993: 133), I contend that for Sōseki, the term “modern” was tinged with anxiety and pessimism in direct response to Japan’s place in the world, as a direct result of its new status as a colonial power. This anxiety was expressed in both his fiction and his travel writing, and becomes more apparent when his use of the visual and bodily senses are taken into consideration across various works.
References


http://aboutjapan.japansociety.org/resources/category/1/7/5/8/images/SF7319_resized510.jpg


