Spatializing Modernity: Colonial Contexts of Urban Space in Modern Japanese Literature

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

This dissertation examines representations of modern urban space in the literary works of Meiji and Taishō writers such as Natsume Sōseki, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke.

This project took its initial inspiration from Karatani Kōjin’s and Komori Yōichi’s historically grounded approach to literary criticism; it is thus similarly historical in its uncovering of prose fiction, travelogues, and essays. Drawing on the work of Seiji Lippit, which links the spatial narrative to the construction of Japan’s imperial subject, the present study investigates how these texts not only represent urban space as symbolic of Japan’s ‘colonial modernity,’ but actively construct and legitimize it. This dissertation contributes to a recent surge in scholarship connecting Japanese colonialism and modernity, and seeks to contextualize the formation of Japan’s modern urban space within its colonial history. In each of the four chapters, a different kind of spatial power relation will be read against its formative historical backdrop, beginning with the Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and concluding with Japan’s 1931 invasion of Manchuria. Chapter 1 and 2 respectively examine the implications of power in constructs of metropole/colony and urban/rural. Chapter 3 analyzes the train as a space in which various power relations are condensed and compacted, and Chapter 4 engages in a discussion on the discursive space of modern hygiene. By revealing how these particular spatial power relations
construct and reinscribe a singular Eurocentric narrative, and by exploring how the heterogeneity of spaces represented in these texts overthrows such homogenizing concepts, I will denaturalize and destabilize seemingly self-evident ideas that gave rise to the spatial power structures which undergird the formation of a homogeneous (Western/Japanese) modernity.
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Author’s Note

In line with the established conventions of the field, all Japanese names are given with the surname first, unless the author in question resides and publishes primarily outside of Japan in a language other than Japanese. The same rule applies to Chinese and Korean names. Following Japanese convention, authors are referred to either by their surname (e.g., Akutagawa) or given pen name (e.g., Sōseki), depending on the name for which they are most recognized.

Transliterations of Japanese, Chinese, and Korean respectively follow the revised Hepburn Romanization system, the Hanyu Pinyin Romanization system, and the revised Romanization of Korean system.

Where translations of the literary materials are available, I have cited those; all other translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
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Chapter 1:

Fig 1. The flag of the International Settlement of Shanghai, pre-WWI
INTRODUCTION

[Modernity is then to be considered a unique kind of rhetorical effect, or if you prefer, a trope, [. . .] considered as self-referential, if not performative, [. . .] a sign of its own existence, a signifier that indicates itself, and whose form is its very content.

– Fredric Jameson1

“Formations of Modernity” follows modern social analysis in the emphasis it gives to the construction of cultural and social identities as part of the formation process. By this we mean the construction of a sense of belonging which draws people together into an “imagined community” and the construction of symbolic boundaries which define who does not belong or is excluded from it.

– Stuart Hall2

1. Prologue

In his work *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen* (*Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, 1980), literary critic Karatani Kōjin employs a genealogical methodology to historicize some key concepts in Japanese literary history. He argues that seemingly natural concepts like ‘modern,’ ‘literature,’ and ‘the state’ were historically produced in Japan by crucial shifts in intellectual discourse during the Meiji period. Once these new concepts were internalized by the populace, they were both naturalized and reinforced. Thus, Karatani contends that the ‘discovery’ of such notions is essential to the emergence of modern Japanese literature. By delineating the process in which those purportedly natural ideas were being constructed, and by situating the ‘discovery’ of

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1 Jameson 2002, 34.
2 Hall 1996, 8.
these terms into the framework of Japan’s confrontation with the West and its imperial expansion during a period when Japanese art and literature became ‘modern,’ he is able to show how unnatural these concepts actually are, underscoring that the universality of such terms was “not a priori but historical” (Karatani 1998, 12).

Karatani’s historically grounded way of reading literary texts has reshaped the discursive space of “modern” “Japanese” “literature,” and offers us a way to rethink the constructions that we have taken for granted: namely, the agency hidden behind such constructions and, in the case of the present study, knowledge about Japanese modernity. This dissertation is just such an attempt at a historical reading of texts through an examination of literary representations of urban spaces in early twentieth-century Japan, with a particular focus on the city of Tokyo. The project’s scope of inquiry, however, extends beyond national borders to include Japanese exterior spaces—that is, Japan’s colonies. The present study attempts to show the relationship between the formation of narratives about Japanese modernity and various power structures represented through sets of spatial relations such as metropole/colony, urban/rural, interior/exterior, and spatialized power relation of hygenic/unhygienic. Furthermore, by demonstrating the process of such constructions, this study aims to question and challenge these established binaries.

It is around the concept of spatial power relations and its representations in modern Japanese literature that this dissertation is organized. This study focuses on literary representations of modern urban spaces as prominent symbols of modernity, at both the material and conceptual levels. Its ultimate task is to question the homogeneity of (Western) modernity, by rendering visible the power structures imbedded in the formation of Japanese modernity. I will attempt to reveal the construction of the modernity discourse by examining how this process
was embodied in different sets of spatial relations. By exploring the heterogeneity of modern urban spaces, I want to complicate the discourse of a singular modernity. My reading focuses on works generated inside or about urban space by several Meiji and Taishō writers such as Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 (1867–1916), Tanizaki Jun’ichirō 谷崎潤一郎 (1886–1965), and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介 (1892–1927), and opens up connections between modern Japanese literature and much broader historical questions. By highlighting the power dynamics inherent in the narrative of (Western) modernity—represented in these works as either forming or overthrowing a singular modernity discourse—this dissertation attempts to denaturalize and destabilize seemingly self-evident ideas that gave rise to the spatial power structures which undergird the formation of modern urban space.

2. Key Ideas

2.1 Modernity Discourse and the Critique of Modernity

‘Modernity’ is not simply a temporal or historical term referring to a certain time period, but implies complex social and political relations. The concept of modernity, heavily influenced by European history and thought, lays claim to a universal history without historicization or contextualization. As Harry Harootunian states in the opening of his book *Overcome by Modernity* (2000), one of the more widely agreed upon characteristics of modernity is that it “subsumed all preceding histories as pre-figurations of moments that now have been surpassed,” and that “history was simply the overdetermined precedents leading to modernity” (Harootunian 2000, ix). Within this framework, a universal (Western) modernity justifies itself by excluding temporal Others—that is, eras preceding modern European times—as well as spatial Others,
places still considered ‘premodern.’ Through this double exclusion, spatial difference is rendered temporal. As Harootunian explains in the so-called latecomer theory, there is always a time lag between the West and non-Western “late developers” (Harootunian 2000, xvi), with a base time kept by the West. As a matter of fact, the temporal Other of modernity became most obvious when being spatialized (associated with a spatial Other); thus, we have the common narrative that defines modernization as a process that begins and ends in Europe, diffusing outward from a Western centre to non-Western areas. By the same token, Naoki Sakai points out that the stereotypical pairing of premodern (non-West) and modern (the West) serves as a discursive scheme in which the West must represent the moment of the universal under which non-Western particulars are subsumed (Sakai 1989, 95).

Such dichotomies embedded in the narrative of modernity, like modern (the West) versus premodern (non-West), are loaded with colonial implications, as they follow a linear narrative of progress and demand that all places of the world follow a single track towards a singular Western modernity. This teleological narrative, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, dismisses all countervailing interpretations and possibilities, legitimizing itself as the only official historical narrative (Chakrabarty 2000). In this way, the development of such things as the nation-state has been considered inevitable in all histories. Constructing and imposing such a narrative about modernity thus becomes an act of domination while providing an ethical justification for colonization. In Japan’s case, as the processes of nation-building and empire-building occurred almost at the same time, it becomes more obvious how colonialism was not only disguised but justified through the process of ‘modernization.’ The formation of the Japanese nation-state and national identity, facilitated by its imperial expansion, is a key characteristic of the Japanese modernity narrative that will be central to my discussion.
With the postmodern turn, modernity’s self-evident nature began to be questioned and challenged by scholars such as Harootunian, Chakrabarty, and Timothy Mitchell, who posit narratives other than the diffusionist version of a singular modernity. Harootunian, for instance, proposes the idea of coeval modernities, in which all societies “share the same temporality that whatever and however a society develops, it is simply taking place at the same time as other modernities” (Harootunian 2000, xvi). Each society is thus modern, but not quite the same. As I will argue, representations of the ‘modern’ and its (‘non-modern’) Others, created by the narrative of (Western) modernity, are interdependent: not only do the ‘modern’ and its Others produce each other, but this tension reinforces those very representations of ‘modernity.’

In this study, I attempt to redefine the modern not as temporal but as spatial. By examining the case of Japanese modernity, I will demonstrate how ‘modernity’ is staged against its Others—‘non-modern’ spaces of geopolitical difference—and how power relations between ‘modernity’ and its Others are emphasized to form modernity discourse. Japanese modernity occupies a unique role in questioning the Eurocentric assumption of a universal (Western) modernity not only because it is a non-Western context, but because, as Sakai puts it, “Japan has presented a heterogeneous instance that could not be easily integrated into the global configuration organized according to the pairing of the modern [West] and premodern [East]” (Sakai 1989, 96). Unlike its European counterparts, the production of Japanese modernity happened within a relatively short period of time, under colonial threat from Western powers. As Sōseki writes in his famous 1911 lecture “Gendai Nihon no kaika” 現代日本の開化 (“The Civilization of Modern-day Japan”), the pressure exerted by a new civilization on Japan forced it to “condense into ten years all the developments that it took the West a hundred years to accomplish” (Natsume 1992, 280). It is precisely because modernization occurred within such a
short time period that the complexity and inconsistencies of the (Western) modernity narrative were made more obvious in Japan’s case.

Japan’s particularity offers a useful tool for scholars with which to challenge the diffusionist narrative of modernity. In *Re-inventing Japan: Time, Space, Nation* (1997), Tessa Morris-Suzuki argues that the changes in modern Japan were not only the result of Western influence, but also of an evolution, or rather different evolutions linked to different sets of traditions inherited from the Edo era. However, I would argue that such an evolution narrative still follows a teleological narrative of a singular modernity in its binary of continuity/rupture. Although it rectifies the Eurocentrism of the diffusionist narrative, it reaffirms a framework of a singular mode of modernity, no matter whether it is achieved through mimicry, evolution, or both.

Furthermore, as Oguma Eiji (1998) and others have pointed out, an essential trait of Japanese modernity is that the formation of Japanese national subjectivity occurred simultaneously with colonial expansion, which remained essential throughout the Meiji and Taishō periods. This makes Japan a particularly interesting case study in the investigation of the interrelationship between modernity and colonialism.

### 2.2 Colonialism and Modernity Discourse

Studies of colonization have exposed how the discourse of modernity has been deeply embedded within colonial projects. As Tani Barlow (1997) argues, colonialism and modernity are indivisible when explaining the concept of “colonial modernity.” The same mechanism of simplifying complex histories also works in the process of colonization in order to integrate a variety of colonized areas into the empire’s national narrative. Additionally, colonization does
not only manifest in military occupation, brutal conquest, or economic exploitation, but can also be cultural or ideological, leading to different modes of imagining the Other. In his seminal book *Orientalism* (1979), Edward Said discusses how European historical consciousness imagined particular spatial concepts of the “Orient” as its Other in order to form an “Occidental” Self. The subjectivity of the modern West can only justify itself by creating and objectifying its colonial Other. In this sense, despite being rejected from the narrative of (Western) modernity, the colonial Other is indispensable to the emergence of modernity discourse. In turn, assumptions about the West’s role as modernizers and the non-West as a degenerate backwater also became the foundation for the application of colonial law.

Because of the indivisible relationship between colonialism and modernity, postcolonialism became a powerful tool in the critique of modernity. The study of “colonial modernity” in particular offers a useful platform from which to explore the central role that colonialism played in the construction of ‘modernity’ in both colonized and colonizing nations, and thus to question the idea that the ‘modern’ has only a singular geographic origin. As Barlow (1997) explains in the introduction to *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (a reissue of the inaugural volume of *positions: east asia cultures critique* in 1993), the notion of ‘modernity,’ invested with ideologically motivated and institutionally situated meanings and desires, did not emerge in a vacuum but in conjunction with colonial Others that define what the ‘modern’ is not, despite the modernity of those colonies being “as indisputable as the colonial core” (Barlow 1997, 1). It is against these Others that the boundaries of ‘modernity’ are drawn and defined. In rendering visible the complicated relations between Western modernity and its ‘copiers,’ the concept of “colonial modernity” reveals that modernity should be understood as a product of imperial expansion and global interrelations, rather than something external or in opposition to the non-West.
I attempt to bring a similar conceptual framework to a different subject than those countries formerly colonized by the West that are usually the focus of postcolonial studies. I believe the ‘colonial modernity’ framework offers a particularly persuasive paradigm for interpreting colonial Japan, though in a slightly altered form to allow for the more complex relations Japan had with China, its semi-colonial Asian neighbour. In establishing a modern Japanese identity, not only was the distinction between a ‘premodern’ Japanese Self and a ‘modern’ Japanese Self key, but the distinction between East and West was equally crucial. Meanwhile, the dichotomy of ‘East versus West’ was further complicated by another binary structure: Japan versus China. In other words, the intertwined binaries became triangulated between wa 和 (Japanese), kan 漢 (Chinese), and yō 洋 (Western).

As the only Asian imperial power, Japan began its process of westernization and later colonial expansion against the backdrop of its own Western colonial threat. While many other Asian countries were colonized by Western powers in the nineteenth century, Japan was able to avoid formal colonization. Towards the turn of the century, however, the constant threat of colonization by those Western empires with which Japan had signed unequal treaties was ever-present. In order to escape this danger, as well as to be recognized by the West as an equal power, the Japanese government devoted itself to building a modern European form of the nation-state.

However, resisting Western colonization did not simply stop at rejecting Western incursions; rather, Japan assumed the position of colonizer in Asia. In effect, Japan’s own colonial expansion in such places as Taiwan, Korea, and Manchuria actually aided in its resistance to the threat of Western colonialization. This inevitably gave a fractured and
ambivalent quality to Japan’s colonialism: its sense of inferiority towards the West contradicted its own efforts to construct a superior Self in relation to its colonial Other.

At the same time, Japan’s past subordination under the Sinocentric imperium meant that defining itself against a semi-colonial Chinese Other required the mediation of the West to topple this former power relation. The reconfiguration of the Japanese Self emerged as early as the eighteenth century when the intellectual movement of kokugaku 国学 (national studies), in opposition to kangaku 漢学 (Chinese studies), became increasingly popular. The pairing of wa/ka 漢 (Japanese/Chinese) was emphasized in the kokugaku movement in an attempt to construct the ‘authentic’ native roots of Japanese culture through the exclusion of elements considered Chinese. However, the differentiation between wa and kan did not necessarily establish a new hierarchical structure stable enough to replace the old Sinocentric paradigm. As Atsuko Sakaki points out in Obsessions with the Sino-Japanese Polarity in Japanese Literature (2006), it was not until the introduction of the West as a new cultural hegemony into the “China-Japan entanglement” that “ambiguity in the China-Japan cultural hierarchy” was created (Sakaki 2006, 15, 83). The complication of new power relations by old ones not only left China and Japan in an ambiguous cultural hierarchy, but also led Meiji and Taishō elites to obliterate the threat from the colonial West and replace it as a way to legitimize its own colonial discourse.

Nevertheless, Japan’s identification with the West was extremely unstable. It was caught in the contradictory position of what Leo Ching calls “not-quite and yet-alike,” oscillating uneasily “between being both the seeing subject and the object being seen” (Ching 1998, 66). As Oguma Eiji (1998) argues, as a non-Western, non-white empire, Japan’s admiration for Western civilization was also mixed with its resentment towards Western/white hegemony. According to Western diffusionist theory, even Japan’s colonialism was merely a mimicry of its Western
counterpart. Many Meiji and Taishō intellectuals wrote of their unease during the process of drastic westernization, worrying that in the process of “Leaving Asia, Joining Europe” (Datsu-A nyū-Ō 脫亜入欧) Japan had lost its cultural identity without forming a new one. Additionally, the anxiety and resentment felt towards the West was used as a rallying point around which Japanese colonialists could present themselves as liberators from Western colonial domination, despite the fact that the institutionalized hierarchical power structures in Japan’s neighbouring countries obviously contradicted such a statement (Yui 2002). In order to reverse the newly established hierarchy between Japan and the West, the Japanese government attempted to ascribe new meaning to Japan’s ‘traditions,’ which inevitably hearkened back to its long-standing cultural bonds with China.

Trapped in this triangulated power relationship, by the early twentieth century the boundaries between the Japanese Self and its Others were constantly being challenged and reconfigured. Even in Japanese political discourse, the boundary of ‘Japan/Japanese’ varied greatly (Oguma 1998). For Japan, its deeply intertwined relations to China and the West meant that a meaningful distinction between the centre (colonizer) and the periphery (colonized) often could not be drawn. Japan’s self-perception was not only mediated through the lens of the West, but also through its deep cultural bonds with China. The West and China were seen as having been assimilated into the Japanese Self, but at the same time were also seen as an irreconcilable Other, especially when either of the third parties (China or the West) was present as a point of reference. This created a self-contradictory identity which was often in flux. Therefore, modernity discourse was increasingly necessary for Japan to justify its international status as on par with Western powers, as well as its colonial expansion as a civilizing mission in Asian countries with which Japan shared a deep cultural history. In this sense, Japanese ‘colonial
modernity’ must be situated not only in Japan’s subordinate relationship to the West, but also in the changing hierarchical structures between Japan and its Asian neighbours.

The ambivalent multiplicity of Japan’s colonial context makes it a peculiarly interesting case study, not only for understanding the particularity of Japanese colonialism, but also to question forms of modernity underlying its colonial project. In this dissertation, particular attention will be given to literary texts written within the period of Japanese colonial expansion in the early twentieth century, a period during which implicit and explicit messages—either supporting official arguments for the imperial project or challenging such official narratives—were consumed, accepted, and reiterated by Japanese nationals. Though the application of postcolonial theory tends to be limited when studying modern Japanese literature, there has been growing awareness that this approach could shed light on deficiencies in existing research on Japan.

For instance, in Posutokoroniaru (Postcolonial, 2001), literary historian Komori Yōichi draws on postcolonial theory to explain the particular case of Japanese colonialism. He reads Japan’s imperial expansion as a compensatory measure to divert itself from external colonial pressures, suggesting a dilemma in Japanese modernity. In order to fit within a new hegemonic discursive order, argues Komori, Japan underwent a process of “self-colonization” (jikoshokuminchika 自己殖民地化): Japan’s “colonial consciousness” (shokuminchishugiteki ishiki 植民地主義的意識) in implementing its colonial project was displaced by its “colonial unconscious” (shokuminchishugiteki muishiki 植民地主義的無意識) (Komori 2001, 12–15). This colonial unconscious suppressed a sense of crisis arising in response to a threatening Other (Western powers), reconfiguring it instead into a form of internal colonization: the assimilation of (Western) modernity discourse. By adopting the Western colonial gaze towards its Asian
neighbours and discovering the “uncivilized” among them, Japan presented its own process of modernization and westernization as a spontaneous program—one which proves its legitimacy as a modern power, and justifies its colonial projects (Komori 2001, 12–15).

Faye Yuan Kleeman (2003) likewise argues in *Under an Imperial Sun: Japanese Colonial Literature of Taiwan and the South* that literary works produced in Japan’s colonies during the late nineteenth and the first half of twentieth century demonstrate in detail the process of constructing Japan’s colonial territories as spaces of “the primitive” (Kleeman 2003, 4). This glaring opposition to Japanese modernity “highlighted the civilized nature of the Japanese and reaffirmed their cultural superiority” (Kleeman 2003, 18). Similarly focused on the literary productions of the peripheries, Mark Driscoll provides a different perspective, arguing that the cultural hierarchy between the Japanese metropole and its periphery is not stable. He points out, for example, some of the most important Japanese modernist discourses of the 1920s and 1930s were actually “influenced by colonial forms and genres” (Driscoll 1999b, 157). The fact that these cultural trends moved from the periphery to the imperial centre “runs directly counter to the supposed unidirectional cultural and civilizational movement of Eurocentric historicism” (Driscoll 1999b, 157).

### 3. Key Terms

The present study attempts to examine common assumptions about modernity in Japanese literary narratives. Through an exploration of the coloniality imbedded in spatial power relations in these works, I will argue that ‘modern urban space’ is defined against its Others—‘colonial’ spaces. I employ the term ‘colonial’ in both a narrow and broad sense, as both a
historical condition and a strategy of interpretation. It does not merely refer to the material colonial relations between imperial Japan and its colonies, but is conceived more as an ideological construct which can be used to critically reassess prevalent images of modernity. ‘Coloniality’ here thus emphasizes relations that constitute Japanese modernity, which has been repressed by the singularity of the modernity narrative. In other words, the term ‘colonial’ not only refers to the Japanese imperial project, but also implies its inextricability to Japanese modernity; it is broader and more inclusive than Barlow’s original usage of “colonial modernity.”

I employ this concept of the ‘colonial’ to explain the hierarchical structures contained in works that were written during the period when the Japanese colonial project began to expand in earnest. The authors to be discussed were undoubtedly influenced by their historical conditions, whether or not they consciously intended to reflect such conditions in their writing. Situating their works back into a colonial context can not only make productive connections between these texts and their respective historical backdrops, but can also enable the texts to contribute to a larger project of postcolonial criticism. As discussed earlier, my project examines the colonial by conceiving power relations in spatial terms, such as spatial dichotomies of metropole/colony, urban/rural, or interior/exterior. At first glance some of the pairings such as urban/rural may appear to have little in common with the colonies, as they are not directly associated with brutal conquest and the subjugation of people. However, these spatial relations have nonetheless transformed the existing social order by functioning in the same mode as the centre/periphery binary, which helped to construct (colonial) spatial Others and to imagine ‘modern urban space.’ The present study will thus examine how these Others were formed and differentiated and, employing the strategies of postcolonial criticism, expose the hierarchical power relations in these texts. More specifically, I posit that Japan’s concurrent colonialism and modernization,
which contributed to each other, demonstrate that modernity was not simply exported from a ‘centre’ to the ‘peripheries.’

Throughout this study, attention will be given to spatial power relations used to establish a centralized system of economics, politics, and culture, thus placing the geographic or conceptual periphery into an inferior position. The construction of Japanese modernity is indivisible from the production of various spatial Others. In other words, spatial representations of Japanese modernity were not simply illustrated by, for instance, the Western-style bricktown in Tokyo, but were highlighted and constituted by spatial Others through such dichotomous structures as metropole/colony and urban/rural. The present study thus attempts to show how the construction of ‘Japanese modernity’ was imagined by producing multiple spatial Others against the urban space of Tokyo.

The literary works examined in this study are directly or indirectly related to urban space, and articulate spatial power relations through representations of both physical and non-geographic spaces closely related to the formation of a modern subjectivity. Chapter 1 examines Tokyo’s modern urban space in terms of the relation between metropole and colony, bringing particular attention to texts that read colonial space in Shanghai. Chapter 2 analyzes the hierarchical spatial relations between the urban and the rural within the Japanese homeland, through which the complex notion of Japanese modernity was made visible. Chapter 3 explores the temporary and transitional space related to railways, which were arguably the very embodiment of modern urban space at the turn of the twentieth century. Finally, Chapter 4 investigates how hygiene discourse created a narrative space to stimulate cultural imaginations of a hygienic modernity.
By revealing the coloniality in the spatial power relations that gave rise to Japanese modernity, we can reinterpret the binary structures that formulate the position of the ‘colonized,’ not as an outside/Other to the modern but as a part of its production—an intrinsic part of modernity itself. In short, this multivalent modernity was not something diffused from a core to the periphery and imitated by Others, but produced and consumed by all participants in the process of its development. Heterogeneous urban space, with its ambiguous and multiple qualities, offers a useful platform for rethinking the narrative of a singular modernity. First, modern urban space is one of the most important emblems of (Western/Japanese) modernity, and its heterogeneity thus allows a continuous redefinition of what modernity is. Secondly, with heterogeneity constantly threatening its boundaries, ‘modernity’ must be reinforced by a binary structure to clearly reconfigure the ‘modern’ Self. This binary structure is expressed in terms of centre/periphery hierarchical spatial relations. Thus, by revealing the historical formation of such dichotomies, we can see how (Western/Japanese) modernity itself is a constructed narrative. Finally, the heterogeneity of modern urban space is also a result of its relationship with the colonies. The construction of (Western/Japanese) modernity cannot exist without the colonial Other: not only does the Other provide a perfect ‘outside’ to define a modern national Self ‘inside,’ but the colonial economy and its material benefits were what made industrialization and modernization possible.

4. Literature Review

This project was inspired by Komori Yōichi’s (1995, 1999, 2001) thought-provoking re-reading of Sōseki. Drawing on the works of Maeda Ai, Kamei Hideo, and others to wed social history to different components of literary texts, Komori’s analysis historicizes Sōseki’s
canonical works within the context of Japanese colonialism. In contrast to previous criticism that only considered Meiji and Taishō literature within the bounds of the Japanese homeland, his work focuses on examining those literary texts alongside the implications of Japan’s colonial contexts. In doing so, Komori reveals the ignored and suppressed historicity in these texts, offering an innovative perspective from which to read modern Japanese literature. Using a semiotic analysis of space through historical sources, he highlights the multi-layered structure of Japanese imperialism. Komori’s work on how literary representations of spatial relations were shaped by historical contexts thus informs my own historicist approach to representations of modern urban space. As a project that strives to explore how Japanese modernity was shaped by colonial experiences both in its homeland and colonies, the present study likewise takes up the works of well-known Meiji and Taishō writers, reinterpreting them in their respective historical contexts with a focus on representations of urban space.

I have chosen to focus on writings on urban space in Tokyo mainly because the city has long functioned as a focal point for Japanese intellectuals in the quest for a new Japan. From the early Meiji period, modernity in Japan was closely connected to the idea of building a nation with Tokyo as its centre. As the epitome of Japanese modernity, the capital’s rapid transformation made it a central theme in both official and popular discourse in Japan. The image of a modern Tokyo was created to help form national identity and symbolize Japan’s growing importance as a power on a par with its European counterparts, and has had a great impact on Japanese modernity discourse ever since. At the same time, Tokyo was also characterized by its heterogeneous urban space. Rapid urbanization within a compacted time frame resulted in

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3 Michael Cronin in his 2017 work *Osaka Modern: The City in the Japanese Imaginary* provides a way to undo the centrality of Tokyo by discussing Osaka as a modern city.
extensive co-existence of rural and urbanized landscapes, vernacular and foreign architectures, old and new social relations, to name few. The migration of people from the peripheries to the metropolitan centre meant that Tokyo was also heterogeneous in terms of its class and ethnic demographics, which resulted in the physical segregation of urban space into various neighbourhoods. Tokyo’s hybridity thus not only provides a useful platform to challenge the state’s official narrative of a uniform Japanese modernity; in fact, it reveals heterogeneity as an intrinsic part of being modern.

4.1 The Transformation of Tokyo

In 1868, Edo’s status changed when the emperor issued an imperial decree—“Edo wo shōshite Tōkyō to nasu no shōsho” 江戸ヲ称シテ東京ト為スノ詔書 (“The Decree that Named Edo Tokyo”)—to rename the city “Tokyo,” and moved his residence from the traditional palace in Kyoto to the vacated shogun’s castle in Edo (Ponsonby-Fane 1956, 327–28). The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw Tokyo undergo a wide-ranging transformation. From its inception, Tokyo was designated a national centre symbolizing modern Japan, for both Japanese nationals and foreigners. Less a city than a symbol of the nation as a whole, the spatial transformation of this new centre thus played an essential role in the construction of a nation-state, showcasing Japanese modernity (Smith 1978; Seidenstiker 1983). As Takashi Fujitani states in Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan (1998), Tokyo was equipped with new Western-style architecture in order to document Japan’s entrance into modernity, reifying Tokyo’s symbolic meaning as a national capital. And with Japanese colonial expansion, Tokyo was inevitably at the centre of Japanese colonialism as well. In Dominant Narratives of Colonial Hokkaido and Imperial Japan: Envisioning the Periphery and the Modern Nation-State (2012), Michele Mason observes the role Japan’s ‘periphery’ played in
constructing both the nation-state and empire through the commonly dismissed colonial project pursued in Hokkaido. In a chapter discussing Kunikita Doppo’s 國木田獨歩 (1871–1908) “Gyūniku to bareisho” 牛肉と馬鈴薯 (“Meat and Potatoes,” 1901), she points out how colonial Hokkaido contributed greatly to Tokyo’s modernization project by providing a variety of natural resources. Tokyo’s modernity cannot be separated from the ‘periphery,’ not only because the colonies provided the resources and cheap labour needed to support the capital’s industrialization, but also because the very existence of the ‘periphery’ defined Tokyo as the ideological ‘centre.’

4.2 Secondary Literature Review: Representations of Japanese Urban Space

In the early twentieth century, social and cultural interest in urban space spiked when numerous works dealing with this theme appeared on the Japanese literary scene. The increasingly fragmentary nature of urban space played an important role beyond setting, and in a sense represented the very image of Japanese modernity. Sōseki’s Sanshirō 三四郎 (Sanshiro, 1908), for example, has been singled out as a primary literary source for tracing Tokyo’s and thus Japan’s path of progress in the modern age (Wakabayashi 1996; Burton 1997). In addition, the heterogeneity of such spaces not only gave writers fodder for new narrative content, but inspired new developments in language and writing style. Furthermore, modern urban space engendered new social relations based on anonymity and mass culture, which were closely related to commercial literary productions like advertisements and women’s magazines (Frederick 2006). In this sense, the mutually constitutive forces operating between urban space

4 This is especially true in 1920s and 1930s modernist writings that tried to imitate the rhythm of modern urban space.
and its literary representations make modern Japanese literature a perfect site to explore the spatial power relations that constitute Japanese modernity.

While there have been numerous studies of modern urban space in Japan from a social and historical perspective, only a limited number of studies have focused on the relationship between urban space and modern Japanese literature. With his pioneering works *Toshi kukan no naka no bungaku* (*Literature in Urban Space*, 1982) and *Kindai Nihon no bungaku kukan: Rekishi, kotoba, jokyō* (*The Literary Space of Modern Japan: History, Language, Situations*, 1983), Maeda Ai put spatial narratives on the map of modern Japanese literary criticism. Through an examination of literary productions that emerged in post-Meiji Tokyo, Maeda argues that an old yet vibrant Tokugawa city culture still persisted at all levels of Meiji urban space. In showing the remnants of Tokugawa culture in Meiji urban space and literary texts, Maeda displaces “the time-honored convention of viewing 1868 as the line separating medieval from modern Japan” (Fujii 2004, 6), presenting the Meiji period as continuing rather than rupturing with the previous era. Maeda’s attention to lived space in opposition to industrial modernity is also key. For him, “unlike space that is marked off in advance by the state, such lived space takes shape only when contingencies (an event or encounter) in turn give meaning to the space they inhabit” (Fujii 2004, 11). Similarly, Matsuyama Iwao’s *Ranpo to Tōkyō—1920 toshi no kao* (*Ranpo and Tokyo: 1920 the Face of the City*, 1984) claims that the excessive sensuality of Edogawa Ranpo’s 豊川周助 (1894–1965) writings excavate a repressed premodern layer of urban space, and thus his works suggest a corporeal representation of liminal space excluded from Tokyo’s emergent modernity.

Despite the invaluable contributions these critics have made to the study of literary representations of urban spaces, there seems to be an overreliance on rigid binaries of premodern
and modern, Japan and the West, even while attempting to problematize framing categories like ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity.’ If we were to accept this binarism, we would risk rendering the work of such writers as Nagai Kafū 永井荷風 (1879–1959) and Edogawa Ranpo as merely a return to pre-urbanized, indigenous sensibilities. In response to Matsuyama’s contention that Ranpo’s writings function as a reservoir of the premodern repressed in the urban space of Tokyo, Igarashi Yoshikuni counters that Ranpo’s work “traverses the terrains of both Japan and the West as well as those of the premodern and the modern” (Igarashi 2005, 303). Another gap these critical works fail to address is the construction of Japanese modernity vis-à-vis Japan’s colonial developments, which undoubtedly infused the works of Meiji and Taishō writers.

With the increasing influence of postcolonial theory on the study of Japan, more and more recent academic writings have placed modern Japanese culture in relation to its colonial past. For instance, in her study of Japan’s national mobilization following the Manchurian Incident, historian Louise Young (1999) situates Japanese mass culture as a cultural front in Japan’s “total empire.” In the field of Japanese literary criticism, a growing number of scholars began to touch upon Japanese imperialism. In Complicit Fictions: The Subject in the Modern Japanese Prose Narrative (1993), James Fujii examines the role of the state and urban landscape in the construction of subjecthood in the formative period of modern Japanese literature. He questions the claim that modern Japanese literature is primarily derivative of conventions in European realism, and points out Japanese literary canon’s refusal or incapability “to address the imperialist dimension of Japanese modernity” (Fujii 1993, 128). Another important focus in the book is how the city contributes to the configuration of subjects. In a discussion on “the spatial metaphor” in Shimazaki Tōson’s 島崎藤村 (1872–1943) Hakai 破戒 (The Broken Commandment, 1906), Fujii argues that such spatial dynamics as urban/rural and
centre/periphery may better capture the cultural tensions of this period than would temporal
metaphors as ‘modern progress.’

Seiji Lippit’s *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (2002) builds on the work of
Karatani (1980), and contends that modernist texts were produced during a period when a clear
demarcation between interior and exterior was no longer tenable, due to a disjointed urban
topography, Japanese imperialism, and the rise of mass culture. Echoing Fujii, Lippit posits that
the increasingly fragmented forms of Japanese modernist writings were a response to the
heterogeneous nature of city space, which “materialize a sense of fluidity in the boundaries of
subjectivity” (Lippit 2002, 7), reflecting a process of subject formation analogous to national
formation.

The influence of Japan’s urban environment on the emergence of Japanese interwar
modernist literature continued to attract academic interest. For instance, in *Advertising Tower:*
modernist literature was shaped not by the adoption of Western culture, but instead by the
historical context of 1920s and 1930s Tokyo. According to Gardner, it is impossible to identify a
purely Japanese or Western culture, nor is there a clear distinction between traditional and
modern, or commercial and revolutionary forms. Furthermore, sharing Lippit’s interest in the
relationship between Japanese modernism and imperialism, Gardner argues that poets of the era
were able to appropriate and subvert dominant paradigms in the face of Japan’s position as
colonial power by manipulating the Japanese language.

As both Lippit and Gardner have noted, the city as a phenomenon had extensive effects in
a society beyond mere physical space: for example, the reconfiguration of the urban landscape
after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake not only reflected an upsurge of such material space as
cafés, cabarets, and dance halls, but also a transformation in the production and spectatorship of such mediated spaces and spaces for the media, as evidenced by the rise of film, radio broadcasts, and mass-circulation magazines (Lippit 2002, 23; Gardner 2006, 41). Miriam Silverberg, in her 2006 book *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times*, also explores similar forms of urban mass culture such as cafés, popular magazines and the movies in the context of imperial Japan. In demonstrating the influence of the colonial project on popular culture, Silverberg emphasizes the crucial role 1920s and 1930s Japanese mass culture played in transforming Japanese citizens into imperial subjects. However, Silverberg also suggests that popular culture can function as a space of resistance: not unlike Henri Lefebvre’s (1991b, 2002) notion of everyday practice as producing social space, Silverberg emphasizes how the producers and consumers of urban mass culture play with new cultural forms as a way to resist authority and maintain autonomy in the face of increasing state control.

Additionally, trains, a new feature of the urban landscape and a popular image in modern literature, also played a crucial role in unifying the nation and aiding in Japan’s imperial expansion, as discussed in James Fujii’s articles “Networks of Modernity: Rail Transport and Modern Japanese Literature” (1997) and “Intimate Alienation: Japanese Urban Rail and the Commodification of Urban Subjects” (1999). Similarly, Alisa Freedman’s *Tokyo in Transit: Japanese Culture on the Rails and Road* (2011) also focuses on the railways that greatly changed prewar Tokyo’s social fabric. In examining the history of Tokyo’s mass transportation system through literature, Freedman investigates how trains and buses defined modern Tokyo and changed Japan’s cultural production. Most prominently in her second chapter, Freedman shares with Fujii a focus on Sanshiro’s train experience, touching upon the imperial historical context indicated in Sōseki’s text.
Whether regarded as physical space or a more complex social space, representations of urban space are vital to understanding Japanese modernity, as evidenced by their increasing prominent presence in academic discourse. Nonetheless, the interrelationship between urban space, Japanese modernity, and Japan’s colonial project in the early twentieth century still lacks relative visibility. The present study attempts to fill this gap by examining the construction of various power relations in literary representations of modern urban space.

4.3 Focus and Goals of this Study

It is my contention that ‘coloniality’ is inseparable from Western/Japanese modernity, or modernity in general. Thus, it cannot be overlooked while examining modern urban space. Drawing on the recent surge of scholarship about the relationship between Japanese colonialism and Japanese modernity, the present study seeks to contextualize the formation of the narrative of Japanese modernity within Japan’s colonial history by exploring spatial power relations that were intrinsic to the construction of Japanese modernity. By analyzing the representations of urban space in modern Japanese literature, I hope to contextualize and problematize the narrative of a homogeneous ‘modernity.’ Deviating from the previous scholarship discussed above, this study focuses on spatial power relations that are inscribed in various forms in the construction of the modernity narrative. The texts examined are mainly (but not restricted to) works explicitly referencing urban space in Tokyo, and include canonical works by established writers like Sōseki and Tanizaki, as well as those by lesser known writers like Nakajima Atsushi 中島敦 (1909–42). What they have in common is they all to some extent reveal the writer’s anxiety in the face of the myth of modernity, with some texts showing a resistance to modernity’s homogenizing tendencies. The heterogeneity of urban space represented in modern Japanese writing and the
sense of uncertainty it generated towards modernity offers a useful platform for questioning the applicability of a singular, teleological narrative of modernity.

Concepts like the ‘modern’ are generally perceived in linear, temporal terms. Popular definitions of modern or modernity are also charged with European history and thought, and lay claim to a universal history that follows a teleological narrative of progress. In order to rethink modernity outside this framework, it would be productive to interpret modernity in spatial terms. This is because compared to the linear time, it is easier to see physical space as heterogeneous and diverse, in terms of having different terrains, different architectures, and different landscapes, each with distinct characteristics. Moreover, the juxtaposition and interaction of these spaces make the constant shifting of urban space apparent. Therefore, if we examine modernity in terms of urban space, not only will the heterogeneous characteristic of space bring forward the heterogeneity of the ‘modern,’ but the complexity of urban space can also reveal the intricate relationship between different modernities, and demonstrate how the narrative of Western modernity became dominant.

By examining a variety of spatial power relations and their textual representations, this dissertation attempts to show how the narrative of (Western/Japanese) modernity is established and articulated in negotiation with various Others. I argue that the discourse of (Western/Japanese) modernity is not neutral, but was largely constructed through various spatial power relations emerging from conflicts between the centre and periphery. In other words, an external space is objectified and Othered in order to construct an interior defined as ‘modern.’ The conception of ‘modernity’ consistently posited the negation of its expression as fundamental to its very existence. In short, defining the negative, or what is ‘not modern,’ is even more significant than defining what is ‘modern.’ Like any Self/Other binary structure, modernity
becomes “aware of itself only through perceiving the Other” (Hijiya-Kirshnereit 2006, 21). It is this centre/periphery binary structure that prompts the imagination of a singular modernity where power is centralized, obliterating other possible narratives.

However, the notion of a universal modernity based on a consciousness of worldwide simultaneity and homogeneity can be undermined by discrepancies introduced by the heterogeneity of urban spaces. ‘Modernity’ and its Others are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually constitutive. In particular, the ever-shifting boundary of ‘modernity’ is made more obvious when considering the interaction of different spatial relations. I believe a singular modernity is imagined through a complex discourse, and thus can be challenged through its deconstruction. Using a close reading of literary representations of modern urban space, I attempt to reveal their historicity and expose the formulation, self-legitimization, and reinforcement of modernity discourse. Moreover, through exploring the heterogeneity of urban space represented in literary narratives, I aim to show how the narrative logic of a singular modernity was also challenged and complicated by the same spatial language.

5. Outline

In the following four chapters, I will read representations of Japanese urban space in a variety of literary texts against their historical backdrops, with most texts having been published over a span of twenty-six years, beginning from the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) to the 1931 Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Each chapter examines several texts selected around a particular spatial relation that gave rise to the narrative of Japanese modernity, manifesting in either a physical relation (metropole/colony) or more a conceptual one (hygenic/unhygienic).
Considering that literary representations actively participated in the process of imagining modernity, I believe these texts to be not only representations of space, but also formative of and validating Japan’s ‘colonial modernity.’ While each chapter has its own focal point, all four chapters work in concert to illustrate that various heterogenous spatial Others were fundamental to the construction—and deconstruction—of Japanese modernity.

Chapter 1 aims to complicate images of Tokyo’s modern urban space through those of the semi-colonial city of Shanghai. In this chapter, I examine Japan’s modern urban space in terms of the relationship between metropole and colony, giving particular attention to texts that read the (semi-)colonial space of Shanghai. Japan entered the twentieth century as a rising world power, and victory in the Russo-Japanese War secured Japan’s colonial foothold in the continent. During a period of so-called ‘Taishō Democracy,’ Japan continued to increase its colonial control in Korea and China. Japan’s modernity was indeed inseparable from its own colonial project as well as the broader context of global imperial relations. During Japan’s imperial expansion, literary works often depicted colonial space in such cosmopolitan cities as Shanghai alongside Tokyo. Since the 1910s, a number of famous Japanese writers visited Shanghai or passed through it en route to Europe, and two of them—Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō—will serve as the main focus in this chapter. Using the spatial relations depicted in the two authors’ works on Shanghai and Tokyo, I will examine how modern Japanese identity was constructed and contested in an imagined space within the colonial context, and how Japanese modernity was ‘discovered’ in this process. I will mainly take up Akutagawa’s Shina yūki 支那遊記 (Travels in China, 1921), written in a quasi-ethnographic reportage style, to discuss spatial relations in Shanghai. Furthermore, this chapter will also examine these writers’ works on Tokyo, such as Akutagawa’s “Butōkai” 舞踏会 (“The Ball,” 1920), and Tanizaki’s
“Himitsu” 秘密 (‘The Secret,’ 1911) and “Majutsushi” 魔術師 (‘The Magician,’ 1917), which show a less homogenous and more contentious narrative of Tokyo’s modernity.

Chapter 2 will deal with the spatial relations between the rural and the urban (specifically, Tokyo), in order to reveal the imprint of hierarchical power relations within the Japanese homeland. This chapter will examine two canonical texts, Sōseki’s Sanshiro, published three years after the Russo-Japanese War, and Tanizaki’s Chijin no ai 痴人の愛 (Naomi, lit. A Fool’s Love, 1924), published six months after the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake. I will illustrate how the construction of modern identity is related to the construction of a rural Other by demonstrating how the countryside is represented as an outsider to Japan’s modernity. In this regard, the urban/rural dichotomy can be seen as mirroring Japanese colonial relations overseas, making visible the notion of Japanese modernity. Particular attention will be paid to the capital city of Tokyo, whose landscape transformed in earnest with rapid industrialization and a great influx of people. By juxtaposing the two Tokyo-centred texts, we can see each novel not only as the life journeys of their respective protagonists, but also as signs of the larger historical process of nation-building. I will also discuss how these texts employ metaphors for colonial tensions by transposing them into Japan’s domestic space. In doing so, this chapter will illustrate how a deconstruction of the urban/rural binary helps to constitute the countryside not as a pure outside to the modern capital, but rather as a product of it. Meanwhile, the depiction of heterogeneous space in Tokyo also represents a challenge to the clearly drawn boundaries of ‘modern urban space,’ destabilizing the seemingly self-apparent equation of Tokyo and ‘modernity.’

In Chapter 3, I turn to trains, which function as a kind of liminal space that perfectly embodies ‘modern urban space,’ containing various sets of spatial power relations in an ultra-compact form. Taking up literary representations of space in relation to different trains, this
chapter focuses both on Japan’s national consolidation and its colonial expansion by means of railway. Railways can be seen as the fundamental contextual tissue of urban space that constitutes Japanese modernity: in the metropole, rails that crossed provincial boundaries altered people’s sense of belonging which, until well into the modern era, had been “restricted to local geographic and political units” (Fujii 1997, 14). Japanese rails not only transformed the landscape within the metropole, but also redefined Japan’s national boundaries materially and ideologically, through its expansion into the colonies. Drawing on works by Sōseki, Tayama Katai 田山花袋 (1872–1930), Tanizaki, Akutagawa, Hayashi Fumiko 林芙美子 (1903–51), and Nakajima Atsushi, this chapter will demonstrate how depictions of trains, ranging from cross-country and intra-city rails to the South Manchuria Railway, provide a means to reflect on social, cultural, and political contexts, as well as a productive arena for imagining and simultaneously challenging the identity of Japanese modernity.

Finally, Chapter 4 expands on the discussions of physical space in previous chapters, taking on the question of the discursive space of modern hygiene and its intrinsic coloniality. This chapter addresses the question of how modern hygiene discourse participated in the formation of a nation-state and the production of a consciousness of modernity. Using texts by Mori Ōgai 森鴨外 (1862–1922), Sōseki, Akutagawa, and Tanizaki, I will explore how their works were mobilized to imagine a healthy and homogeneous national community, and how the heterogeneity introduced in their texts at the same time challenged such constructions. First, I will investigate hygiene discourse and its relation to the concept of modernity by showing how norms of modern hygiene collaborate with the construction of national identity and colonial projects. In order to examine this discourse, scientific works by Mori Rintarō 森林太郎—better known as Mori Ōgai—will be analyzed. Then, through an analysis of Ōgai’s and Akutagawa’s
literary texts related to hygiene, I will demonstrate how the narrative of modern hygiene was constructed, and simultaneously complicated by rejecting hierarchical power relations. I will then use Sōseki’s and Tanizaki’s works to discuss a mundane commodity: soap. By discussing the relationship between hygiene discourse and productions of soap in Japan’s colonies as well as the advertisements of soap in the metropole, I will show how using such products as soap became a pass to enter ‘hygienic modernity’ and will uncover the repressed coloniality imbedded in such practices.
[W]e should dispense altogether with the picture of the globe divided into a Western core and non-Western periphery, or any other fixed geographical image, and think instead in terms of overlapping, disjunctive landscapes whose centers and perspective shift according to the different kinds of cultural, financial, and political forces one considers.

– Timothy Mitchell⁵

Introduction

Prior to the late eighteenth century, Japan’s relationship with the outside world was largely influenced by the Sinocentric imperium (Morris-Suzuki 1997, 14). However, as the West displaced China as hegemonic cultural centre, the relationship between Japan and China shifted. After defeating China in the First Sino-Japanese War (1894–95), Japan increasingly attempted to define itself against a Chinese Other, which it positioned as inferior to the West. Meanwhile, Japan’s rapid westernization also produced anxiety among Japanese intellectuals, who subscribed to a range of negative views towards Western hegemony. The hegemony referenced here does not merely refer to the technological, economic, or military dominance that the West had over Japan, but more importantly to a ‘cultural hegemony,’ as in Antonio Gramsci’s terms (Mouffe 1979, 180). What most worried Meiji and Taishō elites was the impression that Western/modern values and norms had gradually replaced their ‘traditional’ ones, though many such ‘traditions’ were recent inventions. They felt the necessity to allocate new meanings to

⁵ Mitchell 2000, 7.
Japan’s ‘tradition’ in order to reverse the newly established hierarchy between Japan and the
West. This inevitably reintroduced China’s presence because of the inextricable cultural bonds
shared between the two. The boundaries between the Japanese Self and its Others, therefore,
were constantly challenged and reconfigured. This is particularly true in the semi-colonial space
of China’s leading treaty port and its most westernized metropolis, Shanghai, where power
relations between China, Japan, and the West were deeply intertwined.

Among others, many of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s works express
Taishō intellectual’s anxieties over how to reconcile a Japanese identity situated between the
coordinates of modernity and tradition, East and West. Their works on the cosmopolitan cities of
Shanghai and Tokyo serve as an example of their probe into this identity question, as their
representations of the ambivalent multiplicity experienced in these heterogeneous urban spaces
not only demarcated but also blurred the boundaries of Japan’s modern identity. By juxtaposing
literary representations of Tokyo and representations of (semi-)colonial space in Shanghai, their
works reveal complex colonial tensions existing within the metropole during the Taishō period.
Both writers’ perspectives were mediated through their exposure to the West as well as their
training in the Chinese classics, and their works can help us unpack the tensions and ambiguities
latent in Japan’s attempts to negotiate its modern identity both within and against the West and
China.

This chapter will focus on spatial relations depicted in Akutagawa’s and Tanizaki’s literary
works on Tokyo and Shanghai, examining how modern Japanese identity was constructed and
contested through imagining colonial spaces, as well as how Japanese modernity itself was
‘discovered’ in this process. I will mainly take up Akutagawa’s Travels in China, which was
written in a quasi-ethnographic reportage style, to discuss spatial relations in Shanghai. I will also
examine the texts written about Tokyo before and after the authors’ trips to China, such as Akutagawa’s “The Ball,” and Tanizaki’s “Secret” and “The Magician.” By painting a complex picture of the modern urban space of Tokyo alongside the semi-colonial city Shanghai, this chapter attempts to show a less homogenous and more contentious narrative of Japanese modernity.

1. Shanghai and Tokyo

1.1 Changing Power Relations

From the mid-nineteenth century onward, Japan’s identity underwent a significant transformation as its relationship changed with both China and the West. After losing the first Opium War (1839–42) to Britain, China, which had been culturally dominant in East Asia for centuries, was exposed to the new cultural hegemony of the West and descended into a semi-colonial state. With China’s defeat as well as the arrival of Commodore Matthew Perry’s ‘Black Ships’ (1853) demanding Japan open its ports, a new power hierarchy began to take shape in the Japanese psyche. With new geopolitical power relations being established but yet to be solidified, Japan’s creation of a modern self-identity was a contentious and unstable process. Being an Asian country, Japan’s modern identity was predicated on the inferior position of Asia in relation to the West. But with the rapid process of industrialization after the Meiji Restoration, it was believed that the hierarchy between Japan and the West could be reversed, especially by asserting Japan’s unique positionality within Asia. Many Meiji intellectuals such as Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉 (1835–1901) claimed that Japan’s only way of advancing towards civilization was to abandon the Sinocentric imperium and emulate Western powers, as expressed in the famous slogan ‘Leaving Asia and Joining Europe.’ In this sense, Japan’s role as a non-Western
imperial power can only be articulated against its Asian neighbors, and thus the representation of Asia, especially its former ‘teacher’ China, can never be absent in the discourse of constructing a modern Japan.

As Japan’s imperial expansion in China grew, the Japanese reading public became more interested in contemporary events in China. From the turn of the century to the 1920s, especially during the Taishō Period (1912–26), a trend referred to as Shina shumi 支那趣味 (Sinophilia) emerged in Japanese cultural circles, in which China was frequently written about in newspapers and magazines. The emergence of Shina shumi is certainly related to Japan’s long-standing historical and cultural relations with China. As Atsuko Sakaki has suggested, Japan’s attention to China shifted in the Taishō period “from the spiritual/intellectual to the material” and, especially following the Russo-Japanese War, Japan began to adopt a “Western Orientalist appreciation of things Chinese” (Sakaki 2006, 66). Japanese intellectuals increasingly took an exotic and defamiliarizing look at contemporary China through the lens of Western modernity, which led to an “objectification of China itself,” imagined as a timeless Other, one that was implicitly or explicitly opposed to modern Japan (Sakaki 2006, 76–78). Shina shumi writings can therefore be considered a counterpart to orientalism, where China was “rehistoricized as Japan’s past,” over which Japan gained temporal superiority (Tanaka 1995, 20). It is noteworthy that in the term Shina shumi, the appellation of Shina 支那, widely used after the Meiji Restoration, applied a kanji transliteration of China’s name in European language to replace the Chinese characters for Chūgoku 中國 (China, lit. Middle Kingdom).6 Where Chūgoku strongly implies China’s

6 Arai Hakuseki 新井白石 (1657–1725) noticed in 1708 that the Latin term for China was Sinae (plural of Sina) was similar to Shina, the Japanese pronunciation of 支那, and he began to use this word for China regardless of dynasty (Wikipedia, accessed June 30, 2018, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shina_word)).
dominant position in the Sinosphere, Shina decentred China semiotically in relation to the West. Within this historical context, it is significant that Akutagawa’s travelogue on China was titled Shina yūki. This word choice in the title indicates that the text displaced the Chinese world system of Hua-yí 華夷 (Jp. ka-i, Sino-barbarian), which had positioned China in the centre of civilization (Morris-Suzuki 1997, 15).

Within this context, many writers who traveled to China hoped to present this new image to their readers, and Shanghai became one of the most popular destinations for Japanese travelers due to its fame as an international metropolis. The ambivalent cultural hierarchy between China and Japan deeply influenced Japanese writings on contemporary China, which was often depicted as stagnant and backwards in relation to modern Japan. Shanghai, however, was a semi-colonial treaty port considered to be the Asian equivalent to Western metropolises such as Paris and New York, thus presenting a more complicated situation for Japanese writers. In particular, considering the many similarities between Shanghai and Tokyo, the increasingly segregated and multivalent urban spaces in Shanghai provided opportunities for Japanese intellectuals to better understand various layers and contradictions latent in the capital city Tokyo.

1.2 The (Semi-)Colonial City

After the opening of treaty ports to foreign powers in the late nineteenth century, Tokyo and Shanghai became two of the biggest port cities in East Asia. At the time, Tokyo as the imperial capital was the economic, cultural, and political centre of Japan, while Shanghai was considered the ‘Paris of the East.’ Both cities followed a similar path, being economically prosperous and having active artistic and intellectual communities, which brought each of the cities and its people a unique identity. The residents of Shanghai identified themselves as not only Chinese but also Shanghainese, as people from all over the country traveled to live and
work there. The transformation of Shanghai’s urban space, according to Meng Yue, was not only a product of the “inter-relation between capitalist and imperialist cultural politics” but also of the “unruly” socio-cultural practices following the decline of Qing (1644–1911) elite authority (Meng 2006, xxviii). Shanghai’s cosmopolitan landscape absorbed people from everywhere in the nation and around the world—journalists, writers, political diasporas, semi-illicit actors, revolutionaries—all gathered here forming a unique urban fabric that Meng argues became “a primary drive” of Shanghai’s urban history (Meng 2006, 67, 134). Similarly, Tokyo’s native inhabitants proudly called themselves edokko 江戸っ子 (Tokyoite) to differentiate themselves from people who came to the metropolis from other parts of the Japanese mainland.

1.2.1 Tokyo: Historical Background

On September 3, 1868, the emperor issued an imperial decree to move the imperial capital from Kyoto to the vacated shogun’s castle in Edo, upon which the city was renamed Tokyo (lit. Eastern Capital). In addition to the change, the travels of the Iwakura Mission (Iwakura Shisetsudan 岩倉使節団, 1871–73) to the West also convinced Meiji officials of the inadequacy of the capital city. The transformation of Tokyo’s landscape, assisted by Western planners and architects, resulted in such spaces as the fully westernized Ginza Bricktown (Reingagai 煉瓦街), reconstructed in 1872 as a showcase of Japan’s modernization (Seidensticker 2010, 75). However, according to Fujitani, it was not until late 1880s that Tokyo’s physical configuration experienced influential changes, partially because of the governing elites’ reification of Tokyo as a symbol of the nation (Fujitani 1998, 41). Fujitani points out that the Meiji officials “held massive transformations in the capital’s core” and used modern architecture to convince both domestic and foreign audiences of the capital’s civilization and modernity (Fujitani 1998, 73–74, 82).
By the beginning of the twentieth century, Tokyo’s symbolic meaning as the national capital and the centre of Japan’s expanding empire became increasingly important within Japan’s future imperial enterprise. During World War I (1914–18), Japan experienced a period of economic and industrial growth, which also facilitated the transformation of Tokyo at an unprecedented speed. The construction of new architecture, the development of novel forms of transportation, especially railways, and the rise of middle-class consumption created a cosmopolitan modernity, which had a drastic impact on Tokyo’s cityscape and urban environment. In addition, the growth of industries and related urban development resulted in countless opportunities in Tokyo, attracting a sizable group of people from all over the country in search of upward social mobility. Moreover, in addition to the many Westerners who had been traveling to Tokyo since the early Meiji period, there also emerged a large number of immigrants from Japan’s newly acquired Asian colonies, which further complicated spatial relations in Tokyo, making them comparable to its semi-colonial counterpart in China, Shanghai.

1.2.2 Shanghai: Historical Background

After the First Opium War in 1842, the Treaty of Nanjing was signed between the United Kingdom and the Qing dynasty of China, the terms of which stipulated that Shanghai would be opened as a treaty port for international trade. Britain opened the first settlement in Shanghai in 1843, and the United States and France followed suit in 1848 and 1849, after which point the three countries created the Shanghai Municipal Council (Gongbuju 工部局) in 1854. The council became the settlements’ official governing body, though France exited the Council in 1862 to preserve the independence of its settlement. Following the French exit, Britain and the United States united their settlements in 1863 and eventually changed its name to the International Settlement of Shanghai in 1899. The International Settlement was wholly foreign-controlled,
with staff of all nationalities, including British, American, German, Russian, Danish, Italian, Portuguese, Swedish, Austrian, Spanish, and Dutch nationals. This internationality made Shanghai one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the world during this time.

Figure 1. The Flag of the International Settlement of Shanghai, pre-WWI

Shanghai was the centre of a new wave of rapid industrialization in China beginning in the early twentieth century and continuing until the early part of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) (Bergère 2008, 147–48). By the 1920s, the city’s landscape swelled with multi-story department stores, dance halls, coffeehouses, cinemas, and publishing houses, especially in the Concessions where foreigners exercised political and economic power. Until Japan’s occupation of Shanghai following the Pacific War in 1941, no one nation could claim Shanghai as its own, and it remained a contested site. In order to share the city, different powers established their own Concessions or occupied parts of the International Settlement composed mainly of nationals belonging to their own country, dividing Shanghai’s landscape in a puzzle of segregated spaces.

At the same time, Shanghai in the early twentieth century was also a place where national identities were perpetually challenged and dissolved, as it was the only metropolitan city in the

7 ‘Open Source’ by Wikibooks, licensed under CC BY-SA 2.5.
world where foreigners could land without a passport. The segregated urban structure also made it a perfect asylum for exiles and fugitives. Precarious and unstable domestic and international political situations beginning in the 1910s led many to take up temporary residence in Shanghai, such as pro-imperial Russians fleeing the October Revolution, or Jews fleeing Nazi persecution. Shanghai was a haven for everyone “from multimillionaires who came to pursue an extravagant yet secluded lifestyle [. . .] to the absolutely destitute who roamed the city’s streets in search of bare survival; from political dissidents who fled to the ‘safety zone’ of the foreign concession to criminals who came to join the nation’s largest underground” (Lu 1999, 43). The complex demographic composition of Shanghai thus led to heterogeneous spatial relations within the city, where any assumption of stable identities or constructions could become fluid and dissolve.

1.2.3 The Multilayered Urban Texture of Shanghai and Tokyo

In the early twentieth century, representations of Tokyo and Shanghai depicted the cities as hybrid spaces rather than homogeneously westernized landscapes. Tanizaki’s essay “Tōkyō wo omou” (My Thoughts on Tokyo,” 1934) describes the disorderly state of the city in the late 1910s and 1920s:

だが、いかに東京聴衆の人でも、あの時分、世界大戦当時から直後に及ぶ好景気時代の帝都を、立派な「大都会」だと思った者はいないであろう。その頃の新聞紙は筆を揺れて「我が東京市」の帝都の乱脈と道路の不完全とを攻撃したものであった。(中略)「東京は都会ではない、大きな村だ、或いは村の集合だ」と云ふ悪罵は、日本人も外人も口にした。

However, no matter how big a fan of Tokyo a person was, at that time, during and right after the World War and even in the booming era, probably few would have thought this imperial capital was a splendid “metropolis.” Newspapers at that time often attacked “our city Tokyo” for the imperial capital’s disorder and the city roads’ incompleteness. [. . .]
Both Japanese and foreigners disparaged Tokyo for being “not a city, but a big village, or a group of villages.” (Tanizaki 1983, 6)

From this passage, we can see that even during the economic boom of the Taishō period when Tokyo often flaunted its cosmopolitanism, it was not a rationally-designed, geometric city like its Western model, post-Haussmann Paris. Tanizaki’s depiction of Tokyo as “village[s]” rather than a “metropolis” reproduced the urban/rural dichotomy that gave rise to Tokyo’s modern status (I will discuss this dichotomy further in Chapter 2). However, his characterization of Tokyo also challenged this binary structure by pointing out modern Tokyo’s hybridity. Tokyo was divided into two areas: Shitamachi 下町 (downtown) and Yamanote 山手 (uptown). This distinction was a result of Edo’s demographic divisions during the Tokugawa period: the samurai class usually resided in Yamanote, while the majority of common citizens took Shitamachi as their home (Jones and Inouye 2017, 11). Entering the Meiji period, Shitamachi, which had once been the cultural centre of the city, still “retained many of its basic urban features of Edo” and was often labeled Tokyo’s dark side, while Yamanote, though it “lay nearer to farmlands,” was “accumulating the money, the power, and the imagination” to become a modern space (Seidensticker 1983, 126, 193, 283). Furthermore, Tokyo, at first glance, appeared to have changed radically as it entered the twentieth century, yet rather than radiating out from a centre point like many Western metropolises, it preserved the basic structure of old Edo in a way that led Naito Akira to characterize it as the “Edo Spiral,” circling outward in a clockwise direction from the shogun castle along the moat system (Naito 1987, 33–35). The co-existence of a westernized global metropolis and surviving traces of a castle town is precisely what formed

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8 All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
9 For an in-depth examination of the area, see the special issue “Thinking from the Yamanote” in Japan Forum, guest edited by Mark Pendleton and Jamie Coates (Japan Forum 30, no. 2, April 2018).
modern Tokyo’s cityscape. This intermixing of new and old embodied the very multiplicity of the city, and gave Tokyo much of its distinctive personality or, as Cybriwsky phrases it, its “essence” (Cybriwsky 1998, 1).

Like Tokyo, Shanghai in the early twentieth century was a complex space that did not conform to a simple binary structure of ‘East versus West’ or ‘modern versus traditional.’ Its multilayered cityscape was fragmented, yet intricately interconnected and hierarchical. Between the segregation of the spaces mentioned earlier—typically represented by the labyrinthine Walled Chinese City (Chengnei 城內) and the French Concession with its straight boulevards and multistoried European-style buildings—existed another relatively fluid space that accommodated westernized Chinese intellectuals, immigrants from India and Russia, as well as Shanghai’s ‘belated’ colonizers, the Japanese. This demographic did not have a fixed part of the city to identify with, although most of them lodged in the International Settlement. They moved around the city, interacted with individuals of all different classes, races, and nationalities, and were constantly challenging and being challenged by the equally unstable construction of segregated spaces in Shanghai.

Among this wandering tribe, Japanese Shanghailanders occupied a unique position. Japan had a long premodern history of ties to Shanghai, with things such as rice production technologies, language, and Buddhism being imported from the area to Japan in ancient times (Nishibe 2006, 2–3). In 1862, nineteen years after the port of Shanghai had officially opened, the first Japanese vessel of the modern era docked to find most of the Western powers were already well established in the city. The Treaty of Shimonoseki (“Shimonoseki jōyaku” 下関条約, 1895), which ended the First Sino-Japanese War, stipulated that Japan could build factories on Chinese soil. Benefiting from this treaty, Japan’s economic presence in Shanghai increased
steadily after that point. Although it was well within their power, Japan never sought to establish a concession area in Shanghai as they did in other Chinese cities such as Tianjin and Hankou, and according to Joshua Fogel, “possible fears of alienating the large foreign presence in the city with this newly emergent (and non-European) group may have militated against such a move” (Fogel 2000, 928–29). At the beginning of the twentieth century, only around 1000 Japanese civilians lived in Shanghai, but this number rose to 11,761 by 1915, overtaking Britain as the country with the largest number of foreign residents (Nishibe 2006, 12). The great majority of Japanese settled in the Hongkou quarter of the International Settlement, which by 1910 came to be known informally as Japan Town.

1.3 Literature About Tokyo and Shanghai

1.3.1 Writings on Tokyo

Tokyo, as the capital city and the centre of Japan, was a major focus of modern Japanese literature. Most canonical Japanese literary figures have written about the city: Natsume Sōseki, Tayama Katai, Higuchi Ichiyō 櫻庭一葉 (1872–96), Nagai Kafū, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke all have seminal works concerning Tokyo. These texts offer readers a fascinating portrait of different parts of the city and its residents, from Shitamachi to Yamanote. Nagai Kafū’s Bokudō kidan 濟東綺譚 (A Strange Tale from East of the River, 1937) provides poetic evocations of his favourite Shitamachi haunts, Tamanoi and Asakusa, and presents his observations on “the Japanese experience of the modern, the complex negotiation of and painful coming to terms with the various challenges printed by the projects of defining a nation-state and both national and personal selves” (Snyder 2000, 2). Sōseki’s description of the complex mosaic of Yamanote is revealed through the eyes of the titular protagonist of Sanshiro, who is inducted
into a circle of Yamanote intellectuals whose dwellings are “perfect examples of late Meiji Yamanote domiciles” (Maeda 2004, 333). Tayama Katai’s short story “Shōjōbyō” 少女病 (“The Girl Fetish,” 1907) takes place on the inner-city railways that transport the rising bourgeois from their suburban residences to the city centre, a setting crucial to “the construction of modern subjectivity and experience” (Zanotti 2018, 86). Some of these works provide a panorama of a rapidly changing city of Western-style buildings and train tracks, while others lead us down the dark back alleys of Tokyo.

In a period when Tokyo’s cityscape was rapidly being westernized, many writings about the city centred on its new appearance, in keeping with the government’s use of the city as a showcase for its modernization/westernization project. At the same time, as the city’s new face was “overlaid upon an already well-developed Edo” (Jones and Inouye 2017, 58), there are many works that painted a more nostalgic picture of its older districts. Both of these approaches are important expressions of Tokyo’s layered temporalities. The physical boundaries of the city, as well as the cultural and social meanings associated with them, have been constantly redefined in these works, which enables us to understand how Tokyo was experienced and conceptualized spatially.

1.3.2 Writings on Shanghai

Unlike earlier generations who could only imagine China by reading texts, many Japanese people during the late Meiji and Taishō period were able to visit China in person. Two of the most popular overseas destinations for Japanese travelers were Manchuria and Shanghai. The enthusiasm towards Shanghai rose as Japan’s control of the semi-colonial city increased. The presence of a highly developed and convenient sea route between Shanghai and the Japanese homeland also heightened its appeal as a travel destination. The NYK (Nippon Yūsen Kabushiki-
Lines linking Japan and Shanghai developed out of two existing Meiji Period sea routes—the Yokohama-Shanghai and Kōbe-Shanghai connections—and a third route created in 1923 that linked Nagasaki to Shanghai. With the development of high-speed passenger liners that could travel at a top speed of twenty-one knots, the travel time between Nagasaki and Shanghai was shortened from around two days to twenty-six hours (Liu 2009, 189–90).

Most Taishō intellectuals, unlike their Meiji predecessors, lacked opportunities to visit Western countries. For them, Shanghai was the next best place to experience an ‘authentic’ Western atmosphere. Many Japanese poets and writers traveled to Shanghai, and produced various writings about the city. One of the most famous works is Yokomitsu Riichi’s novel _Shanghai_ (Shanghai, 1928), which follows a group of Japanese expatriates living in the International Settlement during the May Thirtieth Incident (_Wusa yundong_ 五卅運動) of 1925, and deals with colonialist ambitions and racial politics in the city. Yokomitsu was urged to visit Shanghai by Akutagawa, who had visited the city in 1921, but did not make the trip until 1928, the year after Akutagawa’s suicide (Lippit 1999, 47). In _Shanghai_, Yokomitsu develops a vision of modernity in which the city’s ambiguous modern identity, caught between discourses of indigeneity and Western colonialism, is positioned as one of “the most significant problems of

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10 Nagai Kafū’s father Nagai Kyūichirō 永井久一郎 (1852–1913) was invited to become Shanghai branch manager of NYK Lines in 1897 (Liu 2009, 185).


12 May Thirtieth Incident was a nationwide anti-imperialist movement precipitated by the killing of thirteen labour demonstrators by British police in Shanghai.
modern culture,” which also lies “at the heart of Japanese modernity” (Lippit 2002, 87).

Yokomitsu’s viewpoint concerning modernity was shared by many of his contemporaries including, I would argue, Akutagawa, even though unlike Shanghai, the city Akutagawa depicts in his travelogue lacks the atmosphere of ‘light, heat, and power’ that characterized 1920s Shanghai. Though it might appear that Akutagawa did not wholeheartedly embrace the material development of Shanghai, I would posit that his restrained depiction of modern urban landscapes is due instead to his ambivalence towards the contradictions in the modern city. Akutagawa’s negative portrayal of the city stirred the interest of Muramatsu Shōfū 村松梢風 (1889–1961), who then traveled to Shanghai in 1923 to observe the city that Akutagawa seemed to disdain (Liu 2009, 199). Muramatsu’s Mato 魔都 (The Magic City, lit. Demon City, 1924) recounts his experiences in Shanghai, depicting the decadent and dark side of the city. It eventually became his most famous work, and the basis for the city’s nickname of Mato (Ch. Modu).

2. Tanizaki Jun’ichirō and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke

Tanizaki Jun’ichirō and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke both experienced the chaotic transitional period of Japan’s modernization. Many of their writings express confusion towards a historical moment when older layers of urban topography were being drastically changed by rapid modernization, a period in which new modern forms “[stood] out in all their astonishing and

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13 Ziye 子夜 (Midnight, 1933), a novel by Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896–1981) depicting life in cosmopolitan Shanghai, opens with the image of a gigantic neon sign on a roof that flashes out in flaming red and phosphorescent green the words (written in English in capitals) “LIGHT, HEAT, POWER!” (Mao 2016, 1).
disturbing strangeness” (Pincus 1996, 295). As Tokyo-born writers, the capital’s topography features prominently in each of their works and descriptions of modern transformation.

Both writers also traveled to China roughly around the same period: Tanizaki traveled through China twice, in 1918 and 1926, and Akutagawa in 1921. Tanizaki’s first trip yielded several China-themed works, such as “Shinwai no yoru” 秦淮の夜 (“A Night in Qinhui,” 1919), “Seiko no tsuki” 西湖の月 (“The Moon of the West Lake,” originally published in 1917 as “Seiji iro onna” 青磁色の女 or “A Woman in Celadon Blue”) and “Bishoku kurabu” 美食倶楽部 (“The Gourmet Club,” 1919), most of which contributed to the popular trend of *Shina shumi*. Although Akutagawa’s travels to China were likely inspired in part by Tanizaki, he took a different approach when writing about his journey. Rather than creating a *Shina shumi* fantasy to amuse his readership, Akutagawa’s work instead seems to be intent on undermining the depiction of China created by *Shina shumi*. In his travelogue, he directly criticizes the trend:

> If one can still love China, after witnessing its national corruption, one is either an extremely degenerate sensualist, or a shallow person crazy about *Shina shumi*. (Akutagawa 1935b, 167)

Akutagawa refuses to position modern China in relation to a timeless, literary past, and his criticism of the *Shina shumi* trend gestures towards his awareness of the difference between China in the Orientalist imagination versus China as a material place subject to historical change. This differentiates his work from popular representations of China in the *Shina shumi* trend, which were in some senses very similar to European orientalism. In this way, Akutagawa’s harsh diatribe against China is more ambiguous than simply being the colonizer’s condescending viewpoint. Tanizaki’s writing after his second trip to China also deviates from his previous *Shina*
*shumi* style, and to some extent echoes Akutagawa’s approach. Thus, studying Akutagawa in conjunction with Tanizaki’s writings about Shanghai and Tokyo can generate new insights into the hybridity and conflict within the urban space of these two cities.

2.1 Early Life and Shitamachi

Akutagawa and Tanizaki shared a very similar early life. Both were born and raised in Shitamachi at a time when the district was gradually losing its Edo period status as the cultural centre of the city. Both of them received a childhood education in Chinese classics at a time when Chinese language was becoming more and more foreignized and was no longer standard education for a boy in order to become an elite. Both also studied English—Akutagawa at Tokyo Imperial University, and Tanizaki at private school—and thus were fully aware that the old dynamics of Japan and China were being challenged by a new dynamic between Japan and the West. Living in an era when Sino-Japanese power relations were being destabilized by Western colonial pressures, it is not hard to imagine the anxiety they would have experienced trying to locate the Japanese Self within the vacillating imagined geography of China and the West, modern and non-modern.

As proud *edokko*, Akutagawa and Tanizaki had deep nostalgic feelings towards Shitamachi, a place “where the merchants and artisans of Edo [. . .] had produced an urban culture of vigor and imagination” (Ito 1991, 9). However, the Edo spirit of Shitamachi gradually declined during the late Meiji period, due to both natural disasters such as earthquakes and the westernizing pressure of the central government. As Yoshi Seiichi states, by the time Akutagawa was born, the section of the city in which his family lived had “become a foreign nationals’ residential area [. . .] and there were only three homes of Japanese in the area, including the Akutagawas” (Yoshida 1979, 7). Facing such dramatic changes, Akutagawa’s and
Tanizaki’s portrayals of Shitamachi, such as Akutagawa’s debut work “Ōkawa no mizu” 大川の水 (“The Water of the Sumida River,” 1914) and Tanizaki’s Yōshō jidai 幼少時代 (trans. *Childhood Years: A Memoir*, 1955), incorporate a clear understanding of these cultural dynamics.

In “Ōkawa no mizu,” Akutagawa gives a nostalgic description of the Sumida River, a locus of Edo urban culture that had been gradually encroached upon by endless industrialization (Seidensticker 1983, 214). By presenting this natural, idyllic scene, Akutagawa provides an allegorical rejection to the industrialized urban landscape of early twentieth-century Tokyo. In his later works, threatening images of modern machines provide even clearer evidence of his fear of the darker aspects of modernization (Lippit 2002, 60). In 1927, months before Akutagawa’s suicide, he was commissioned by *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun* 東京日日新聞 (*Tokyo Daily News*) to write about the current state of a particular area of Tokyo four years after the Great Kanto Earthquake. In his essay “Honjo Ryōgoku” 本所両国 (“Honjo Ryogoku”), which appeared as the first chapter in the compilation *Dai Tōkyō hanjōki* 大東京繁昌記 (*Report on the Prosperity of Greater Tokyo*, 1928), he laments the drastic industrialization of Shitamachi since his childhood in a way that very much echoes the depiction of the Sumida River in his debut work. Similarly, Tanizaki, famous for his ambivalence towards the West and modernization, projects a nostalgic picture of Shitamachi and a way of life that was lost forever in his *Yōshō jidai*, which was written in the 1950s, after the author had twice witnessed the destruction of Tokyo, once by

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14 The works by the seventeen writers commissioned by *Tokyo nichinichi shinbun* were published twice. First they were serialized in the newspaper from March 15 through October 30, 1927. In the following year the texts were collected to make two volumes. The first contains seven essays on Shitamachi, and the second eleven essays on Yamanote. Together, these volumes were given the title *Dai Tōkyō hanjōki* (Schulz 2003, 143).
the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923, and again by the bombings of 1945. In short, both these writers express their ambivalence towards Tokyo’s modernization by offering a nostalgic view of the changing Shitamachi area. Like the metaphorical Shitamachi in their writings, Shanghai provided a setting both real and fictional for them to negotiate their ambivalence towards ‘modernity.’

2.2 Akutagawa in China

2.2.1 Pre-Travel Days: The Rokumeikan

The year before Akutagawa’s trip to China, he wrote a short story entitled “The Ball.” The story is set in the Rokumeikan 鹿鳴館, a Western-style building completed in 1883. This two-story building in Tokyo was commissioned to house foreign guests by Japan’s first foreign minister Inoue Kaoru 井上馨 (1836–1915). Inoue hoped to use the Rokumeikan to convince Western visitors that Japan was an equal in terms of ‘civilization,’ thus facilitating renegotiations of the unequal treaties signed by the Tokugawa government (Nagai 1994, 21–23). However, the Rokumeikan did not have the desired effect, as it was considered to be a tasteless imitation by many Westerners.

The Rokumeikan recalls the practice of colonial mimicry that Homi Bhabha argues is a constituent part of colonialism, whereby the colonizer requires the colonized to imitate them, but at the same time rejects such imitation (Bhabha 1984, 132). Pierre Loti, a French naval officer most famous for semi-autobiographical works about his life in Japan such as Madame Chrysanthème (1887), wrote a classic Orientalist story entitled “Un Bal à Yeddo” (“A Ball in Edo,” 1889). Set in the Rokumeikan, Loti’s narrative compares the building to a “casino” in a French “second-rate resort town,” and dismisses the European-style ball held within as “strange”
A rewriting of Loti’s story, “The Ball” was composed two decades after the failure of ‘Rokumeikan diplomacy’ (Rokumeikan gaikō 鹿鳴館外交) in its political objective of renegotiating unequal treaties in Japan’s favor. The story is presented as the reminiscence of an old woman named Akiko who, as a civilized young girl, danced with an exotic French naval officer at a ball in the Rokumeikan. In contrast to Loti’s contempt for the Rokumeikan, Akutagawa added a few twists to reverse the narrative, as seen in the following conversation between Akiko and the officer:

“I should like to go to a Parisian ball and see what they’re like.”

“No, a Parisian ball is exactly the same as this.”

As he said this, the naval officer looked round at the sea of people and the chrysanthemums surrounding the table where they stood; then suddenly, as a cynical smile seemed to move like a little wave in the depths of his eyes, he put down his ice-cream spoon and added as if half to himself,

“Not only Paris. Balls are just the same everywhere.” (Akutagawa 1938, 105)

In response to Akiko’s yearning to experience a Parisian ball, the French officer, who is later revealed to be none other than Loti, claims that a ball in Paris is no different than in Tokyo. Thus, by virtue of the fictional Loti’s words, Akutagawa’s story overturns Pierre Loti’s criticism of the Rokumeikan Ball. The fact that the French officer claims that balls are all the same everywhere in the world challenges the positioning of Japan’s modern apparatus as a poor imitation of the West.

To further symbolize Japanese modernity, Akutagawa’s story replaces westernized architecture, which was associated with the failure of Rokumeikan diplomacy, with the figure of

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a beautiful young Japanese woman who is well versed in French and ballroom dancing. In doing so, Akutagawa reassesses the process of Japan’s modernization and reflects on the gradual change of power relations between Japan and the West since the late Meiji period. Another noteworthy detail contributing to this reassessment is the portrayal of Chinese bureaucrats. The author’s strategy is made obvious when Akutagawa’s text is compared to Loti’s original:

At ten o’clock, the party of the Chinese Ambassador arrived. From among the swarms of dwarfish Japanese, the heads of this haughty band of a dozen protruded with disdainful looks on their faces; these Chinese, men from a superior race of the north, possessed, in the way they walked, and in their fine silks, a noble grace. They displayed as well a splendid dignity and taste, by adhering strictly to their traditional robes, their finely embroidered jackets, their coarse, pendulous beards and their queues. With reserved smiles, all the while playing with their fans, they made their tour of the rooms and of this masquerade; then they went, disdainfully, by themselves out in the fresh air, to sit on a terrace overlooking the illuminated garden and the Venetian fete. (Loti 2001)

When half way up the stairs, she and her father overtook some Chinese officials ascending just ahead of them. And as the officials separated in their fatness to let them go ahead, they cast surprised glances at Akiko. In good truth, with her simple rose-colored ball gown, a light blue ribbon around her well-formed neck and a single rose exhaling perfume from her dark hair, Akiko that night was fully possessed of the beauty of the girls of enlightened Japan, a beauty that might well startle the eyes of these Chinese officials with their long pigtails hanging down their backs. (Akutagawa 1938, 100)

As we can see, both texts introduce China as a way to mediate power relations between Japan and the West. In Loti’s original text, Chinese bureaucrats are depicted as elegant and cultivated, “a superior race of the north” in contrast to the “dwarfish Japanese,” and through the author’s Orientalist lens they are praised for “adhering strictly to their traditional robes.” Akutagawa’s counter-narrative, however, depicts Chinese pig-tailed officials as obese, unrefined, and shocked by the beauty of the civilized, modern Japanese girl. In doing so, the superiority of a modern civilized Japan that is on par with the West is made obvious in contrast to the appearance and

manners of East Asia’s former great power. The counter-narrative of Loti’s Orientalist story offered in Akutagawa’s text makes clear the author’s sensitivity to the political implications of the original and his resistance to the hierarchy between Japan and the West, as well as a newly found confidence against the changing historical backdrop as Japan was recognized as a significant international power of the post-World War I period. As David Rosenfeld points out, Akutagawa’s story adopts an Orientalist attitude to position China as inferior to Japan, which was a conscious strategy employed in order to position Japan as an equal to the West, during a time when Japan’s self-identification as an imperial power was still unstable (Rosenfeld 2000, 53–55).

2.2.2 Travels in China

In 1921, Akutagawa conducted a four-month journey through eastern, central, and northern China as a special journalist for Ōsaka mainichi shinbun大阪每日新聞 (Osaka Daily). This was Akutagawa’s first and only time traveling overseas, and the newspaper widely publicized the trip. The Osaka Daily, whose readership exceeded one million by 1924 (Gorden 2007, 4), was interested in where and how China’s ancient culture confronted the new sociopolitical environment, especially after the May Fourth Movement (Wusi yundong五四運動). Akutagawa, many of whose writings show the confusion during this transitional moment in history, was thought to be a good choice to find answers to these questions. His trip began in late March and came to an end in early July. Besides the short story “Konan no ōgi” 湘南の扇

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17 The May Fourth Movement was an anti-imperialist, intellectual, and political movement initiated mainly by university students in Beijing on May 4, 1919, demonstrating against the Chinese government’s perceived capitulation to Western powers at the Treaty of Versailles, which allowed Japan to receive territories in Shandong that had been surrendered by Germany.
(“Fan of Hunan,” 1926), the major works yielded from the trip are travelogues. Upon returning to Japan, Akutagawa serialized “Shanghai yūki” 上海游記 (“Travels in Shanghai”) in the Osaka Daily from August to September in 1921, and then “Kōnan yūki” 江南遊記 (“Travels in Jiangnan”) from January to February in 1922. Three years later, they were published by Kaizō Press as a book titled Shina yūki (Travels in China), along with two other travelogues produced during the trip, “Chōkō yūki” 長江遊記 (“Travels along the Yangtze River”) and “Pekin nikkishō” 北京日記抄 (“Beijing Journal Abridged”). Because of Akutagawa’s reputation as a renowned writer and the travelogue’s vantage point on a transitional period in Japan’s imperial expansion, Travels in China has traditionally enjoyed a prominent place in the canon of twentieth-century Japanese travel writing (Hedberg 2016, 236). Among all the areas where he traveled, Shanghai is written most detailedly in the book. Although the author shows a preference for places like Beijing, there is no doubt that it was the semi-colonial city of Shanghai where Japan was increasing its control that attracted Akutagawa’s attention the most.

Akutagawa’s description of the city in “Travels in Shanghai” presents the reader with several different images of Shanghai: the foreign settlements as either an orderly and bustling modern town or a strictly-classified hierarchical space; a crowded, chaotic Walled Chinese City surrounded by foreign concessions; and a utopian Japanese national space which is born out of the author’s nostalgia. By portraying the difference, hybridity, and conflict within the urban spaces of Shanghai, Akutagawa sketches a fragmented and yet intricately interconnected hierarchical city.

18 “Travels along the Yangtze River,” originally named “Yangtze River,” was firstly published in the magazine Josei 女性 (Women) on September 1, 1924. “Beijing Journal Abridged” was first published in the magazine Kaizō 改造 on June 1, 1925.
2.3 Tanizaki in China

2.3.1 Pre-Travel Days

The year before Tanizaki made his first trip to Shanghai, he published a famous short story titled “The Magician,” which begins with the narrator expressing his confusion over the location where he met the titular magician. He describes it as a place that can be identified as either Tokyo, or “a colonial land in South Asia or South America,” or even “a port in China or India,” but that it was for certain “in a country far removed from Europe—the centre of civilization—at a remote corner of the globe” (Tanizaki 2016b, 109). This confusion not only gives the story a mysterious background, but also highlights a perceived similarity that allows each of those places to be mistaken for another. The juxtaposition of the imperial capital with those colonial lands, excluding them from “the centre of civilization,” also reveals the colonial hybridity hidden within the urban space of Tokyo. Leaving the confusion unresolved, the narrator then emphasizes that the place looks especially like Asakusa, the centre of the old Shitamachi, a place where Tokyo’s ‘modernity’ and its Edo past most obviously clashed:

To help you form a more focused idea of the nature, spectacle, and atmosphere of the place, I will just say that it was a public area resembling the Sixth District in Asakusa but even more mysterious, chaotic, and turbulent.

[...]

I speak of the magnificent, oceanic spectacle of that gigantic park which fuses all things together—good and evil, beauty and ugliness, laughter and tears; emits an ever more dazzling light; and brims with brilliant patterns of color. And I recall that the park of which I will speak now, off in a certain land, was, in its grandeur and turbidity, a strange, brutal place, even more in the style of the Sixth District than the Sixth District itself. (Tanizaki 2016b, 109–10)

He sketches out a mixed and complicated urban scene in the fictional city, where seemingly incompatible characteristics coexist peacefully: it is a rationally-designed geometric city space
featuring an amphitheatre-like plaza with radially extending streets with a boulevard in the middle, and “burning millions of lights” (Tanizaki 2016b, 115), like post-Haussmann Paris; while at the same time it is also said to be disorderly, filthy, and even barbaric with dim, gloomy spaces, resembling many typical descriptions of colonial places. In these descriptions, the boundary between the European centre and the colonial periphery that the narrator intentionally establishes at the outset of the narrative becomes blurred.

Later in the story, when the protagonist arrives at a packed theatre to see the famous magician perform, he notices that “the audience included every costume and every race—Chinese, Indian, European—but for some reason I saw no one except the two of us wearing Japanese clothes” (Tanizaki 2016b, 123). Though the author does not state that the fictional “park” where the theatre is located is Asakusa per se, he does suggest the association by repeatedly emphasizing the resemblance between the two. His description of the theatre as including “Chinese, Indian, European,” but no one wearing Japanese clothes except him and his lover highlights the international atmosphere, which according to the narrator’s emphasis is very similar to Asakusa: multivalent spaces constituted the very essence of the place, not a homogenous Japanese one, but a heterogeneous cosmopolitan one.

Right after his observation of the racial and cultural dynamics in the space, he again describes a mix of social classes: “[i]n special boxes, a resplendent group of gentlemen and ladies from the city’s high society—people who would not be expected to set foot casually in the park—sat in rows” (Tanizaki 2016b, 123). High society people, who normally occupy the centre of power, become a part of the regular scene on this “eerie” (Tanizaki 2016b, 119) edge of the city. This disrupts the division between uptown and downtown, and makes fluid the boundary
between centre and periphery, the disparity of which was often stressed to construct the narrative of ‘modernity.’

Finally, the great magician himself is portrayed as someone whose race, country of origin, and even gender are mysterious. The fluid gender and racial identity of the magician probably best embodies the heterogeneous space of the “park.” Because of the similarity between the “park” and Asakusa emphasized in the story, the complicated and multilayered urban scene described in “The Magician” can be seen as embodying the equally heterogeneous modern urban space in Tokyo. This complex and multivalent quality was also applicable to Chinese modernity epitomized by the hybrid urban space of the treaty port Shanghai, which may be the place referred to in the story as “a port in China.”

2.3.2 China Travels, 1918 and 1926

In the fall of 1918, Tanizaki traveled for the first time to the Chinese mainland and the Korean peninsula. After this first trip, which lasted one month, Tanizaki wrote fourteen pieces related to China (five of which drew directly from his experiences), which contributed to the Shina shumi trend. In 1926, eight years after his first trip, Tanizaki traveled to China for the second time. Instead of exoticizing narratives, this time he produced two travel accounts, entitled “Shanghai kenbunroku” 上海見聞録 (“Observations in Shanghai,” 1926) and “Shanghai kōyūki” 上海交遊記 (“Shanghai Friends,” 1926). This shift from earlier Shina shumi writings that positioned China as an imagined space to travelogues concerned with cultural and social conditions in contemporary China suggests a significant change in Tanizaki’s position towards representations of China. This change may have been influenced by the writing of his peers, such as Akutagawa, who, as mentioned earlier, openly criticized the Shina shumi trend in his
travelogue. Meanwhile, it is worth noting that prior to Tanizaki’s second trip to China he migrated from Tokyo to the Kansai district after the Great Kanto Earthquake, and was devoted to depicting a more ‘authentic’ Japan in his works. In this sense, his exotic dream which was once realized in *Shina shumi* writings found an indigenous carrier. To cope with Japan’s westernization, he put more effort into inventing Japanese traditions rather than presenting China as Japan’s past. In the same vein, Tanizaki’s distance from the West after his move to Kansai should not be understood as distancing from “the West per se” (Ito 1991, 273), but rather as a new search for the exotic ‘non-West’ in another geographic location. In short, Kansai became the new ‘China,’ a non-Western inspiration for Tanizaki’s creative output.

3. (Un)Defining the Japanese Self: Akutagawa Ryūnoske’s *Travels in China*

In *Postcolonial*, Komori Yōichi argues that Japan responded to the West’s new hegemonic discursive order through a process of self-colonization. On the one hand, Japan largely ignored external colonial pressures and pursued rapid modernization/westernization, a state Komori characterizes as its “colonial unconscious”; on the other hand, Japan pursued colonization on the basis of what he terms “colonial consciousness.” Komori argues that Japan’s “colonial consciousness” was displaced by its “colonial unconscious,” which, by focusing on the discourse of Japan as a modern nation, suppressed the sense of crisis associated with the threat of colonization by Western powers, and legitimized Japan’s colonization of other ‘uncivilized’ Asian countries (Komori 2001, 12–15). In this sense, the coloniality hidden in the urban space of Tokyo constituted a large part of the city’s modernity. Meanwhile, Japan’s Asian colonies were a fundamental and constitutive part of Japanese modernity as well, and the tension between Japan’s colonization and self-colonization was reflected more clearly in such (semi-)colonial
spaces as Shanghai. This colonial space provided a perfect site for the imagination of Japan’s modern status. Nevertheless, the relationship between Japan, a former member of the Sinosphere, and semi-colonial China is more complex. In particular, exploring the relationship between Tokyo and Shanghai, two cities whose processes of modernization were interlinked, works to challenge the tired, diffusionist understanding of modernity as proceeding unilaterally from a colonial centre (Japan) to colonized peripheries (China).

3.1 In Need of National Identity in Shanghai

As mentioned earlier, the great majority of Japanese Shanghailanders settled in Japan Town in the International Settlement. This area was located in a newly urbanized area on the north side of the Suzhou River, which was far less developed than the south side. Before the Japanese occupation of Shanghai in 1941, Japanese Shanghailanders had a relatively inferior position among the foreigners residing in the International Settlement. Most of them were living in tenements on the backstreets of the International Settlement, the slums of the area, while the Westerners were usually living in large detached houses (Golley 1997, 244).

This hierarchical difference is clearly expressed in Akutagawa’s travelogue: immediately after praising the metropolitan and well-ordered urban scene in the International Settlement, he begins satirizing a famous hotel located in Japan Town called the Toayoko Hotel (Tōayōkō 東亜洋行), “where Kim Ok-kyun was assassinated a few years before” (Akutagawa 1997, 12). The hotel is recommended to the author, but he immediately decides to move to another one nearby after observing that it is “dark” and “covered with soot” (Akutagawa 1997, 12–13).
assassination of Kim Ok-kyun (김옥균, 金玉均, 1851–94) is important to the story’s context. Japan had accused the Qing government of plotting the assassination and used it as a pretext to launch the First Sino-Japanese War. This war marked the loss of China’s prestige within Japanese society. Akutagawa’s mention of Kim is thus charged with sociopolitical meaning, and cannot be read simply as an anecdote adding colour to his travelogue. The reversal of power relations it implies undergirds Akutagawa’s repeated identification as a Japanese against a colonial Chinese Other.

The inequality and conflict among different colonizers became one of the most important factors contributing to Akutagawa’s sense of inferiority as an Asian in Shanghai. After World War I, Japan had made significant economic expansions in Shanghai. Japanese companies multiplied their direct industrial investments (Bergère 2009, 86, 152) and, in the year of Akutagawa’s trip, Japan’s share in Shanghai’s external trade rose to 23 percent, equaling Britain’s (Furuta 2000, 126). For this reason, Japanese citizens in Shanghai were more conscious of possessing an elevated socioeconomic status. However, their cultural and political status vis-à-vis the West remained relatively low. This ambivalent sense of status helped develop the Japanese Shanghailanders’ sense of identity, yet it also posed many challenges for Akutagawa while traveling in Shanghai, contributing to his awareness of the performativity inherent to Japanese modernity, wherein the Chinese colonial Other was desperately needed to confirm Japan’s superiority in the complex urban spaces in Shanghai.

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19 A famous Korean activist who had actively participated in the advancement of Western ideas and science in Korea by using Japanese resources. He was assassinated in 1894 at the Toayoko hotel by anti-Japanese Korean reformer Hong Jong-u (홍종우, 洪鍾宇, 1850?–1913).
Furthermore, Akutagawa visited Shanghai in 1921, two years after the May Fourth Movement. As it was an anti-Japanese movement that targeted its colonial project in China, it resulted in the vilification of Japan in the press and on the streets. In *Travels in China*, Akugatawa also reveals his concerns about anti-Japanese sentiment on several occasions. It is not difficult to imagine that such kind of tensions would lead to a more intense awareness of Akutagawa’s position in Shanghai as a Japanese national.

### 3.2 The Construction of National Identity in Shanghai

The representation of China and the Chinese as the inferior Other was frequently evoked in Meiji and Taishō intellectuals’ writings. Characteristics like “bickering and selfishness” were often used to differentiate Chinese from Japanese (Tanaka 1995, 20). At the same time, those who were trained in Chinese classics formed a romantic idea of China through their reading of Chinese literature. As mentioned earlier, this imaginary romanticized construction of China was an important part of the Taishō *Shina shumi* trend, in which China was positioned as temporally backwards yet also served as a model for traditional culture and identity that Japan could use to resist westernization.

In “Travels in Shanghai,” for example, Akutagawa mentions his experience of watching the Chinese opera, which he describes as hardly using any major stage props, instead requiring the audience to use their imaginations. This was an obvious contrast to the Western trend of Naturalism in theatre that became dominant in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which utilized extremely detailed sets and props in order to provide “photographic authenticity” (Styan 1983, 121). The author states that “Japanese observing such a performance [in Chinese theatre] will find it easy to appreciate, because they are used to Nō drama” (Akutagawa 1997, 22). In this case, the representation of China through theatrical performance is paralleled with
Japanese theatre and identity. Considering that new experiences of Western-style theatre meant that Chinese and Japanese traditional theatre were judged by modern, Western criteria, Akutagawa’s impression of the Chinese opera in Shanghai probably reminded him of the process of modernization of Japanese-style theatre ten years ago.

Nevertheless, China also served as an Other upon which Akutagawa could project Japan’s internalized sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the West. In the same section in which Akutagawa describes his experience at the theatre, he comments that the famous Chinese theatre Tianchan Stage (Tensen butai 天蟾舞台) is a cheap mimicry of the West in terms of its design, and emphasizes how dirty and foul its backstage is compared to the beautiful dressing rooms of the Imperial Theatre (Teikoku gekijō 帝国劇場), which was the first Western-style theatre in Japan to stage Western musicals and operas. This kind of condescending attitude is more obvious at the beginning of his travelogue, where Akutagawa describes his first impression of China by focusing on a group of “sleazy” rickshaw pullers:

As soon as we got out of the wharf area we were immediately surrounded by dozens of rickshaw pullers. [. . .] The image that the term rickshaw puller originally had for Japanese is not at all something dirty or slothful. Rather, their energies were reminiscent of the vigorous Edo spirit. On the contrary, though, it would be no exaggeration to say that Chinese rickshaw pullers were filth incarnate. Furthermore, if you look at them as a whole, they all look sleazy. They stand all around you and scream something at you with their necks craning in your direction, so that Japanese women who have just disembarked will surely feel frightened at this uncanny sight. In fact, when one of them pulled at my coat sleeves, I pulled back behind Jones who is a tall man, and I almost ran away. (Akutagawa 1997, 11–12)

Akutagawa’s first impression of China is thus one of filth and sleaze, which he contrasts with Japanese ‘Edo vigor.’ This estrangement of Japan from China is accentuated by suggesting that Japanese women would consider the rickshaw pullers to be “uncanny” (bukimi 不気味). Akutagawa’s portrayal of Chinese rickshaw pullers echoes Loti’s depiction of Japanese rickshaw
pullers in “A Ball in Edo,” where Loti pictures them as “a flight of crows” who wear “shoes made of cloth with the separated big toe sticking out like that of a monkey” (Loti 2001).20 Just as Loti confirms his western superiority by despising Japanese rickshaw pullers, Akutagawa evaluates this group of Chinese through the lens of Western-mediated superiority, defining them as “dirty” and “slothful” in contrast to their clean and energetic Japanese counterparts. This kind of comparison between the Shanghai native landscape and Japan through the respective appearances of their rickshaw drivers works to stimulate the Japanese reader’s imagination of selfhood.

Moreover, positioning China as the ‘primitive’ colonial Other allowed Akutagawa to rehabilitate Japanese Edo traditions, which were becoming increasingly marginalized in modern society. Akutagawa associates the modern Japanese landscape with Edo and rejects Shanghai in the present, saying Japanese rickshaw drivers are strong and hard-working labourers whose “energies were reminiscent of the vigorous Edo spirit” (Akutagawa 1997, 12). In other words, the Japanese ‘past’ (Edo), a formerly temporal Other, is reevaluated as a reservoir of Japanese essence by means of making the spatial Other of Shanghai’s ‘present’ inferior.

Additionally, it is believed that the rickshaw (jinrikisha 人力車) was invented in Japan in 1869 (Waley 1991, 167–68). Its appeal was primarily its flexibility and low maintenance. The human-powered rickshaw could easily gain access to all of Tokyo’s narrow streets21 and did not

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21 According to Andre Sorensen, the street plans of the Tokogawa era castle towns had been “designed exclusively for pedestrian traffic,” and had been “dictated by strategic concerns,” and thus streets in the town areas especially around the castle were “deliberately kept narrow” (Sorensen 2002, 42).
need the costly infrastructure required by horse-drawn carriages or motor vehicles, and thus was better suited to the city. The rickshaw business began to prosper in late nineteenth-century Japan. By 1872, some 40,000 rickshaws were operating in Tokyo, and they soon became the chief form of public transportation in Japan. It was not until 1903, when Tokyo began to build electric streetcars capable of carrying more passengers and at a lower fare, that the rickshaw was reduced to the role of a taxi for the suburbs (Seidensticker 1983, 44).

If we take into consideration the different class and regional constitutions of Japanese and Chinese rickshaw pullers, there seems to be slippage from the contrast between regions or classes to that between nations in Akutagawa’s narrative. Many of the rickshaw pullers in Tokyo were former samurai: entering the Meiji period, as the samurai class came to an end after hundreds of years of privileged status and power, many of the lower-class samurai became rickshaw pullers, especially in the Tokyo area (Takechi 1984, 241–44). By contrast, the overwhelming majority of Shanghai’s rickshaw pullers were peasants who had come directly from poverty-ridden villages to the city seeking opportunity (Lu 1999, 6). However, in Akutagawa’s writing, these class discrepancies—samurai versus peasant—and regional difference—urban (specifically Tokyoite) versus rural—are displaced by a national contrast between Japan and China. By erasing their class and regional differences of Chinese and

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22 Motor vehicles require even and hard road surface such as concrete, while horse-drawn carriages require road surface soft enough not to harm horseshoes such as asphalt. That is why in Shanghai besides concrete roads for motor vehicles, there were special lanes built for horse-drawn carriages, as noted in Tanizaki’s “My Thoughts on Tokyo.” Asphalt roads designed for horse-drawn carriages, though good for reducing the noise and vibrations caused by horses, were more expensive to build and of high maintenance especially during winter times, as Mori Ōgai noticed in Berlin and later wrote about it in his Eisei shinpen 衛生新編 (A New Compilation on Hygiene) (Birumachi 2010, 27). Both kinds of roads are often mentioned in Meiji and Taishō writers’ works as symbols of modernity.

23 Also see Saito 1979.
Japanese rickshaw pullers, Akutagawa was able to make a direct national contrast that provided a clear image of Japanese national identity for his readers. In this regard, Shanghai, as a colonial Other, kept stimulating Akutagawa’s imagination of being Japanese, and ‘being a Japanese’ in turn helped him differentiate himself from the colonized.

Akutagawa devoted an entire chapter of “Travels in Shanghai” to better delineate the boundary separating Japan from China. Entitled “Japanese” (“Nihonjin” 日本人), this chapter defines the concept of ‘Japanese’ through the author’s observation of Japanese Shanghailanders. For example, he mentions a Japanese man named X who loves Shanghai more than any city in Japan, yet desires to be buried back in his homeland when he dies; or another man Mr. Yosoki who claims that the Japanese are creatures that “immediately turn joyous” if they “see a cherry blossom” (Akutagawa 1997, 36). More importantly, in Shanghai the identification of ‘Japanese’ is often intertwined with symbols of colonization:

When I went to the East Asian Common Culture Academy, walking on the second floor of the dormitory, we saw a sea of blue young barley through a window at the end of the hallway. [. . .] Far beyond them we saw a huge carp streamer over a number of connected roofs. The [cloth] carp was blowing in the wind and animatedly fluttering up into the sky. This one carp streamer changed the whole scenery for me. I wasn’t in China. I felt as though I was in Japan. But when I approached the window, I saw Chinese farmers working in the barley field before my eyes. I felt angered as though they weren’t supposed to be there. Coming all this way to see a Japanese carp streamer in the Shanghai sky gave me a bit of joy. I’m probably in no position to laugh about the cherry blossoms. (Akutagawa 1997, 37)

In the above passage, the narrator expresses a strong self-identification with the Japanese nation by saying that he felt as though he were in Japan when he sees the cloth carp blowing in the wind. In this way, the narrator rediscovers cultural signs such as cherry blossoms and cloth carp as the totem for a unified national identity. He expresses his displeasure when he sees Chinese farmers appearing in the same scene, as if the Chinese nationals have disrupted his perfect imagination of Japanese identity and ruined the purity of ‘Japaneseness’ he had constructed.
Nevertheless, I would argue that it is through the presence of these Chinese Others, who he feels should be cleansed from a pure Japanese self, that Akutagawa is able to grasp the essence of ‘Japaneseness.’ In other words, it is colonial discourse that helped form a modern Japanese national identity by demarcating it from its colonial Other.

3.3 China and the West as Japan’s Self and Other

In Akutagawa’s travelogue, the boundary created between the Japanese Self and the Chinese Other is often challenged by the added presence of the West. As William Hedberg argues, although Akutagawa often identified with the West via “Orientalized descriptions of contemporary China,” sometimes his accounts undercut the neat binary of ‘new’ and ‘old,’ and thus become “an ambiguous interrogation of the project of modernity as a universalized realm of discourse” (Hedberg 2017, 239). As mentioned earlier, the hierarchical comparison Akutagawa made between Japan and China was made possible through an unproblematic identification with the West, and Western images were often mobilized to construct an advanced Japan and a backwards China. For example, at the beginning of the text, the author writes that when one of the Chinese rickshaw pullers tugged at his coat sleeves, he got scared and “pulled back behind Mr. Jones who is a tall man” (Akutagawa 1997, 12). Here, the Westerner Mr. Jones becomes part of the civilized Japanese ‘Self,’ acting as a barrier between Japan and the filthy Chinese ‘Other.’ Nevertheless, the inclusion of the West as a part of Japanese Self is unstable. Akutagawa writes that on the ship to Shanghai all the passengers were Japanese except for one American, who was also the only one not to become seasick during the voyage. In this way, Akutagawa gestures towards a physical difference between American and Japanese people, and separates the ‘monstrous’ Western body from the normal Japanese one.
Akutagawa’s ambivalence towards the West became more pronounced in the Western-dominated colonial space of Shanghai. In the travelogue, whenever consciousness of the threat of colonial pressure from the West manifests, the Japanese self is (un)consciously projected onto the Chinese, Japan’s counterparts in colonial oppression. This can be understood in the context of Japan’s situation during the time when Akutagawa was traveling in China. After Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905 and subsequent colonial expansion in Asia, Japan was gradually recognized as a new international power, and was increasingly involved in competition with the West for colonial interests. However, Japan’s confidence in being an equal to the West was often jeopardized by Japanese intellectuals who questioned whether the process of modernization/westernization would lead to the loss of Japanese tradition. This fear of (self-)colonization can explain Akutagawa’s alienation from Western colonizers in China. This is in particular demonstrated in a scene where Akutagawa sees a drunk American urinating in public beside the West Lake and expresses his desire to “expel the barbarians ten times more than those Samurai of Mito” (Akutagawa 1935e, 84). As Hutchinson and Williams point out, the malleability of the Other suggests that one can be both Self and Other at the same time (Hutchinson and Williams 2006, 13–14). The Chinese Other that was expelled in order to construct the modern Japanese Self is reincorporated to expel the Western “barbarians.” In this way, China and the West each vacillated between Japan’s Self and Other.

Akutagawa’s perspective of China was not only mediated through the lens of the West but also through his training in the Chinese classics. Given Akutagawa’s familiarity with the Chinese literary tradition, it is not surprising that he expresses admiration for a “kind of China you find in poetry and essays” (Akutagawa 1997, 19), an imagined literary China of the past that was ‘uncontaminated’ by westernization. For instance, in “Travels in Shanghai,” the author writes that he feels close to a middle-aged female entertainer who sings accompanied by the
Chinese violin and flute, and is named Lin Daiyu 林黛玉 after the character in the classical novel Hongloumeng 紅樓夢 (A Dream of Red Mansions, 1791?), embodying in this way a kind of repository of the Chinese literary past. Furthermore, in the section “Zasshin issoku” 雑信一束 (“A Bunch of Letters”) that appears in the book format of Travels in China, Akutagawa expresses a sense of “homesickness” (kyōshū 鄉愁) for Beijing while “walking in a Western style district” in Tianjin (Akutagawa 1935l, 200), clearly illustrating his preference for what he perceives to be a more ‘authentic’ Chinese landscape.

This search for an ‘authentic’ China resonates with Akutagawa’s desire to recuperate Japanese identity by mediating it through the Chinese past. In this sense, Akutagawa’s longing for an idealized past is different from European orientalism. Whereas European orientalism imagines the Orient as stagnant and opposed to European progress, Akutagawa’s idealization of a lost ‘authentic’ China derives not from contrast but rather from a sense of affinity between China’s loss and Japan’s, both of which were products of the same colonial process. China, previously pictured as an inferior Other against the superior Japanese Self, was now imagined as part of the Self in opposition to Western colonial powers. In this sense, China was praised as an ‘insular place’ where contemporary Japan could resist Western hegemony by recuperating its ‘lost Eastern traditions.’ Meanwhile, projecting past traditions onto a Chinese Other also enabled Japan to distance itself from those very traditions and position itself as the modern, civilized counterpart to the West, legitimizing its role as colonizer and ‘protector’ of Asia.

To complicate matters further, in the cosmopolitan space of semi-colonial Shanghai, Akutagawa inevitably noticed that there were closer affinities between China and the West than between Japan and the West. Throughout Akutagawa’s travelogue, Shanghai is portrayed as an amalgamation of Chinese and Western culture. Immediately after the passage concerning the
“filthy” Chinese rickshaw pullers on the wharf, for example, he comments on an orderly scene witnessed in the concession on the way to his hotel, and concedes that “traffic control in big cities in Japan, such as Tokyo or Osaka, wouldn’t even come close to the good job done here” (Akutagawa 1997, 12). The author’s quick mood change from being “intimidated by the ferocity of the rickshaw pullers” to feeling “cheered up” (Akutagawa 1997, 12) reveals that his position is constantly in flux in Shanghai’s heterogeneous urban space. Later, he goes as far as to say that “Shanghai is the West in one sense” (Akutagawa 1997, 27). In this regard, Shanghai does not seem to the narrator to be a mimicry, but the original. The two are similar enough to be mistaken for each other, dissolving the boundary between the colonizer and the colonized. The idea that Japan has an affinity with China through their mutual loss of tradition, or that Japan has an affinity with the West in contrast to a colonized Chinese Other, are both put into question by his sense of even closer ties between Shanghai and the West.

In the ambiguous and complicated space of Shanghai, the hierarchical relations among Japan, China, and the West are intricate and ever-shifting, a dynamic that is demonstrated again when Akutagawa visits the old Walled Chinese City, an area mainly inhabited by Chinese natives. Witnessing a Chinese urinating in public, he says:

There he was leisurely pissing into the lake. Nothing seemed to faze him in the least—Chen Shufan could raise his rebellious banner in the wind, the popularity of vernacular poetry could die down, or the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance could come up again—nothing. [. . .] [T]his is more than a scene of melancholia. At the same time, it was a bitter symbol of this grand old country. (Akutagawa 1997, 17)

While criticizing the backwards hygienic standards of the Chinese, the narrator lists several events that the indifferent Chinese man should have paid attention to, such as the Chen Shufan Rebellion, the Vernacular Culture Movement (or New Culture Movement, Xinwenhua yundong
new cultural movement), and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which deeply influenced Chinese sociopolitical environment. At first glance, it would appear that the possible renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance is somewhat irrelevant to the Chinese man and not really comparable to the other two events, which are immediately applicable to the Chinese context. However, I would argue that its inclusion demonstrates Akutagawa’s sensitivity to the sociopolitical circumstances of China’s semi-colonial condition, wherein the Anglo-Japanese Alliance played a significant role in Sino-Japanese relations.

To some extent, the complex power relations between Japan and China beginning with the First Sino-Japanese War were directly facilitated by the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation (“Nichi-Ei tsūshō kōkai jōyaku”, which was signed on July 16, 1894. Through the Iwakura Mission, the Meiji government learned that according to the Westphalian system only sovereign states had the right to wage a “just war” (Lai 2005, 23–25). The Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, which paved the way for the Anglo-Japanese alliance and heralded the end of the unequal treaties in Japan, suggested the international recognition of Japan as a modern nation-state. This was used to legitimize Japan’s initiation of the First Sino-Japanese War on July 25, 1894, merely nine days after the

24 The Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902–23) “bound Britain and Japan to assist one another in safeguarding their respective interests in China and Korea. Directed against Russian expansionism in East Asia [...] the alliance served Japan in the Russo-Japanese War by discouraging France, Russia’s European ally, from entering the war on the Russian side. [...] After the war the British no longer feared Russian encroachment in China and wished to maintain close ties with the United States, which tended to view Japan as its rival in the Pacific. Following an unsuccessful attempt to bring the U.S. into the alliance at the Washington Conference of 1921–22, Britain allowed [its alliance with Japan] to lapse” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed June 20, 2018, http://www.britannica.com/topic/Anglo-Japanese-Alliance).

25 The origins of Westphalian sovereignty have been traced to The Peace of Westphalia (1648) which underlay a new political system of sovereign states in Europe created as a means of resolving conflicts among European powers (Anghie 2005, 310).
signing of The Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Commerce and Navigation. In this regard, mentioning the possible renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance demonstrates Akutagawa’s awareness of the current sociopolitical environement, and also reveals certain sympathies towards the colonial situation China was facing under the threat of a Western-Japanese alliance.

The author’s complex attitude towards Japanese identity thus became more obvious in Shanghai’s heterogeneous space. Enmeshed in the complicated power relations in Shanghai, the identification of the Japanese Self against its multiple Others is constantly challenged and reconfigured. The fluid boundaries of the Japanese Self are highlighted in the colonial space of Shanghai, as showcased in Akutagawa’s writing. In Akutagawa’s Shanghai, the definition of ‘Japanese’ is not only emphasized through the dichotomy of ‘Japanese’ versus ‘Chinese,’ or ‘Japanese’ versus ‘Westerners,’ but also questioned by the inherent instability of these dichotomies, which reveals new possibilities to rethink the purposely-induced hierarchy between the Self and the Other.

4. The Heterogeneity of Segregated Space

Tracing Akutagawa’s steps during his stay in Shanghai, it seems that he mainly stayed in the concessions, with most of the nighttime spent in the well-known area of Foochow Road (Shimaro 四馬路). This area is not only the administrative centre of the International Settlement, but also the cultural centre of modern Shanghai, housing the headquarters of more than 300 publishing houses, newspapers, and bookstores (Xue 2012).26 The area was also famous for its

bustling nightlife, gaining Shanghai the nickname of ‘a city without night.’ We know from the place-names given in ‘Travels in Shanghai’ that the author visited quite a few famous restaurants, coffeehouses, and dance halls there. One passage from the text describes the district as follows:

After we finished dinner, we took a stroll along [the busy Foochow Road]. Then we went to catch a glimpse of the dancing at the Café Parisien. The dance hall was rather large, but the way that the lights were flickering blue and red together with the music of the orchestra was so reminiscent of Asakusa in Tokyo. Yet the performance of the orchestra was far superior to that in Asakusa. Even though it was in Shanghai, the dance hall was very Western. (Akutagawa 1997, 13)

The Café Parisien mentioned in this passage was one of the most famous coffeehouses in Shanghai, and it is frequently featured in historical or literary works. For Akutagawa, it feels “reminiscent of Asakusa in Tokyo.” Indeed, as he travels around Shanghai, he constantly has Tokyo in mind and frequently makes comparisons to the city. The narrator’s admission that the orchestra is superior to that in Asakusa reminds us of the dissolution of a Japanese modern identity he experienced in confrontation with Shanghai’s cosmopolitanism, which was discussed in the previous section.

Similar to Akutagawa, Tanizaki makes comparisons between the two cities when writing about Tokyo. In his aforementioned essay “My Thoughts on Tokyo,” he compares 1920s Shanghai to Tokyo as follows:
Looking at the well-organized districts, clean pavement, and beautiful Western-style houses of Tianjin and Shanghai, I felt happiness as if I had stepped onto the streets of Europe. Especially in Shanghai there were many facilities far more advanced than those in Tokyo and Osaka at that time. For instance, there were traffic patrols at intersections, and trolley buses that had just appeared in Kyoto recently. In the suburbs, which were newly being expanded, there were even wagon roads with soft soil constructed along concrete roads for automobiles, so as not to damage horseshoes. After coming back from the trip, I felt Japan was distasteful, and became enthusiastic about China, and even more about the West. (Tanizaki 1983, 10)

In the passage above, Tanizaki compares Shanghai to Japan’s major cities like Tokyo and Osaka and lauds Shanghai’s developed system of transportation and infrastructure. (I have noted the maintenance costs of roads required by horse-drawn carriages and motor vehicles in the previous section.) This not only demonstrates the technological and financial advantage Shanghai had over Japanese metropolitan cities like Tokyo and Osaka, but also suggests that, to the author, Shanghai was comparable to European cities. Though neither Tanizaki nor Akutagawa had ever been to a Western country, Shanghai was apparently in line with the image of the West (or more precisely, of Western modernity) they had formed through texts and visuals. Tanizaki’s expression of preference for the West does not necessarily mean he was enthusiastic about total westernization but rather that he appreciated various kinds of modernity, as shown in his embrace of Shanghai’s modernity. Moreover, despite Tanizaki’s preference of Shanghai over Japan, he does not necessarily establish a hierarchy between the two. As he notes in his travel account “Shanghai Friends,” in which he describes his friendship with Chinese intellectuals living in Shanghai, many Chinese elites studied in Japan before, and people with this kind of experience were most valued in Chinese society.27

27 “At least in the world of literature, people who studied in Japan are well known and successful. Therefore, the situation in the world of Japanese literature is well known to the Chinese literary world. This is really beyond our imagination” (Tanizaki 1997, 73).
In semi-colonial Shanghai, with its mixture of races, classes, and cultures, hierarchies of power between Japan and China were constantly shifting. This volatility made writers like Akutagawa tend to prefer Shanghai’s well-administered and controlled area where he felt less threatened by the city’s hybridity. Indeed, it is notable that in Akutagawa’s “Travels in Shanghai,” a sense of distance always remains between the observer and the city as an object of observation. On the one hand, the scenery of the well-administered space of the concessions is described in simple terms with little detail, which is very much at odds with new sensationalists’ enchantment with those areas. On the other hand, the chaotic space in the old Walled Chinese City is depicted in much greater detail, though it was clearly despised as an uncanny Other. This not only created for the author a sense of distance from Shanghai, but also provided, through the constant references to distant Tokyo, a penetrating gaze at the capital of Japan that could not have been obtained if Shanghai was not in the frame. The heterogeneous spaces of Shanghai provided another perspective on Tokyo’s landscape and its modernity, and filtering Tokyo through the lens of Shanghai’s colonial space brought to the surface overlapping colonial logics operating in Shanghai and the metropole.

4.1 A Homogeneous West?

Since the American navy began putting military pressure on Japan in the 1850s, ‘the West’ had been perceived as a homogeneous entity opposed to Japan or the East. The term ‘West’ thus gradually lost its geographical meaning and became loaded with connotations of authority and superiority that only intensified as its imperial network expanded. It is this conceptualization of ‘the West’ that makes possible the popular equation of ‘the West’ with ‘the modern.’ It is not surprising that Akutagawa, like many of his contemporaries, struggled against this perception of ‘the West.’ The multilayered and hybridized spaces in Shanghai provided him
with an opportunity to escape from the tired equivalency of ‘the West’ and ‘the modern,’ and see ‘the West’ not as homogeneous but sundered by deep national, cultural, and religious rifts (Bergère 2009, 85).

In one scene on a busy street in the International Settlement, for example, Akutagawa points out that “an Indian policeman with a red turban” signaled an international mass of “Westerners and Chinese busily walking on a large asphalt street” (Akutagawa 1997, 12). Here the author does not merely gesture towards the international atmosphere of the city, but is specific about the nationality of the Indian policeman. Indeed, as colonial subjects of the British Empire, many Indians were employed in the police service in Shanghai’s International Settlement, and “their presence in the streets became a feature of the city” (Lu 1999, 39). In this way, Akutagawa’s description of the Indian policeman gestures indirectly towards power imbalances in Shanghai between Western colonial powers in a way that draws into question the homogenization of ‘the West’ as a universal category.

For one, as mentioned earlier, Britain was the first to open its settlement in Shanghai. Since then, more foreign powers entered into treaty relations with China and poured into Shanghai, and different powers competed to take part in the administration or even to head municipal departments, especially following the establishment of the International Settlement. However, the British overpowered the other forces and remained predominant in the administration of the International Settlement. Although the relative importance of the British declined gradually, in the early twentieth century they still represented the largest and also most

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28 In 1885 fifty-eight Indians had been employed in the police service in Shanghai, and by 1930 this number increased to 691 (Thampi 2016, 426–27).
dominant group in Shanghai, until Japanese Shanghailanders overtook the British as the largest group in 1915.

Moreover, as the paramount political and military power in India at the time, the British also possessed a significant portion of India both in area and population. By 1910, the British Empire covered approximately 54 percent of the area and included over 77 percent of the population (Hunter 1908, 59–61). Britain thus transported Indians into Shanghai in order to maintain its advantage over other Western powers. Following this, a community of Indians formed around the British establishment, and most of the community members were employed as policemen by the municipality of the International Settlement (Bergère 2009, 85–86). In this sense, what Akutagawa observes in the scene with the Indian policeman is the power of the British Empire over other Western colonizers—an unbalanced relation of power between Western colonial powers, calling into question a homogenous West. In addition, the presence of colonial British Indian subjects in Shanghai, as a part of the administration system, also raises questions concerning the hierarchical relations brought forward by the problematic term of ‘the West.’

4.2 Colonial Relations

4.2.1 The Hierarchical Space of Shanghai

In Shanghai’s settlements, the citizens of each foreign power were given the right to freely inhabit, trade, and travel between concessions. They developed their own cultures in respective concessions to make them more like home. In contrast, Chinese locals were originally forbidden to live inside most of these places. To improve commercial activity and services, by the 1860s most concessions were eventually open to Chinese, yet the Chinese were still treated
as second-class citizens, despite the fact that they contributed 55 percent of all taxes in the
International Settlement. Chinese were barred from using the best equipped hospitals and were
given very little voice in governance. Within concessions, as Shu-mei Shih has noted, Chinese
were not allowed to use the same elevator in foreign commercial buildings, enter foreign clubs
except as guests of foreigners, or ride in the first-class compartment on French-controlled trams
(Shih 2001, 284). It is safe to say that during the first several decades of the twentieth century,
the barriers of race and class in semi-colonial Shanghai were encoded into the very division of its
space.

During Akutagawa’s short trip to Shanghai—he stayed for one month, but spent the first
three weeks in the hospital due to pleurisy—he formed a picture of the city wherein underlying
power politics gave form and meaning to its urban spaces. These power politics, common to
colonial places, are depicted throughout “Travels in Shanghai.” Akutagawa frequently describes
Chinese natives in Shanghai as objects of colonial oppression. At moments, especially when
witnessing the treatment of Chinese residents as second-class citizens, he internalizes the
Chinese colonial experience, which echoes Japan’s own continued vulnerability to cultural
colonization by Western powers.

For instance, when Akutagawa is dining with his friend Jones at the Shepherd Restaurant
in the International Settlement, he immediately notices that although “the waiters were all
Chinese,” there was not even one “yellow face” among the customers around them (Akutagawa
1997, 13). By using the word “yellow face” (kiiroikao) to highlight the difference in
skin colours, Akutagawa draws attention to the unequal relationship not only between Chinese
and the colonizers, but between Asian and Western powers in general. Akutagawa does not
acknowledge his own conspicuous racial difference from the all-white dining crowd, despite
drawing attention to the racial hierarchy in the restaurant. It is possible that as an affluent, well-established writer on a newspaper-funded trip, his social status allows him to distance himself from the Chinese waiters. Moreover, Akutagawa is accompanied by his friend Jones, a white man, which as mentioned earlier was one of the conditions by which Asians could enter many foreign-run places in Shanghai. Furthermore, at the time of Akutagawa’s trip in 1921, imperial Japan’s power in Shanghai would colour his identity, even as a civilian who did not directly participate in the colonial project. Akutagawa may be subconsciously appropriating the colonizer’s voice in positioning himself as an equal to the West and different from the “yellow faces” of the Chinese waiters. Yet, the very fact that he was fully aware of the racial hierarchy suggests that the author does not fully identify with the privileged group either. The coloniality Akutagawa experiences in Shanghai once again reminds him of the presence of Western powers as an irreconcilable Other whose threat, as Komori argues, had been suppressed by Japan’s self-colonization and imperial expansion.

Through observing Chinese experiences of discrimination in Shanghai, Akutagawa develops an acute consciousness towards the colonial fabric of the city’s space, and expresses an intention to destabilize the racial justification for colonialism. Akutagawa’s awareness of metaphorical segregation is emphasized in the chapter “The West” (“Seiyō” 西洋) where the Western presence in Shanghai is described in detail. At the beginning of the chapter, Akutagawa draws attention to the notorious sign of “Chinese and Dogs Not Admitted” that was placed at the entrance of the Public Garden (Gonggong gongyuan 公共公園). Drawing attention to the irony of the park’s name, he comments that calling it “Public Garden” is rather strange as the word “public” applies only to Westerners, and “not even one Chinese is allowed inside” (Akutagawa 1997, 26). With a sarcastic tone, the author directly satirizes the hierarchically constituted racial
structure of the city. Akutagawa’s satirical comment about the segregated space of the Public Garden is probably in part out of empathy for the colonized Chinese locals, as even in the early 1920s when Japan already possessed status as an important colonial power, the Western powers’ superiority over Japan was still troubling to Taishō intellectuals.

The park in question was opened in 1868 and lies at the northern tip of Shanghai’s Bund in the International Settlement. Initially known as the Public Garden, it changed its name to the Bund Park (Waitan gongyuan 外灘公園) in 1936. As Bickers and Wasserstrom have noted, the location of the Public Garden on the waterfront near Nanjing Road is significant, “since this part of the Bund soon acquired icon status, thanks in part to its impressive skyline but also to the modernity it came to symbolize,” boosting the symbolic importance of the Public Garden in both Chinese and Western minds (Bickers and Wasserstrom 1995, 445). With the geographical and symbolic significance of the Public Garden, it was thus important for Western powers to isolate it from the rest of the Chinese native land and consolidate a totemic space of Western presence in Shanghai. This became especially necessary when the boundaries along segregated spaces were being challenged, compromised, and blurred as bodies traversed them. As mentioned earlier, the concessions that had been reserved exclusively for foreigners eventually allowed Chinese natives to reside in them. Therefore, the exclusion of Chinese residents in the Public Garden not only added another layer of hierarchy to the social construction of space, but also in a sense expressed a colonial resistance to the heterogeneity of Shanghai’s urban space and its characteristically fluid boundaries.

4.2.2 Challenging Western Superiority

Akutagawa’s quasi-colonial experience as part of the non-white population in Shanghai prompted him to further look for an apparatus to disrupt the ideology of Western superiority,
which likely influenced his reading of Tokyo’s urban space. In this sense, Shanghai served as the staging ground for a conflict that he believed was also present in Tokyo. Questioning Western hegemony in Shanghai helped provide a model through which to differentiate ‘the modern’ from ‘the West.’ Rather than representing ‘the West’ as synonymous with ‘the modern,’ he increasingly saw Western counterparts as also participating in a process of modernization, alongside and within cities like Shanghai and Tokyo. In this way, Akutagawa questioned the self-evident interchangeability of the modernization process and westernization.

As a renowned Japanese writer on a journalistic mission for a major newspaper, Akutagawa’s social status ensured his mobility across segregated parts of Shanghai. His mobility navigated him through the city’s complicated space and helped him gain a comprehensive picture of the colonial relationships represented by Shanghai’s hierarchical spaces. Based on his very own observations in Shanghai, Akutagawa developed a complex perspective towards the West. This is most clearly demonstrated in the aforementioned chapter, “The West.” Therein, Akutagawa describes an exchange of questions and answers between two interlocutors, each of which argues a different stance regarding the hierarchy of Japan and the West. The speakers are not named, and perhaps constitute two sides of an internal monologue, suggesting that Akutagawa is torn between these two distinct positions. At the opening, one speaker comments that the French park in Shanghai is “far more advanced” than those in Japan, to which the other speaker replies, “Just because it’s Western doesn’t mean that it’s advanced” (Akutagawa 1997, 27). To many Japanese intellectuals at that time, the presence of ‘the West’ in Shanghai was largely positive, and it was embraced as a corrective to the supposed inadequacy of Chinese tradition in the modern world. However, in Akutagawa’s narrative, he pays more attention to the racial hierarchy constructed by the West, frequently depicting how Chinese residents are subject to colonial inequality. Moreover, by denying Japan’s inferiority vis-à-vis its Western
counterparts, he suggests different ways of configuring relationships between Japan, China, and the West. This is demonstrated in the seemingly contradictory positions the two speakers take in the exchange: celebrating the modernity of Shanghai’s settlement while at the same time harshly criticizing its “unrefined” westernization (Akutagawa 1997, 27).

Although Japan succeeded in gaining recognition as a power on par with the West, particularly after winning the Russo-Japanese War, the fact that it had recently been the object of Western imperialism necessarily resulted in an ambivalent relationship with the Western Other. As Taishō leaders believed that ‘the modern’ was equivalent to ‘the West’ and that it was necessary to emulate Western powers to become a modern nation, the persistence of a hierarchy between Japan and the West was still evident during the Taishō period, particularly in terms of culture. Many of Japan’s cultural customs and practices were considered ‘uncivilized’ or ‘non-modern’ and had to be replaced by Western ways. The belief that the West was more civilized penetrated into almost all aspects of people’s lives, such as the perception that Western-style clothing was more civilized than Japanese garb. This caused Taishō intellectuals to frequently express anxiety and ambivalence towards the West, an attitude that is clearly represented in Akutagawa’s treatment of Western colonialism in Shanghai. The anxiety Akutagawa experienced in his first direct encounter with the West in Shanghai can be interpreted as an experience analogous to the Japanese nation’s ambivalence towards the West.

Tanizaki also expressed skepticism towards the idea that Japan could become modern by emulating Western culture. After his second trip to China, he wrote a short travelogue, “Observations in Shanghai,” which was published in Bungei shunjū 文芸春秋 in May 1926. This travelogue criticized the superficial westernization of Shanghai, arguing that “Chinese customs
were excessively westernized” (Tanizaki 1982b, 559). With a slight twist, he directs a similar criticism towards Tokyo in his later work, “My Thoughts on Tokyo”:

大正七年に私が支那に遊んだのはこの満たされぬ異国趣味を繰り返し欲めるためであったが、旅行の結果は私を一層東京嫌ひにし、日本嫌ひにした。なぜなら、支那には前清時代の歴を伝へた、平和な、閑静な都会や田園と、映画で見る西洋のそれに劣らない上海や天津のやうな近代都市と、新旧両様の文明が肩を並べて存在していた。過渡期の日本はその一つを失って、他の一つを得ようとしてもがいている時代であったが、自分の国の中に租界地と云ぶ「外国」を有する支那に於いては、この二つが相犯すことなく両立していた。

I went to China in 1918 in order to fulfill my unsatisfied desires for exoticism a little. But the result of the trip made me dislike Tokyo and Japan even more. Because in China, the old and new civilizations existed side by side: it had both peaceful, quiet towns and rural areas conveying the ancient atmosphere of the pre-Qing era, and modern metropolises, such as Shanghai and Tianjin, that were just as good as those of the West seen in the movies. Japan of the transitional era had lost one of the two (its original civilization) and struggled to obtain the other (modern) one, while in China there were “foreign countries” in the form of settlements within its land, and the two civilizations coexisted without compromising each other. (Tanizaki 1983, 9)

From the above passage, it becomes obvious that for Tanizaki the modern should not be contrastive, contradictory, or mutually exclusive to either Chinese or Japanese civilization.

Rather, he indicates that native culture can contribute to forming the countries’ modernity.

Compared to the fictions with Shina shumi motifs that he wrote after his first trip to China, Tanizaki’s stance shifts here in a way that can be explained through historical context. As touched upon before, Akutagawa went to China after the influential May Fourth movement of 1919, whereas Tanizaki’s first trip took place one year prior. Though the physical construction of space may have not transformed much after the May Fourth movement, the social environment had changed greatly. In particular, the May Fourth movement directly responded to imperial Japan’s colonial project in China, and thus had a significant impact on Japanese intellectuals, who were well aware of Japan’s expansion into the continent. Moreover, during Tanizaki’s second trip to Shanghai, with the help of Uchiyama Kanzō 内山完造 (1885–1959), he became
friends with many established Chinese writers such as Tian Han 田漢 (1898–1968) and Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892–1978). In “Shanghai Friends,” Tanizaki devoted many pages to his communication with local young artists. These young artists complained to him about the loss of traditional Chinese culture, the imperialist invasion, and the miserable lives of commoners. This made Tanizaki realize that China’s “old customs [were] being destroyed by Western culture” (Tanizaki 1997, 80). These exchanges with Chinese intellectuals concerning the difficult situation contemporary China was facing certainly contributed to the changes of Tanizaki’s understanding of China, transporting it out of the timeless space that once inspired much of his Shina shumi writings. In other words, Tanizaki, was no longer free to imagine China as a blank canvas.  

4.3 Confronting Heterogeneity

4.3.1 Confronting Heterogeneity in Shanghai’s Urban Space

As the leading treaty port in China, Shanghai bore traces of Western influence virtually everywhere in the city, and one of the most important characteristics of modern Shanghai was the segregation of space that was imposed upon the city by Western colonial powers. However, the putative homogeneity of the West in Shanghai was repeatedly challenged in several ways, not only by the heterogeneity within Western powers, which had to represent and negotiate their identities vis-à-vis each other—a plurality of ‘the West’ that we find depicted in Yokomitsu’s Shanghai through its depiction of Russian exiles—but also by the West’s inability to contain and isolate itself against border-crossing Chinese locals. Even the settlement deliberately designated

29 Another influence on Tanizaki’s change in approach to China may have been the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, which I have discussed in a previous section.
for the colonizers “ended by being inhabited overwhelmingly by Chinese, who lived side by side with foreigners of all stripes” (Lu 1999, 25). In this section, I argue that this heterogeneity in Shanghai does not indicate an unfinished stage of modernity, based on the Western-derived model of modernization, but rather constituted Shanghai’s own form of hybrid modernity. By the same token, although the birth of modern Tokyo was inevitably influenced by ‘the West,’ the indigenous also constituted an important part of Tokyo’s modernity. I will emphasize here the active role heterogeneous spaces in these cities played in shaping the sociopolitical reality of their modernization, since the ways in which we “conceptualize and operationalize space” are not only personal experiences but also “products of political, economic, social and cultural processes” (Dennis 2008, 1).

The coexistence of ‘Tokyo’ and ‘Edo’ after the Meiji Restoration has always been a popular topic among Japanese intellectuals and urban studies scholars. Their research has demonstrated that it would be incorrect to simply relegate the indigenous part of Edo culture to ‘the past.’ Take the ukiyo-buro 浮世風呂 (lit. public bathhouse of the floating world) as an example. Public bathhouses or ukiyo-buro have always been an important part of the urban fabric of Edo’s cityscape and edokko identity. Entering the Meiji period, this Edo tradition favoured by so many of its inhabitants continued to thrive, and the number of public bathhouses in Tokyo increased rapidly, reaching three times as many as before the Restoration (Nagano 1971, 129, 146). Even today, as Theodore Bestor has pointed out, many who could bathe at home still “prefer the congenial atmosphere of public bathing” as bathhouses not only serve as a bathing place but also “as social centers for local residents” (Bestor 1989, 39–40). Just as the café served as a public space for the emerging bourgeois in Europe, the sentō 銭湯 (public bathhouse), with its own social dynamic, was also an important aspect of Tokyo’s modernity.
Similarly, in Shanghai places such as teahouses had long served as centers of social activity. One of the most famous teahouses in Shanghai, known among the Chinese as the Huxinting 湖心亭 (pavilion in the middle of a lake) and among Westerners as the “willow-pattern teahouse,” was located at the center of the old Walled Chinese City, whose edifice and zigzag bridge have together been a symbolic landmark in Shanghai since the late nineteenth century (Lu 1999, 111). In “Travels in Shanghai,” Akutagawa depicted this teahouse in his detailed description of the Walled Chinese City. Unlike many Japanese visitors to Shanghai, who walked right past this downtown section and rarely mentioned it in their accounts, turning instead to the stylish architecture on the famous Bund and Nanjing Road, which served as a proud symbol of the metropolis’ westernization, Akutagawa devotes significant space in his travelogue to the less noted aspects of urban growth in modern Shanghai, areas that reflect the heterogeneity of Shanghai’s modernity. To be sure, Western-style edifices made up some of Shanghai’s most eye-catching modern sights, with such landmarks as the Bund featuring a mile-long string of European-style buildings merely a decade after the city’s opening as a treaty port. At the same time, less than a mile south of the Bund was the Walled Chinese City where many Chinese institutions survived. The Walled Chinese City, although it formed only a small portion of modern Shanghai, played a unique role in complicating Shanghai’s modernity and transforming visitors’ perspectives.

In “Travels in Shanghai,” Akutagawa renders the old Walled Chinese City in such rich detail that it seems as if he considered this area of the city more fundamental to ‘modern Shanghai’ than the landmarks of the foreign concessions and the Western lifestyle of the international residents. Akutagawa’s preference, which arguably derives from a colonizer’s objectifying appreciation of ‘authentic’ Chinese culture, is clearly demonstrated by comparing
his description of the two spaces of the Walled Chinese City and the concessions. The last chapter of “Travels in Shanghai” recounts the moment he left Shanghai:

I walked on the quiet deck toward the stern. When I looked downstream, gaslights dotted the street along the bund. I wondered if I would see Garden Bridge, which spanned Suzhou Creek and was always full of carts and horses during the daytime. The group of trees I saw there must be those from the park at the foot of the bridge, though I couldn’t make out the color of their leaves. [...] If you continue through that park, you should be able to see the British Consulate with its spacious garden and the Specie Bank. If you walk straight along the river, you will come to an alley on the left where you will find the Lyceum Theater. [...] At the top of the stone stairs of the theater entrance, you will see a colored billboard for the Comic Opera, but you probably won’t see many people coming and going. Then an automobile will come driving along the riverbank. Roses, silk, and necklaces of amber—no sooner will you spot them than they disappear. These people must be on their way to the Carlton Café to go dancing. (Akutagawa 1997, 41)

In this passage describing his last glimpse of modern Shanghai, Akutagawa is on a ship that distances him from the material Shanghai itself. Unlike the position as flâneur that he occupies when discovering the Walled Chinese City on foot, this distanced position situates him at the centre of a panoramic space, far above the rest of city, and provides him with total control over the space from a position of putative omniscience. This panoramic way of observing things helps constitute the firm boundaries of the viewer himself as a modern knowing subject and reduces the space of modern Shanghai’s landscape to a mere surface, what Michel de Certeau would call a “concept city.” In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau distinguishes “the concept city,” which unfolds for the viewer as a panorama, from “the textured city,” which is experienced at street level (de Certeau 1988, 91–110). The panoramic view makes the city known and therefore governable, through a process that James Donald calls “benign surveillance and spatial penetration” (Donald 1999, 14). This kind of panoramic perspective, which is a cornerstone of Western modernity, is contested in Shanghai by the city’s hybrid spaces, which frequently frustrates attempts at “imaginary totalization” (de Certeau 1988, 93). For example, in the section
“The Walled Chinese City,” Akutagawa describes the space of the old Chinese City as a crowded space of narrow alleys and closed perspectives:

There was a store with entire birds roasted to a dark red hanging next to one another. There was another store with all sorts of hanging lamps, so many that it evoked a bizarre sensation. There was an opulent silverware shop with its skillfully crafted silverware shining brightly, and a shabby looking wine shop whose worn sign was written in the style of the poet Li Taibo. While I was observing these interesting store fronts, the carriage came to a wide avenue where suddenly it slowed down and went into an alley right around the corner. According to Mr. Yosoki, a city wall used to overlook this wide avenue.

We got out of the carriage and went right into another narrow alley, which was a bit larger than most alleys. On either side of the path there were stores selling mahjong sets and stores selling sandalwood goods, and these shops were lined up one after the next. Signs were carelessly hanging in the fronts of these numerous shops, so you couldn’t even see the sky. Many people came to this area. If you were casually looking in these stores for cheap materials to make seals, you would bump into people. The people who were busily passing by were all ordinary Chinese. I was intent on following Mr. Yosoki as he cautiously walked on the cobblestones of the pathway. (Akutagawa 1997, 16–17)

As we can see from the above description, the alley compounds of the Walled Chinese City constituted a completely different world from the avenues and monumental architecture of the foreign settlements. In a sense, this racially and socioeconomically segregated section of the Chinese area presented a challenge to the panoramic landscape of Western economic powers and to their vision of universal modernity.

Akutagawa’s description of the Walled Chinese City implicates the viewer corporeally in the experience of space. In Maeda Ai’s analysis of Mori Ōgai’s “Maihime” 舞姫 (“The Dancing Girl,” 1890) he points out the different perspectives the narrator adopts between the panoramic view of the new section of Berlin and the worm’s eye view of the old town (Maeda 2004, 295–328). In a very similar manner to Ōgai’s, when Akutagawa writes of the old Chinese City, instead of viewing it from a distant spot, he walks through dark, chaotic alleyways, crowded with Chinese natives. This characteristic gives the viewer-narrator an opportunity to observe the space
in a particular manner and incorporate extensive descriptions of its space, atmosphere, and inhabitants. The surging of native crowds produces a dynamic interaction between the seeing subject (the narrator) and his object of vision, and intensifies his feeling of corporeal presence as well. In this process, Akutagawa’s experience of space changes from de Certeau’s panoramic vision of the city to a physically embodied experience of city space that is defined by partial rather than totalizing vision. When Akutagawa opens himself up to this chaotic reality, his homogeneous self is simultaneously dissolved along with the surrounding space. In this way, the heterogeneity of Shanghai’s urban space disrupts a smooth reading of the cityscape by challenging the observer’s panoramic control over the space of the city.

The author’s bodily senses of smell and sound are also actively engaged in his exploration of the old Chinese City. At the end of this section, Akutagawa writes that he was shocked by the reek of urine in the streets. Having just been hospitalized for three weeks after a recent bout of pleurisy, for him the stench is shocking, and he becomes acutely aware of his own corporeality within the space he is observing. Akutagawa also describes attempting to escape from the cacophony of sounds “from the numerous bird cages hanging on either side of the narrow street” (Akutagawa 1997, 20). The corporeal experiences of sound and smell frustrate the indifferent objectivity of the aloof and distanced “voyeur-god” (de Certeau 1988, 93), in de Certeau’s words, replacing him instead with an insecure walker who is fully implicated in the texture of lived space.

As many scholars have pointed out, the paradigm of rationality is undergirded by a hegemonic privileging of vision, and the very distinction between “subject” and “object” is enabled by the externality of sight (Jonas 1954, 517). Vision as such occupies the very centre of a rationalist Western discourse of modernity. Additionally, vision is also complicit in the
apparatuses of surveillance and spectacle that constitute repressive power in the modern world, as is explored in Michel Foucault’s work (Foucault 1977). Thus, the decentring of vision through the other senses can be read as a form of resistance to Western ocularcentrism and its role in the formation of Western modernity. As David Michael Levin puts it, the “problematization of ocularcentrism is also the problematization of modernity” (Levin 1993, 192).

In Li Zhuowu and Zhu Yangshan’s *Shanghai shangfu jiaotong tu* 上海商埠交通圖 (*Shanghai Commercial Ports and Traffic Maps*, 1929), it shows a detailed map of the French Concession and the Walled Chinese City that helps illustrate why the narratives of describing these two spaces in Akutagawa’s travelogue are so different. From the map, it can be seen that the space of the French Concession was characterized by straight, broad roads, and clear, neat geometric blocks. This space, over which foreign powers had absolute control, was designed in a strictly rectilinear pattern of wards and avenues, in order to easily control the population. Consequently, this geometric space facilitates navigation. In the Walled Chinese City, however, the streets are labyrinthine and narrow, and the space is divided in terms of extension, not by lines, and thus is more complex and dynamic. This space enjoyed a far more open design where public and private space intermingled—sometimes people’s living rooms, rather than for housing, were often used as small stores (Lu 1995, 96). These active, narrow, and convoluted streets were not easy to navigate, and required more attention to the surrounding space. The inability to read this urban space from a continuous and homogenous perspective helps us realize that it is unfeasible to simply include everything into a singular Western discourse of modernity. In this regard, although Akutagawa’s perception of the Walled Chinese City is laden with associations of filth and chaos and may easily pass as the judgmental racism of the colonizer, his
evocation of a confused, multisensory experience of the flâneur tentatively navigating the Walled Chinese City challenges his own self-definition as a modern subject.

4.3.2 Confronting Heterogeneity in Tokyo’s urban space

Akutagawa’s description of Shanghai’s multilayered spaces returns in Tokyo, as in his autobiographical essay *Haguruma* (Cogwheels, 1927), originally titled *Tōkyō no yoru* 東京の夜 (Tokyo Nights). In *Cogwheels*, the narrator roams helplessly through modern Tokyo, in a way that is reminiscent of Akutagawa’s experience in the Walled Chinese City. It is worth noting that in this narrative the author repeatedly emphasizes his compromised vision. The “cogwheels” in the title directly refers to his viewing of “turning, semitransparent cogwheels” that increasingly block his vision. In the end, these cogwheels intertwine with objects in reality and make the narrator feel as if he is seeing things “through finely cut glass” (Akutagawa 2007, 193, 224). The narrator’s acute awareness of his compromised vision also extends to others whom he has encountered. He mentions an old friend he runs into on the street has “a bloodshot eye” because of conjunctivitis, which reminds him that he has developed the same sort of eye infection over the last fourteen or fifteen years (Akutagawa 2007, 210); and in another scene, a random foreigner approaches him who “[appears to be] myopic” (Akutagawa 2007, 220). His visual impairment, which is probably psychological in origin, makes the narrator more sensitive to sound. For example, in a bright room after “again seeing semitransparent cogwheels,” the narrator hears “the sound of wings and the squeaking of a rat” (Akutagawa 2007, 208); and in the last part of the story when the narrator, increasingly bothered by the “cogwheels,” sees several crows, he emphasizes that he is “certain” he hears the one in the middle cawing four times (Akutagawa 2007, 224).
The narrator also compensates for his compromised vision through the olfactory and tactile senses, describing how his nostrils are “assailed by the smell of the sulfur” when he receives a Sitzbad (Akutagawa 2007, 211), and how he shakes hands with someone whose hand has “a strangely reptilian dampness” (Akutagawa 2007, 207). In contrast to the omniscient perspective and detached style Akutagawa often exhibited in his earlier works, the narrative in writings like *Cogwheels* loses its totalizing vision. In the increasingly fragmented space of Tokyo, not only is the narrator’s vision compromised but also his linguistic ability, as he shows symptoms of, for instance, an inability to pronounce the last syllable of the Japanese word *fuminshō* (insomnia). As Baryon Posadas points out, such a breakdown of language overlaps with the collapse of his subject, since “the unification and consolidation of a specific schema of language played a central role in the constitution of modern subjectivity” within the context of Japanese modernity (Posadas 2010, 123).

The heterogeneity of Tokyo’s urban space is also recorded by Tanizaki in an earlier short story, “The Secret”, published in 1911, which, similar to Akutagawa’s *Cogwheels*, challenges the privileging of vision with a full spectrum of sensory stimuli. “The Secret” concerns a man who withdraws to a monastery in a labyrinthine neighbourhood of Tokyo. On one occasion, he meets a woman with whom he had had a shipboard affair some years earlier, and suggests a rendezvous. The woman agrees on condition that he will come blindfolded to a place of her choosing. When the protagonist finally discovers where the woman lives, he abandons her at once. At the beginning of the story, the author confesses that “dropping out of sight and willfully keeping [his] activities secret” was “from a desire to experience again the sensations [he’d] enjoyed as a child playing hide-and-seek,” prompting him to “hid[e] [himself] downtown in the [obscene], unnoticed spot” (Tanizaki 2017, 41–42). The narrator thus depicts urban space in
modern Tokyo in a way that is incompatible with the spatial configuration of a Western metropolis, as it is difficult to imagine living in seclusion in downtown Tokyo if the city is like post-Haussmann Paris.

Another noteworthy detail is that the narrator first meets the mysterious woman on a ship heading to Shanghai. Though when “The Secret” was published Tanizaki had not yet visited China, the Shanghai sea-lane of NYK Lines was operating between Yokohama and Shanghai; thus, a shipboard affair on the way to Shanghai would have served as a believable backstory for Tanizaki’s fictional narrative. In addition, during this time, Japan was expanding its imperial project on the Asian continent, and increasingly being recognized as an international colonial power. The year before Tanizaki published the story, Japan officially annexed Korea, and all the unequal treaties Japan signed with Western powers ended in the following year (Asano 2015, 27). Against such historical backdrop, cities such as Shanghai, in which Japan’s colonial power was increasing, became perfect objects for the colonial imagination of Japanese writers. Thus, by setting up the backstory on a Shanghai-bound ship, Tanizaki was able to introduce a colonial dimension to the Tokyo-based narrative.

Furthermore, the story also questions panoramic perspective. In order to find the secret place where he has been taken to meet the woman, the protagonist closes his eyes and uses his bodily senses to navigate the city:

In the course of those long months when we were being pulled around together nearly every night, the number of revolutions the rickshaw made at the Thunder Gate crossing and the number of right and left turns settled into a routine, and before I knew it I’d memorized the pattern. One morning I stood on a corner at the crossing and, with my eyes close, turned myself around several times. When I thought I had it about right, I trotted off at the same pace as a rickshaw. My only method was to calculate the intervals as best I could and turn into side streets here and there. Sure enough, there was a bridge, and there was a street with trolley rails, just where they should be; and so I thought I must be on the right track. (Tanizaki 2017, 56)
The fact that the protagonist finds the secret place through his bodily senses rather than his vision parallels Akutagawa’s experience in the Walled Chinese City. The story’s setting in Asakusa, as discussed earlier, is representative of the heterogeneity of Tokyo’s urban space. The labyrinthine space of Asakusa makes the Tokyoite protagonist’s difficulty in navigating believable, even with panoramic vision. Eventually it is through the protagonist’s bodily senses that he is able to find the place he is searching for. The story in a sense shows Tanizaki’s preference for reading the city through various perceptions, which enabled him to grasp the hybridity of the city’s modern urban space, as well as the heterogeneity of Japanese modernity itself.

**Conclusion**

For any nation, the criteria of modernity are relative and subject to historical contingency. The unique modernity embodied in the urban spaces of Tokyo and Shanghai disrupt the notion that modernity is the property of the West and can be learned only belatedly by other parts of the world. Without denying the influence of Western colonialism on Asian modernization, this chapter attempts to paint a more complex picture of the modern urban spaces of Tokyo and Shanghai, which retained the capacity to challenge the narrative of a universal Western modernity as they were less homogenous and more contentious than commonly believed. Modernity in cities like Tokyo and Shanghai, where the ‘traditional,’ the ‘metropolitan,’ and the ‘colonial’ coexisted, is not entirely based on a discursive emulation of the West, but rather on a hybrid form that contested the process of total westernization. As Timothy Mitchell argues, modernity was a creation not of the West but of an interaction between West and non-West (Mitchell 2000, 2).
The ambivalent multiplicity experienced in Tokyo and Shanghai provides a possibility to complicate the singular narrative of (Western) modernity. The experiences of Tokyo and Shanghai demonstrate that modernity in the two cities is a complex product of their unique histories, an outcome of their particular material conditions. Modernization, rather than “a straightforward replacement of the old by the new” (Dennis 2008, 113), involved a revaluation and conservation of both old and local elements. Certainly, to correct some thinking that tends to overemphasize the Western aspects of modernization should not be interpreted as a call to emphasize the other side of the dichotomy that essentializes ‘tradition’ versus ‘modern,’ or ‘Japanese’ versus ‘the Western.’ Rather, it should be deemed as an apparatus to blur the boundaries between these figures and explore new possibilities to narrate modernity.
CHAPTER 2
The Construction and Deconstruction of Tokyo Modernity

In current descriptions of the world, the major industrial societies are often described as “metropolitan.” At first glance this can be taken as a simple description of their internal development, in which the metropolitan cities have become dominant. But when we look at it more closely, in its real historical development, we find that what is meant is an extension to the whole world of that division of functions which in the nineteenth century was a division of functions within a single state [. . .] Thus one of the last models of “city and country” is the system we now know as imperialism.

– Raymond Williams

Introduction

As per my discussion of Shanghai in Chapter 1, Japanese modernity was imagined and lived through the construction of the metropole in opposition to neighboring colonial areas. A similar power relations between the urban and the rural within Japan’s domestic space worked to give rise to Tokyo modernity. As the capital, Tokyo symbolized the emerging Japanese modern nation-state and, as it was the centre of modern life, modernity itself. As Sorensen has pointed out, all major urban reconstruction undertaken by the Meiji government was in the new capital (Sorensen 2002, 61). Entering the early twentieth century, Tokyo’s landscape changed quickly due to rapid industrialization, as well as an influx of foreign nationals and people from all over the country. The transformation of Tokyo plays an important thematic role in Japanese literature, beyond merely serving as a setting for the narrative. Literary accounts of Tokyo’s spatial

30 Williams 1973, 279.
relations not only displayed internal socioeconomic changes, but helped readers imagine the very conditions of modernity. While it is true that the construction of Tokyo’s modernity was associated with Western influence, engaging with modernity is a much more complex process than a simple importation from the West. Rather, the reordering of spatial and social relations, often carried out in a dualistic schema, played a key role in the formation of Japan’s modernity discourse. In this sense, the shifting boundaries against which the modern space of Tokyo was defined shows us how the seemingly imported ‘modern’ is constructed and articulated in negotiation with various Others.

This chapter will investigate spatial relations between the rural and the urban (specifically Tokyo) in order to reveal the imprint of hierarchical power structures within the Japanese homeland. The ways in which the urban/rural dichotomy made visible the notion of Japanese modernity mirrored Japanese colonial relations overseas. Through an analysis of Natsume Sōseki’s Sanshiro and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s Naomi, I will show that these authors present the countryside as an outsider to Japan’s modernity, which suggests that the construction of Japan’s modern identity is related to its creation of a rural Other. By juxtaposing the two Tokyo-centred texts, we will see them not only as the personal life journeys of their protagonists, but also as signs of a larger historical process of nation-building and empire-building. This chapter will also explore the colonial tensions metaphorized through Japan’s domestic space, and deconstruct how the urban/rural binary not only positions the countryside as simply ‘outside’ the modern capital, but also as part of its production. Moreover, I will address how depictions of heterogeneous urban spaces in Tokyo also represent a challenge to the clearly drawn boundaries of ‘modern urban space,’ destabilizing the seemingly self-apparent equation of Tokyo and modernity, and complicating the discourse of (Western) modernity.
1. The Transformation of Tokyo

As mentioned in Chapter 1, after moving the capital and sending the Iwakura Mission to Europe and the United States, the Meiji government began to remodel the newly-named Tokyo on European cities, believing the capital was a powerful symbol of a strong nation-state. Meiji officials were particularly impressed by Paris, which Georges-Eugène Haussmann had reformed from a chaotic city into an orderly one, featuring straight boulevards, broad vistas, and uniformly designed avenues radiating from specific focal points (Sorensen 2002, 46–50). Thus, during the first several decades of the Meiji era, the regime’s leaders tried to reconstruct Tokyo into a modern metropolis based on “the leading Western urban model” (Smith 1978, 55) of post-Haussmann Paris. The transformation of Tokyo as the capital of the emerging modern nation-state was considered a “symbol of imperial power for the nation as a whole” (Smith 1978, 55), the very embodiment of Japan’s modernity. This was particularly true beginning in the 1880s, when the Meiji governing elites’ view of Tokyo changed from one of anzaisho (temporary court) to teito (imperial capital), a shift in classification that informed many of the physical changes made to the configuration of the city (Fujitani 1998, 76). The 1880s were also known as the Rokumeikan era, named after the Rokumeikan (which, as discussed in Chapter 1, was also the stage for Akutagawa’s “The Ball”). This period saw the rise of Rokumeikan diplomacy, driven by foreign minister Inoue Kaoru, who at the time was trying to renegotiate the unequal treaties signed with Western powers. He hoped that the westernization of the Tokyo landscape by buildings like the Rokumeikan would impress foreigners, and that the city’s modern look would facilitate the renegotiation (Nagai 1994, 21–23). In this regard, ‘Rokumeikan diplomacy’ can be seen as a perfect example of what Komori calls “self-colonization”—that is,
adopting Western values and culture in order to avoid being colonized (Komori 2001, 8). There was thus a fundamental difference between the transformation between Tokyo and Paris. As David Harvey argues, Haussmann’s plan for the reformation of Paris was mainly a response to problems brought about by industrial capitalism, such as population growth, water supply, sewage disposal, and workers’ uprisings (Harvey 2003, 109, 146). However, in the early Meiji period, Tokyo was still largely agrarian, and did not suffer from the same issues of overcrowding and poor sanitation. Unlike Paris, Tokyo’s population decreased as large numbers of samurai returned to their native provinces following the Meiji Restoration, and the water supply and waste disposal infrastructure inherited from Edo were better than even those of European cities (Seidensticker 1983, 127; Hanley 1997, 104–105). This difference suggests that redecorating Tokyo in Western style architecture would have easily been seen as superficial. The failure of Rokumeikan diplomacy eventually forced Inoue to resign in 1887 (Nagai 1994, 33). Tokyo, as the symbolic showcase of Japan’s modernity, was thus unable to convince the foreign powers. In this sense, a colonial power structure was already deeply imbedded in the process of Tokyo’s transformation by the early Meiji, despite Japan never having been colonized.

What signaled Japan’s right to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the nations of the West for the first time was its victories in the First Sino-Japanese War and Russo-Japanese War. The Japanese government wished to turn Tokyo into a symbol of Japan’s emerging status as a modern imperial power. The Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars also sparked Japan’s industrialization and the rapid urbanization that it entailed. After the Sino-Japanese War, Tokyo again reached the peak population of Edo (Smith 1978, 57). Tokyo’s prosperity and ability to drastically transform was afforded in part by transferred wealth from the colonies. Exploiting the new regime’s colonial frontier in the Asian continent and an earlier colonized Hokkaido, a large number of resources were transported inland to support the capital’s construction (Mason 2012,
During this period of nation-building and imperial expansion, the Tokyo landscape changed rapidly, as a result of industrialization and an influx of people following the two wars. New public buildings were built, streets were straightened and widened, and, above all, rapid growth in urban rail reconfigured the city, “carving up, linking, and reordering it” (Fujii 1999, 109). Meanwhile, cultural changes led to a boom in urban consumption with the arrival of new urban sites of enjoyment: theatres, cafés, and department stores, to name a few. The emergence of new readership and the publication industry also greatly transformed the urban space in Tokyo. From 1895 to 1923, the population in Tokyo doubled and reached almost four million by the eve of the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake (Smith 1978, 57). The earthquake, which razed almost half of Tokyo, was viewed by the government and city planners as a chance to radically transform the urban framework of Tokyo, which I will discuss further in Chapter 3. First, however, I will turn to two pre-earthquake texts: Sōseki’s Sanshiro and Tanizaki’s Naomi.

2. Natsume Sōseki’s Sanshiro and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s Naomi

It is hard to imagine that any author of a work set in Tokyo during this period would not be affected by the significant transformation of the city. Sōseki’s Sanshiro and Tanizaki’s Naomi are two of the most representative works of the time to explore the implications of these changes.

2.1 Natsume Sōseki and Sanshiro

2.1.1 Natsume Sōseki

Natsume Sōseki is widely considered the foremost novelist of the Meiji period. Born in 1867 in the Edo region, one year before it was renamed Tokyo, his life coincided with an era that
witnessed unprecedented changes in Japan. During high school, he became interested in classical Chinese poetry; in 1884 he entered Tokyo Imperial University with the intention of becoming an architect, but chose to study English literature instead. After graduation, Sōseki left the capital in 1896 to teach English in Kumamoto, Kyushu for four years, a place he would eventually use as the hometown of his novel Sanshiro’s titular protagonist. On September 8, 1900, the thirty-four-year-old Sōseki, sponsored by the Japanese government, traveled to London to study English literature, an experience that greatly influenced his later writings and views of Japan’s modernization (Brodey 2000, 6–7). Given the profound influence of this era on Sōseki’s own life, it is not surprising to see how each of his works reflects, in different ways, his struggle to understand Japan’s modernization at this crucial moment of confrontation with the West.

2.1.2 Sanshiro

Sōseki’s Sanshiro was serialized in Asahi shinbun 朝日新聞 from September 1 to December 29, 1908. As Komori has noted, the story’s mention of an actual event occurring in 1907 made it easy for readers to relate it to the real, contemporaneous world in which they lived (Komori 1996, 312). The novel, which is the story of the eponymous character’s first year in Tokyo, begins with the train ride from his hometown of Kumamoto to Tokyo, where he is to begin studies at Tokyo Imperial University. The novel describes Sanshiro’s movements as he navigates space in the city: the university campus, the commercial centre, and Yamanote houses. The enumeration of various city scenes through Sanshiro’s eyes creates “an ever-expanding panorama of a full range of urban phenomena” (Maeda 2004, 336). As Angela Yiu points out, location and movement in Sōseki’s works is “always well planned, carefully thought out, and loaded with significance” (Yiu 1998, 120). Far from being merely background, the space and movement described in Sanshiro provide a basis for a discussion of larger themes, such as the
emergence and characteristics of Japan’s modernity.

2.2 Tanizaki Jun’ichirō’s *Naomi*

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Tanizaki was born and raised in Tokyo’s Shitamachi. In 1921, Tanizaki moved to nearby Yokohama, which at the time had the country’s highest ratio of Westerners to Japanese (Tsuruta 2000, 244), where he took lessons on social dance and English conversation, and made Western friends. After the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake devastated much of Yokohama, he was forced to move to the Kansai region, an area usually associated with traditional culture and literature—a major change after life in highly westernized Yokohama. The following year, the first eighty-seven installments of *Naomi* were serialized in *Osaka asahi shinbun* 大阪朝日新聞 from March 20 to June 14, 1924. The remaining installments were published by *Josei* 女性 magazine from November 1924 to July 1925. While *Naomi* was written just after Tanizaki’s forced move west to Kansai, the novel is mainly set in Tokyo—a significant feature given that the Great Kanto Earthquake razed almost half the metropolis. Although Tanizaki’s story is set in pre-earthquake Tokyo, its composition at such a decisive moment undoubtedly left its traces on the writer himself as well as his narrative. As a result, *Naomi* can provide insight into the early 1920s Tokyo areas where Tanizaki lived, through an exploration of its changing landscape and social relations.

*Naomi* is the story of Kawai Jōji, the son of a farmer from Utsunomiya. Making a decent living as an engineer in an electrical firm, he takes in Naomi, a fifteen-year-old café waitress from a poor Shitamachi family, grooming her to become his ideal of Westernized beauty. Naomi is depicted as a woman whose beauty has a heavy Western flavor, the main source of her appeal to Jōji, whose fantasy is to “live in the West and marry a Western woman” (Tanizaki 1985, 67).
The novel highlights a number of critical issues of its time, particularly Japan’s complex relationship with the West and modernity—a problem faced by Sōseki a generation earlier. Tanizaki’s embrace of Japan’s westernization in *Naomi* clearly differs from Sōseki’s alienation from westernization, partially due to the different ways in which they had been exposed to the West. Unlike Sōseki and many of his generation who experienced the shock and rupture of living in the West firsthand, Tanizaki learned about the West solely by reading texts. More importantly, Sōseki wrote *Sanshiro* in 1908, a mere three years after Japan defeated a European power for the first time in the Russo-Japanese War, an event followed by an economic recession as “Japan dipped into its national wealth” to wage the war (Flath 2000, 96). The difference in Sōseki’s mentality is unsurprising compared to the positive outlook of Tanizaki, who had lived through the heyday of Taishō Cosmopolitanism and imperial Japan’s continuous overseas conquests.

### 3. Colonial Contexts of *Sanshiro* and *Naomi*

#### 3.1 *Sanshiro* and its Colonial Context

*Sanshiro*’s historical context is key to understanding the novel: written in 1908, it appeared just three years after Japan’s victory over Russia, an event that intensified and attracted worldwide attention, finally earning Japan recognition as a modern nation-state. Meanwhile, the superiority of Tokyo over the rest of the country, established by the Meiji government to showcase Japanese modernity, was prominently featured. Thus, a dichotomy of centre/periphery in the form of an urban/rural (or more precisely Tokyo/rural) binary became particularly salient in the early twentieth century. The construction and instability of such classifications like urban and rural were made especially explicit by migrants moving to Tokyo from colonies or the
countryside, like Sanshiro’s protagonist. As Sōseki explains in the preface to Sanshiro’s serialization, he “sought to present the new national atmosphere after Japan’s 1905 military victory over a Western power through the eyes of a Tokyo university student from the countryside” (Freedman 2011, 78).

The novel begins with Sanshiro’s three-day train ride from his home in the countryside to the nation’s capital, one of the most important events in his life. The setting of a cross-country train references the nationalization of railways, a hot issue at the time because of its close ties to imperialist policies after the Russo-Japanese War. Sanshiro encounters other characters in the passenger cars of the three different railroad lines, all talking about issues of war and national development (Komori 1996, 313–15). Although they discuss how military activities destroy families, their conversations also reveal how people nationwide were mobilized in war, connecting through shared war experiences and a common ideology. In one noteworthy scene, the train stops at Hamamatsu Station and Sanshiro and Hirota, a Western-educated urban individualist, spot four or five Westerners on the platform. Turning from the subject of the beauty of the Western women among them, Hirota remarks that military victory and new international status have not improved Japan’s national appearance:

> 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. You just have to look at the houses we live in, the gardens we build around them, they’re just what you’d expect from faces like this. (Natsume 1977, 15)

Japan’s anxiety surrounding their lack recognition by Western powers is clearly shown in Hirota’s self-mockery. His comment on the inerasable differences between Japanese and Westerners also expresses Sōseki’s skeptical view of westernization, as well as the unsolvable problems arising from the equation of modernization and westernization. In short, for Sōseki,
imitating the West can never make Japan as ‘modern’ as Western powers. In this sense, the
question of modernity implicated in this scene not only comes up in reference to the Russo-
Japanese War, but also to the imprint of ‘coloniality’ within Japan’s domestic space.

3.2 Naomi and its Colonial Context

Published sixteen years after Sōseki’s Sanshiro, Tanizaki’s Naomi was written in the
post-World War I era, when Japan’s imperial project further expanded into the Asian continent.
The connection between modernity and Japan’s colonialism is thus made more explicit in Naomi.
For example, the opening passage of the novel highlights how Japan’s colonial presence in Asia
was brought back to the homeland.

As Japan grows increasingly cosmopolitan, Japanese [mainlanders] and foreigners are
eagerly mingling with one another; all sorts of new doctrines and philosophies are being
introduced; and both men and women are adopting up-to-date Western fashions.
(Tanizaki 1985, 3, emphasis mine)

During the Taishō period, many people from other Asian countries as well as from Japan’s
countryside migrated into Tokyo, which made Tokyo an increasingly cosmopolitan city.
However, Tokyo’s famous cosmopolitan modernity also often concealed colonial tensions within
the city’s urban space. As Kota Inoue notes, Tanizaki uses the term naichijin 内地人
(mainlanders) when describing Japan’s increasingly cosmopolitan denizens, instead of the more
generic term nihonjin 日本人 (Japanese). The term naichi 内地 refers to the Japanese mainland,
and was usually used to distinguish the Japanese metropole from its colonial frontier, or gaichi
外地 (outer land). The territories of naichi and gaichi were institutionalized through the
Common Law (Kyōtsūhō 共通法) in 1918, which made gaichi a legal part of the Japanese
empire (Kamoto 2014, 88). This set of terms became popularized as the government’s colonial policies increasingly emphasized assimilation of colonial Others into the Japanese empire. The power structure of ‘centre/periphery’ was thus constantly challenged by a massive centripetal flow of people: as its Others were integrated into ‘Japan,’ the boundary between the ‘Japanese’ Self and the colonial Other was increasingly blurred.

As the concept of ‘Japan’ was no longer able to fully uphold the connections between Japanese mainlanders and their superiority over the colonized, a term like naichi had to be set off against the term gaichi, with the semiotic implication of the hierarchy between the core (nai 内) and the periphery (gai 外). Tanizaki’s choice of the term naichijin here thus expels gaichijin 外地人 (the colonial Other) from Tokyo’s cosmopolitan core, reifying and reaffirming the boundaries of naichi. In this regard, the depiction of Tokyo’s urban scene in the opening passage of Naomi already reveals the colonial project that is being carried out by the empire. At the same time, the characterization of cosmopolitan Japan as a place where “Japanese [mainlanders] and foreigners are eagerly mingling with one another” silently erases the colonial Other (gaichijin), who is neither naichijin nor foreigner, from the modern urban scene. Considering that there were many gaichijin in Tokyo for education or employment, and that their very existence constituted Tokyo as ‘modern,’ their removal calls even more attention to the coloniality inscribed in Tokyo’s urban space. It is also worth noting that Naomi was serialized just a couple of months after a brutal massacre of more than 6,000 Koreans in Tokyo, committed by Japanese civilians soon after the earthquake. At the time, there were roughly 20,000 Korean migrants living in Tokyo and Kanagawa (Ryang 2003, 732). It is no coincidence that this considerably large body of gaichijin, around one third of whom were brutally ‘erased’ from Tokyo’s landscape in 1923, were similarly removed from Tanizaki’s novel in 1924. Compared to the pessimistic tone of
Sōseki’s character Hirota, who calls Japanese “sad-looking things” next to Westerners (Natsume 1977, 15), the optimistic attitude Tanizaki adopted in his opening passages is conspicuously linked to a changing colonial context of the Taishō period, in which Japan found itself to be a rising imperial power.

The Taishō generation’s changing attitude towards colonial projects was also made explicit in Tanizaki’s text. Unlike the intellectuals of the Meiji generation, who had been under constant threat of being colonized by the West, the Taishō generation saw the rapid expansion and rise of the Japanese empire. During an important scene on Kamakura beach where Jōji discovers Naomi’s secret rendezvous, Naomi and her friends are discussing the Tokyo Peace Commemoration Exposition (*Heiwa kinen Tōkyō hakurankai* 平和記念東京博覧会) held in Ueno Park, clearly positioning the story in a larger colonial context:

「あっははは、おけつの振り方は関さんが一番うまいよ」

「そりゃそうださ、己あこれでも大いに研究したんだからな」

「何處で？」

「上野の平和博覽會でき、ほら、萬國館で土人が踊ってるだろう？己あ彼處へ十日も通ったんだ。」

「馬鹿だな貴様は」

「お前もいっそ萬國館へ出るんだったな、お前の面ならたしかに土人とまちげえられたよ」 (Tanizaki 1982a, 182)

“Seki’s the best when it comes to shaking his ass,” Naomi said with a laugh.

“Of course. I’ve been practicing, you know.”

“Where?”

“At the Ueno Peace Exposition. There were natives dancing at the International Pavilion, remember? I went ten days in a row.”

“How dumb can you get!” said Kumagai.
“You should’ve gone instead of me. They’d have taken you for one of the natives, with that mug.” (Tanizaki 1985, 141–42, emphasis mine)

The Tokyo Peace Commemoration Exposition mentioned in the conversation, which attracted around eleven million visitors in total, was held from March to July 1922. Despite the fact that the Exposition was held to commemorate the end of the First World War (1914–18)—as its name ‘Peace Commemoration’ indicates—when the Exposition opened, Japan was still involved in the so-called ‘Siberian Intervention’ (Shiberia shuppei シベリア出兵, 1918–22). The intervention was Japan’s most significant military action stemming from the Great War, and was “primarily driven by Japan’s imperialist motives” (Inoue 2004, 114). Penetrating far west into Siberia, Japanese forces started a four-year occupation in which over 50,000 Japanese civilian settlers were brought to the territory, hoping to eventually annex the resource-rich region. Even after the international coalition withdrew its forces, the Japanese Army stayed on until June 1922 (Harries 2001, 123–24). It is against this backdrop that the “Ueno Peace Exposition” opened in March 1922. Although the deepening rift between the army and government eventually forced the withdrawal from Siberia (Humphreys 1996, 25), Japan’s colonial ambition in the area never went away, and nine years later, Japan finally acquired the “land of opportunities” (South Manchuria Railway Company 1922) through the Manchurian Incident. Thus, as Inoue notes, the use of the term “Peace” at the Ueno Exposition “conceal[ed] Japan’s ongoing colonial oppression” (Inoue 2004, 116).

However, irony is not only implied in the exposition’s name, but in the colonial quality of the exhibition event itself. The world exposition stemmed from the specific context of the nineteenth century heyday of European imperial expansion. In his article “The World as Exhibition” (1989), Timothy Mitchell points out the significant role visual representations of exhibitions played in constituting the subjectivity of both the colonizer and the colonized. The
underlying colonial language of ‘civilization and enlightenment’ was explicitly inscribed in the spatial arrangement of exhibitions. For instance, at the Chicago International Exhibition of 1893, people of different ethnic groups were put in order, from “barbarian” to “civilized” (Yoshimi 2010, 201). Japan had showed great enthusiasm for expositions since the early Meiji, and had participated in almost all the major international ones, viewing them as a great stage to present itself as a strong and modern nation. At first, however, Japan had always actively performed the role of exotic Other in expositions, conforming to European views of the Orient (Yoshimi 2010, 215). It was not until the 1893 Chicago International Exhibition that Japan was finally presented as an emerging power: the Japan exhibits were located side-by-side with those of Western rather than Asian countries (Yoshimi 2010, 219; Kal 2005, 525–26). Colonial ideology was not only evident in the exhibition’s spatial organization, but more importantly in the hierarchical relationship between the viewing subject and the displays. At expositions not only were objects displayed, but also people deemed barbaric and primitive. Such exhibitions of human beings were influenced and justified by popular discourses of social evolutionism. Following this longstanding Western tradition of displaying colonized peoples at expositions, Japan, who had finally achieved the colonial position of ‘gazing subject,’ displayed its own colonized groups from Hokkaido and Taiwan at the Japan-British Exhibition of 1910 (Nichi-Ei hakurankai 日英博覧会). Exhibiting its colonial Others soon became a fixture in Japanese domestic expositions, the scale of which increased rapidly during the Taishō period. At the 1922 Tokyo Peace

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31 Hokkaido, as Komori Yōichi has pointed out, was integrated into Japan through a colonial process rather than a natural one associated with modernization in the Meiji era and colonial expansion in the Taishō era (Komori 2012). The colonization of Hokkaido played a big role in constructing the modern Japanese nation. On the one hand, it benefited Japan economically through exploiting the massive natural resources and cheap labour in Hokkaido. On the other hand, the “Japanization” of Ainu people not only helped assimilate local Ainu communities into the Japanese empire but also consolidated the national identity of Japanese citizens back on the mainland (Mason and Lee 2012, 5).
Commemoration Exposition, in addition to the exhibits featuring colonial places like Taiwan, Korea and Manchuria, it included two new pavilions exhibiting the lifestyles of natives from the South Pacific and Siberia, where Japan was expanding its military influence (Yoshimi 2010, 212, 220–21).

Returning to Tanizaki’s story, the Hawaiian “natives” that catch the characters’ attention are referred to as “dojin” 土人, which literally means “soil people.” The word, which signifies primitiveness, is derogatory: the character do 土 (soil), in particular, usually refers to a nonindustrial or rustic status, as seen in words such as tsuchike 土氣 (countrified). As shown in the quoted passage, the primitive “natives” are considered to be so different from the ‘Self’ that they can be easily discerned by their appearance. Therefore, colonial power relations were most obviously presented in the characters’ fear of being mistaken for “natives.” Seki’s taunting that Kumagai could be “taken [for] one of the natives” reveals the mechanism by which Japanese identity is formed: by distinguishing themselves from the colonized/native. Additionally, the group of five urban dwellers would likely be offended by being associated with the concept of do 土 (soil, rustic).

Tanizaki further connects Taishō metropolitan culture and Japan’s colonialism in a scene where Jōji dances with the exiled Russian aristocrat Madame Shlemskaya and notices “her body ha[s] a certain sweet fragrance” (Tanizaki 1985, 60). He later hears from students in the mandolin club that Westerners have strong body odour, so he assumes that the countess probably had “used perfume to hide it” (Tanizaki 1985, 60). In the latter half of the novel, he is once again beguiled by Naomi “wearing the same perfume,” evoking in him “thoughts of lands across the sea” (Tanizaki 1985, 212). This time, Naomi’s allure is so powerful that even Madame Shlemskaya cannot compete. Here, “the same perfume” transforms the uneducated Naomi into
the embodiment of Western modernity. This suggests that the desired modern status can be achieved through the application of imported cosmetics and fashion—things that indicate the conspicuously modern outlook of Taishō culture. In many of Tanizaki’s texts, Western modernity is often embodied by consumerism, which is inseparable from the economic profit gained through the exploitation of Japan’s colonial lands. In other words, Tokyo’s modernity, which usually conjures up the image of things foreign or Western, was largely conditioned by the increased “circulation of materials, people, and capital between the Japanese metropole and the colonial peripheries” (Inoue 2004, 110). This concentration of resources in the metropolitan centre constituted the very “economic base,” to borrow Karl Marx’s term, that made Tokyo’s rapid transformation possible and gave rise to the new middle-class consumerism whose tastes are evident in Naomi.

4. Tokyo Modernity

4.1 Urban/Rural Dichotomy

In the age of modernity, the countryside is often presented as the antithesis of the city. While the urban typically embodies the ideas of a centre where learning, communication, and progress occur, the rural evokes the ideas of “backwardness, ignorance and limitation” though peaceful and simple (Williams 1975, 1). In other words, the linear historical narrative creates the illusion of urban, industrial civilization as naturally superior to the agrarian civilization of the countryside: if the city is modern, then the countryside must be backwards.

After the Land Tax Reform (Chisokaisei 地租改正) in 1873, large numbers of rural peasants were forced off their land through bankruptcy and were driven to major cities,
especially Tokyo, in search of work. Not only did these unemployed masses offer cheap labour, but they contributed greatly to the transformation of the cities: through their difference from urban dwellers, be it their dark skin or distinct regional dialect, they helped construct the very modern identity of urban dwellers. Carol Gluck notes that after Tokugawa’s long history of favouring the countryside over cities, by the 1910s even well-intentioned comments directed at farmers revealed the sentiment that they “lack[ed] a sense of nation, motivation for progress, adequate powers of observation, and an ability to socialize that was sufficient to civilized times” (Gluck 1987, 183). For instance, lecturers in Tokyo’s social education programs appealed to Tokyoites’ pride in their hometown, urging them to develop a love of their city (aishishin 愛市心) despite being besieged by an influx of country bumpkins (inakamono 田舎者), and to make the capital a worthy model for the nation (Gluck 1987, 185). Thus, the relationship between the rural and urban was transformed through the emergence of new forms of production and the construction of new hierarchies. In this sense, as the metropolitan centre, Tokyo’s modernity was not only based on an economic advantage gained through the exploitation of its peripheries, but was also based on an ideology that distinguished it from the “Outsider”/“Other.”

Due to an increasing anxiety over the project of modernity, the urban/rural dichotomy was further consolidated by scholars like Yanagita Kunio 柳田國男 (1875–1962), who in his famous Tōno monogatari 遠野物語 (Legends of Tono, 1912) theorizes the countryside as a homogeneous premodern space retaining ancient rituals and traditions (Figal 1999, 220). Though Yanagita’s writing was an attempt to deal with Japan’s modernization and westernization by imposing the countryside as a space existing outside modernity, the urban/rural binary structure he emphasized is the very thing that helped construct the modernity he feared. By exoticizing and alienating the rural as the urban’s Other, a colonial order was inserted into this urban/rural
dichotomy. This binary hence helped form a national identity that is modern yet still possesses an underlying Japanese authenticity.

The same apparatus can be seen at work in the construction of gendered identity as well. During the Meiji era, facing the pressure of rapid westernization, Meiji intellectuals translated their fear into attempts to make Japanese women “repositories of the past and of traditional values” (Goldstein-Gidoni 1999, 355). Japanese women were thus made into representations of ‘Japaneseness’ through the concept of ryōsai kenbo 良妻賢母 (Good Wife, Wise Mother), a Meiji slogan coined in 1875 and promoted vigorously by the state. As many feminist studies suggest, colonial power functioned in complex relations, not only of race and class, but also gender. In this regard, producing Japanese women as models of ‘Japaneseness’ should be understood against the background of constructing Japanese modern identity. In short, the notion of ryōsai kenbo was not only used to subject women to patriarchal nationalist imaginary, but was also intrinsic to constructing a modern identity of Japanese manhood.

In this sense, it is no coincidence that both male protagonists in Sanshiro and Naomi remain connected to the countryside through their respective ryōsai kenbo figures—Sanshiro’s mother, Omitsu, and Jōji’s mother. In contrast, the boldly transgressive Naomi represents a threat to the unified identity of Japanese nation-state. Her constant challenges to constructions of gender, culture, and class make her a “threatening other” to the state ideological construction of women (Shamoon 2012, 1089). Thus, her existence also poses a threat to Japanese male elites, who required particular ideas about womanhood as a gendered Other, against which they could construct and maintain their own identity as modern men. Naomi, who is considered to be the prototypical Modern Girl (modan gāru モダンガール), is ironically a hybrid of modernness and unmodern. Perhaps revealing an uneasiness about this hybridity, the author restricts Naomi’s
autonomy by completely silencing her voice in the last chapter of the novel.

In Sōseki’s *Sanshiro*, this urban/rural dichotomy is emphasized in its portrayal of the protagonist, who is “eager to plunge into the ceaseless change and movement” of Tokyo’s modern city life, “but fearful of losing the certainties of childhood” associated with his hometown of rural Kumamoto (Rubin 1976, 170). The first section of the novel ends with the following conversation between Hirota and Sanshiro:

“Tokyo is bigger than Kumamoto. And Japan is bigger than Tokyo. And even bigger than Japan . . .” He paused and looked at Sanshirō, who was listening intently now. “Even bigger than Japan is the inside of your head. Don’t ever surrender yourself—not to Japan, not to anything. You may think that what you’re doing is for the sake of the nation, but let something take possession of you like that, and all you do is bring it down.” (Natsume 1977, 16)

At the outset of the story Hirota establishes two sets of comparisons (Tokyo and Kumamoto, and Japan and Tokyo). In the novel, Kumamoto represents the countryside, which is always set against the metropolitan capital Tokyo in order to define it as a modern city. To some extent, without the existence of the countryside represented by Kumamoto, Tokyo would no longer be the metropolitan capital as we understand it. Additionally, by setting up another pair—Japan and Tokyo, though asking Sanshiro never to surrender himself to Japan, Hirota offhandedly references the nation-state of ‘Japan,’ a newly constructed concept after the Meiji Restoration, as if it had existed from time immemorial, thus reinforcing the very concept of the nation-state of ‘Japan’ for the audience.

However, the urban/rural binary also dissolves in the novel’s depiction of Tokyo’s heterogeneous space. One place Sanshiro frequents is Nonomiya’s home near Ōkubo Station, which was then still a rural suburb to the west of the city centre. The reason that Nonomiya and his sister Yoshiko later want to move is that she hates passing through Toyamagabara, a large
desolate area around Ōkubo and Shinjuku that had few buildings before the mid-Taishō period. Thus, the uneven development of Tokyo’s landscape as seen in this passage, with its coexisting rural and urban scenes, shows that Tokyo itself does not necessarily stand for things Western and ‘modern.’ Rather, the boundary that demarcates it from the periphery is blurred, as in the teleological narrative of (Western) modernity, such rustic parts of Tokyo would be excluded.

A similar sentiment appears sixteen years later in Tanizaki’s *Naomi*. Naomi’s home is in Senzoku in Asakusa. Once celebrated for its agrarian civilization, the narrative depicts Senzoku as a squalid place where Naomi’s family members pursue mean occupations, and we are told that Naomi “didn’t want anyone to see where she lived” (Tanizaki 1985, 14). Tanizaki’s description of this decayed district reveals the defeat of agrarian civilization by Tokyo’s industrialization. Again, the area of Senzoku, which does not quite fit into the narrative of Tokyo modernity, is portrayed as an outsider; it represents a past life of modern Tokyo that has been reborn like the new Naomi after receiving a Western education. The narrator expresses his amazement over Naomi’s transformation by contrasting her westernized image with her Senzoku roots, saying, “I could hardly believe that she had grown up in Senzoku” (Tanizaki 1985, 20). In this regard, it reveals the process of how Naomi’s modern bourgeois identity is articulated against Tokyo’s old-fashioned Other. Meanwhile, for Jōji, an Utsunomiya native, who migrated like many others to Tokyo from the countryside, areas like Asakusa and Ueno function as a space resembling their rural hometown (Un’no 1983, 200). Therefore, it is Asakusa where Jōji meets the heroine Naomi, who is working there as a waitress in a café. As Komori argues, Jōji is attracted to Naomi precisely because her connection to Asakusa, where she was born and raised,

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32 Senzoku is also the stage of Higuchi Ichiyō’s story “Takekurabe” たけくらべ (“Growing Up,” 1895).
reminds him of his rural origins (Komori 1988, 141). The existence of spaces like Senzoku right in the heart of downtown Tokyo thus exposes discrepancies in the urban/rural dichotomy, revealing Tokyo’s heterogeneity and evoking anxieties about the definition of Tokyo modernity.

While Senzoku, which once had been the centre of Edo, could be interpreted as a ‘traditional’ area situated in Tokyo’s past, representations of Tokyo’s unevenness in the suburbs (which, with their Western style homes and bourgeois occupants, should have made them a symbol of modernity) are more complicated. When describing the landscape surrounding their new home in Ōmori, Jōji mentions “a small rice paddy” (Tanizaki 1985, 18) lying between the National rail tracks and their newly rented “culture house” (bunka jūtaku 文化住宅), a term referring to a Japanese adaption of the Western house. The juxtaposition of the “rice paddy,” a symbol of rustic countryside, and the “culture house,” a symbol of Tokyo’s urban space, brings to light a “contemporary extratextual social condition” that is only fleetingly represented here in Tanizaki’s text (Inoue 2004, 145). Although brief, this representation of heterogeneous space once again unsettles the construction of Tokyo’s modernity. I would posit that anxiety over such signs of unevenness in Tokyo’s modern urban space represses representations of the suburb in Tanizaki’s novel.

Tokyo’s heterogeneous spaces reveal the contradictions inherent in its modernity; therefore, the hegemony of the capital (as the symbol of the modern nation-state) required more of an exterior against which the shifting boundaries of its modernity could be defined, either through a temporal Other (the Edo era) or a spatial Other (the rural area). The temporal Other and the spatial Other often overlap: the former city of Edo, for instance, was considered to be rustic and spatially inferior in comparison to modern Tokyo, despite possessing a highly developed urban system that would eventually have a deep influence on Tokyo’s spatial
structure; Japan’s rural areas, despite the fact that they were contemporaneous with the capital city, were considered to be anachronistic and temporally inferior compared to Tokyo. Within this context, the urban/rural dichotomy positioned Tokyo as a self-consciously modern city by imagining rural space as its spatiotemporal Other. According to Harootunian, “[c]oncern for the maintenance of the division between city and countryside appeared precisely at the moment the new metropolitan cities embarked on their expansion and colonization of space and when they projected a ‘universal’ self-image of modernity that excluded any other alternative” (Harootunian 2004, xiii). As a new colonial power, Meiji Japan knew the importance of maintaining a hierarchical relationship between the metropole and the colonies. In creating a hierarchy between Tokyo and countryside, it also projected its colonial desire onto its domestic rural space.

4.2 From the Countryside to Tokyo

Both the stories of Naomi and Sanshiro feature a similar trajectory in the protagonist’s movement from ‘periphery’ to ‘centre.’ In Sanshiro, the titular protagonist leaves his mother and childhood home in rural Kumamoto to attend Tokyo Imperial University. In Naomi, Jōji also comes to Tokyo from a wealthy landowning family in rural Utsunomiya and, upon receiving an education at Tokyo High School of Industry, works as an engineer. After his first few weeks in Tokyo, Sanshiro fantasizes about mixing his rustic past with his new life in the city, but as time passes, he increasingly wants to fit into modern urban life. Jōji similarly wishes to break away from rural origins characterized by traditional Japanese culture, becoming immersed in the new urban scene. The relationship between the rural and the urban is thus transformed into protagonists’ tension between ‘tradition’ and the ‘modern.’
As Naomi opens, Jōji presents himself as a conventional human being, but rejects certain orthodox practices associated with rural traditions, such as arranged marriages: “I was a commonsensical person who didn’t like to act recklessly—indeed, was incapable of doing so; and yet I held rather advanced, sophisticated opinions about marriage” (Tanizaki 1985, 6). For Jōji, arranged marriage is a part of the unenlightened past, and one benefit of Tokyo’s modernity is the ability to pick his own bride. Naomi, his chosen bride, is the ideal embodiment of everything Western and the gateway to modern life. In addition to his modern values concerning marriage, Jōji’s everyday life is characterized by modern urban activities:

For recreation, I’d go in the evening to a movie, take a stroll on the Ginza, or, once in a great while, treat myself to an outing at the Imperial Theater. That’s the most I ever did. (Tanizaki 1985, 5)

First presented in Japan in 1897 by The Vitascope and the Lumière Brothers’ Cinematograph, moving pictures were no doubt one of the most novel things modern Tokyo had to offer. Before writing Naomi, Tanizaki had a brief career in the Japanese film industry working as a scriptwriter, and strongly advocated bringing modernist themes to Japanese cinema. In the novel, Jōji and Naomi regularly go out to watch movies, which signals the modernness of their lifestyle. Likewise, their frequent hangouts of Ginza and the Imperial Theatre symbolize the emergence of modern Tokyo. Ginza Bricktown, the premier shopping district in Tokyo, was designated as a model of modernization in 1872; and the Imperial Theatre, the first Western-style theatre in Japan, was located close to the Palace in Marunouchi, a major business district. In contrast to the old sakariba (entertainment quarters) and playhouses generally designated for the masses, they represented a new bourgeois space that promised new and novel experiences.

4.3 Tokyo Versus Japan’s Countryside

4.3.1 The Countryside as Spatial Other
The dominance of Tokyo over the countryside was maintained through imaginary social practices promoted to and by the Japanese public. In this construction, areas further away from Tokyo were imagined as increasingly peripheral and primitive. As rural immigrants migrated to Tokyo in search of employment opportunities and higher education, their upward social trajectory into a bourgeois lifestyle further confirmed the superiority of the metropolitan centre. Thus, it is through its spatial Others that Tokyo established its modern bourgeois status. In Sanshiro, the centre/periphery opposition is drawn between the capital city Tokyo and the protagonist’s rural hometown of Kumamoto in Kyushu, Japan’s southernmost island.

Sanshiro’s journey begins with a three-day train ride from rural Kumamoto to Tokyo, a trip only made possible after the 1906 nationalization of the Kyushu line and the San’yō line connecting Kumamoto to the Tōkaidō line on Honshu island (Komori 1996, 313; Aoki 1994b, 59). The national railway network spatially connected citizens from around the country to the capital city. Trains were described as either going “up” (nobori ︰裏) towards or “down” (kudari ︰下り) and away from Tokyo, establishing a hierarchy between the city and the countryside and positioning Tokyo in the very centre of the Japanese empire (Komori 1996, 315–16). At the same time, the choice of Tokyo dialect for the standardized national language cemented Tokyo’s status as the only centre (chūō ︰中央), rendering all other regions local (chihō ︰地方). This binary is regularly reinforced through the use of the standard Japanese language (Narita 2003, 57). However, the old capitals of Nara and Kyoto, located far west of Tokyo, and each possessing distinct dialects, also once symbolized the core that held ‘Japan’ together. The construction of a centre (and thus the periphery) is thus clearly artificial, and it is this ambivalence that destabilizes Tokyo’s modern status. Unlike Tokyo, Nara and Kyoto preserved much of their old townscape, conveniently allowing them to be imagined as a timeless space preserving traditional
Japan, and thus situating them in a position of temporal Otherness that reaffirmed Tokyo’s modernity. Still, the spatial Other most heavily invested with temporality within the Japanese homeland was the countryside.

4.3.2 The Countryside as Temporal Other

The urban/rural hierarchy is made even more obvious through the construction of the countryside as a temporal Other. In Sanshiro, negative perceptions of the country are repeatedly articulated in remarks about the protagonist’s rustic hometown. During a walk with Sanshiro and his close friend Yojiro, Hirota compares the latter to a paper lantern. Annoyed at being compared to “an outmoded domestic implement,” Yojiro accuses Sanshiro—who does not mind such “old-fashioned things”—of being ignorant of modern trends because of his country background:

“[Y]ou’ve just arrived from the wilds of Kyushu. Your mind is still back in Meiji zero” (Natsume 1977, 57). Here, the temporal Other is associated with the countryside, which exists in the national past. “Meiji zero” (Meiji gannen 明治元年), or 1868, is seen as the transition point from the ‘premodern’ to the ‘modern,’ just prior to the initiation of the era’s modern changes. This meaning is invoked by Yojiro to mock the rural-born Sanshiro’s ignorance and limitations. Furthermore, his reference to “the wilds of Kyushu” (Kyūshū no inaka 九州のいなか) attaches a negative connotation to the area and its people, implying they are uncivilized. Sanshiro does not respond to Yojiro’s comments, but when he later reflects on his “three worlds,” he also seems to agree that the countryside, his “first world,” is a place “of the past”:

[His first world] was far away and had the fragrance of the past, of what Yojiro called the years before Meiji fifteen. Everything there was tranquil, yes, but everything was sleepy, too. It would not be difficult for him to go back, of course. He need only go. But he would not want to do that except as a last resort. It was, after all, a place of retreat, and in it he had sealed up the discarded past. He felt a twinge of remorse to think that he had buried his dear mother there as well. Only when her letters came did he linger a while in
this world, warm with nostalgia. (Natsume 1977, 62–63)

When Sanshiro describes his roots in the countryside as evoking “the years before Meiji fifteen,” he is not contrasting Tokyo of the present to the countryside of the past, but rather is contrasting Tokyo of the present to the countryside of the present. In other words, to him and Yojiro, the countryside is no different before or after Meiji fifteen, and in a sense exists outside of historical time, serving as a spatial marker of temporal difference. Through this comparison, the spatial Other is made temporal. The countryside and its people were considered temporally behind the metropole’s reformation, and Japan’s rural space thus became Tokyo’s past, its spatiotemporal Other. The description of the countryside as “sleepy” (ねぼけている) establishes Tokyo’s progressive modernity against a stagnant rural Other. This characterization of the countryside as ‘stagnant’ or ‘lagging behind’ was not a mere reflection of Kumamoto’s socioeconomic conditions; rather, it gestures towards the discursive formation of an Other, shaped in comparison with Tokyo.

For rural migrants, moving to Tokyo was more than just a means to achieve upward social mobility through employment or higher education. Rather, going to the ‘centre’ meant catching up to contemporary times, and not being left behind in the anachronistic ‘periphery.’ While Sanshiro considers his hometown “a place of retreat” that is “warm with nostalgia” like his mother’s letters, it is also a place where “he had sealed up the discarded past.” In this regard, rural space is not only associated with the national past of “Meiji zero” or “before Meiji fifteen,” but a personal past which Sanshiro has “discarded.” These negative associations of the countryside with ‘the past,’ either as “sleepy” and stagnant on a national level or as something to be “discarded” on a personal one, further establish Tokyo’s temporal superiority. This hierarchy is intrinsic to the construction of Tokyo’s modernity: the narrative of progress locates the rural in
the evolutionary past of a linear timeline of history, implying a need for the countryside to move forward into a future that is Tokyo’s present.

However, this construction of Tokyo’s modernity is constantly challenged in Sōseki’s text. Right after Yojiro’s “Meiji zero” remark, to which neither Sanshiro nor Hirota responds, they pass by an old temple, “next to which a cedar grove had been cleared away and the earth levelled to make room for a blue-painted Western-style house” (Natsume 1977, 57). Hirota comments that the sight is an “anachronism” (anakuronizumu 時代錯誤), and further declares that “[b]oth the material and spiritual worlds of Japan are like this” (Natsume 1977, 57). Hirota’s anxiety over the coloniality of such an “anachronistic” juxtaposition (a sentiment echoed in Sōseki’s 1911 speech, “The Civilization of Modern-day Japan”) is clear:33 for him, the coexistence of a Japanese-style temple (representative of the past) and a Western-style building (the present) in the same space makes plain the artificiality of the binary structure through which the temporal Other is created.34 Hirota’s criticism of Tokyo’s urban space as being anachronistic, a trait usually associated with Japan’s rural areas, reveals its heterogeneity, which in turn exposes the artificiality of the centralized narrative of Tokyo modernity.

4.3.3 The Countryside as Racial Other

The coloniality imbedded in the binary structure of Tokyo/countryside becomes more apparent when the countryside is imagined as a racial Other. In the opening train ride discussed

33 Ironically, later Hirota himself also becomes an “anachronism” to Sanshiro: when Sanshiro sees Hirota walking among young students on the main university thoroughfare, he remarks that the slackness of Hirota’s stride makes him “an anachronism in these youthful ranks” (Natsume 1977, 187).

34 Hirota’s comment about obliterating Japan’s Asiatic past (Buddhism and Buddhist architecture being of foreign origin—that is, from India, China, and Korea) is problematic, as well as negligent of the heterogeneity of Japanese civilization. In constructing the binary between the East and the West, he reduces the East to Japan.
earlier, the spatial distance between Tokyo and countryside is also expressed through Sanshiro’s observation of women’s skin colour, which he notes seems to get progressively lighter the closer he gets to Tokyo. ‘White’ skin has long been considered an essential characteristic of feminine beauty in Japan: from the eighth to the twelfth century, white, untanned skin was a symbol of the privileged class, as they did not perform any outdoor labour (Wagatsuma 1967, 407–408). Thus, skin tone was a significant marker of social status. In the modern era, as the division between urban and rural became increasingly evident, there was a growing tendency to associate ‘white’ skin with urban life, and ‘black’ skin with rural living. Noticing the differences between the lighter complexions of local women compared to Kyushu women when the train is approaching Tokyo, Sanshiro expresses that he feels “homesick” already; and when a “Kyushu-color woman” enters the car, he “[feels] he [has] gained an ally of the opposite sex” (Sōseki 1977, 3). In referring to the dark-skinned woman as his “ally,” Sanshiro reveals his own anxiety about being marked as visibly inferior to the fair-skinned urban passengers on the train, again reiterating the spatial hierarchy between the city and the countryside.

As I have just demonstrated, the ease with which spatial hierarchies (centre/periphery) could be transposed onto temporal difference (modern/premodern), and in turn skin colour (fair/dark), played a big role in Western colonialism. Influenced by skin colour hierarchies imposed by the West, white skin began to be associated with purity, advanced civilization, and spiritual cleanliness in the early Meiji. Being the only Asian nation that not only maintained national independence but had also developed into a military and industrial power, Japan felt the need to “conceptualize the Japanese as culturally and genetically the highest of the ‘Mongoloid,’ and whitest of the ‘colored’ peoples” (Leupp 2003, 160). This colonial mentality of racial superiority, used to justify the imperialist conquest of darker-skinned people, highlights the coloniality in the urban/rural spatial dichotomy. In Naomi, such colonial skin colour hierarchies
Jōji’s fascination with ‘whiteness’ is obvious from the very beginning of the novel. His attraction towards Naomi begins with her Western appearance and resemblance to Hollywood actress Mary Pickford; he even finds her name “splendid” because if it were “written in Roman letters it could be a Western name” (Tanizaki 1985, 4). For him, Naomi’s allure stems from “the terrifying whiteness of her skin. Every bit of rich flesh protruding from the dress was as white as the flesh of an apple” (Tanizaki 1985, 208). While Western superiority is epitomized by a European woman’s white skin in the passage above, the comparison between Madame Shlemskaya with Naomi, as well as with the protagonist himself, simultaneously reveals an ambivalent celebration of and anxiety towards ‘whiteness.’ Furthermore, Madame Shlemskaya is a Russian aristocrat living in exile and poverty in Japan after the Russian Revolution of 1917 that provided the pretext for the 1918 Siberian Intervention and resulted in Japan’s four-year occupation of the area. The supposedly natural superiority of a homogenous ‘West,’ then, was destabilized. Thus, by implying the historical context of Japan and Russia, Tanizaki’s narrative also complicates skin colour hierarchies, challenging Western superiority.

4.4 The Connection and Disconnection of Rural and Urban

The countryside is not only Tokyo’s spatiotemporal and racial Other, but has a more complex relation with the city. When Jōji cuts short his two-week vacation back home, saying he “was bored in the country” and “there’s no place like Tokyo,” Naomi responds that she thinks
“it’d be nice to go to the country in the summer” (Tanizaki 1985, 23). Naomi’s statement implies a bourgeois lifestyle in which urban dwellers vacation in the countryside, making it—at least in the summer—no longer the antithesis to the city, but an extension of it. Furthermore, in response to Naomi’s proposal, Jōji says his family lives in “an out-of-the-way farmhouse,” and that the landscape is “dull” with “no historic sites” (Tanizaki 1985, 23). In Jōji’s mind, a lack of “historic sites” indicates a lack of meaning: the countryside is not only the repository of ‘traditional’ values, but also provides physical premodern remains that meet city folks’ archeological and touristic needs. The “historic sites” of the country are thus desirable to the city dwellers of ‘the present’ because they give them a way to look at ‘the past.’ Thus, Jōji not only re-inscribes the countryside as temporal Other by superimposing the dichotomy of the premodern and the modern on the countryside and the city, but also points to the temporal difference connecting urban dwellers to the countryside.

In both Naomi and Sanshiro, the protagonists correspond continuously with their families in rural Japan, a constant reminder of the world outside the newly rising metropolis. Their rural connections are predominantly represented by their communications with their mothers, figures who embody “the comforting shades of old Japan” (Rubin 1976, 153). Whenever Sanshiro or Jōji feel repelled by the modern life of the metropolis, their hometowns provide them with an escape to the countryside.

In Sanshiro, the protagonist spends the entirety of the plot in Tokyo, going to university and hoping to eventually settle down in the city. Nevertheless, Sanshiro’s hometown of Kumamoto frequently appears in both his recollections and his reflections. Immediately after Sanshiro’s shock at seeing the Tokyo streetcars, he receives a correspondence from his mother, which makes him feel
as though his mother’s letter had arrived from the musty past. […] After all, if he was in touch with the real world now, the only point of contact was his mother, an old-fashioned lady in an old-fashioned country town. (Natsume 1977, 18)

As Freedman argues, the suddenness of the transition allows Sōseki to “[juxtapose] Tokyo’s machines, traffic, and crowds with the countryside and its social relationships described in the letter” (Freedman 2011, 99). By repeatedly characterizing his mother and hometown as “old-fashioned,” and by contrasting his mother’s letter from “the musty past” to the “real world” where he now lives, the countryside is conveniently marginalized in opposition to a ‘modern’ Tokyo.

Thus, once when Sanshiro feels threatened by Tokyo’s vibrant activity, he decides to go immediately back to his room and write to his mother, retreating to a space connecting the city and the countryside formed through their correspondence. However, the impulse to retreat disappears when he sees two women standing against the background of “a Gothic-style building of bright red brick” (Natsume 1977, 22), one of whom is Mineko, an urban ‘new woman’ with whom Sanshiro falls in love. Framed against the Gothic-style building behind her, Mineko becomes part of the metropolitan landscape of modern Tokyo. For Sanshiro, she represents the modernity of the metropolis, emphasizing the contrast between the ‘new woman’ of Tokyo and the “old-fashioned lady” back in Kumamoto. The building itself plays a role similar to that of Mineko: another manifestation of the alluring side of Tokyo’s modernity that helps Sanshiro temporarily forget the menacing urban landscape. Sanshiro’s self-consciousness about his rural origins is also demonstrated in his embarrassment over wearing a jacket hand-stitched by Omitsu, a girl from his hometown. His ambition to enter the “real world” in Tokyo and dismiss

35 From the position described, the building is probably that of the Department of Law and Literature (Hōbunkan 法文館).
his rural past as a “personal struggle up the domestic social hierarchy” (Van Compernolle 2016, 107) not only reflects the dichotomy between Tokyo and the countryside, but is also, as Van Compernolle suggests, analogous to Japan’s national struggle to advance in a competitive international arena of capitalist modernity (Van Compernolle 2016, 106–107).

The letters from Sanshiro’s mother describing the community that Sanshiro left behind arrive at times when he is feeling confused. The ongoing correspondence between Sanshiro and those back home in the countryside—namely, his mother and Omitsu—serves to constantly remind readers of the space outside the newly rising modern city. This not only further contrasts Tokyo with the countryside, but also suggests a sense of prefectures as a community which, according to Narita Ryūichi, did not immediately arise after their construction following the Meiji Restoration. Rather, it was through a sense of inferiority to Tokyo that the prefectural community came into being. Each prefecture has its respective association (kyōyūkai 郡友会) in Tokyo, which even administer prefectural dormitories for their own transplanted students in order to help them keep the “good customs of the hometown” (Narita 2003, 73–74). In the novel, Sanshiro’s lodgings are maintained by his prefectural association in Hongo. When he is shocked by the indifference or opportunistic character of Tokyo natives, he describes it as damage being done to “the moral precepts by which he had been raised” (Natsume 1977, 87). This suggests that traditional values still cherished in the countryside are quickly being lost in the capitalist city during the process of modernization. This adds further to the illusion of the countryside as a pure time-space outside of modernity. Compounding this is the existence of prefectural associations, which, while representing their respective prefectures, all acknowledge the prefectures’ subordinate status to the capital city.
Similar to Sanshiro, in *Naomi* Jōji maintains continuous correspondence with (as well as constant financial support from) his family in rural Utsunomiya. However, he does not return to his hometown often, and the only time that he hurries back home is when his mother is dying:

A telegram saying that she was in critical condition came in the morning, two days after I’d met Hamada. Receiving it at the office, I dropped everything and hurried to Ueno Station. I reached my home in the country at dusk, but my mother had already lost consciousness and didn’t recognize me. She expired two or three hours later. (Tanizaki 1985, 201)

Unlike Sanshiro, who would need to make a three-day journey to get back home (and it is perhaps for this reason that he only makes one return trip at the very end of the narrative), Jōji is able to take a train from Ueno and arrive the same day, though he still arrives too late. The sudden death of his mother is not simply incidental to the narrative. Jōji later sells off his inheritance in the countryside in order to support his luxurious lifestyle in Yokohama with Naomi. His mother’s death is thus the cornerstone for Jōji’s vision of modern urban life: by cutting off his connection to the countryside, he is able to construct it as the total Other against which to establish his own ‘superiority.’

5. The Heterogeneity of Space

5.1 Physical Space: Architecture, Interior Space, and the Culture House

As discussed earlier, Tokyo’s topography, architecture, and transportation systems underwent great changes in the early twentieth century, generating distinct heterogeneous spaces represented in new architectural typologies and cityscapes. Tokyo was physically more heterogeneous than ever, undermining the process of homogenization suggested by a singular narrative of modernity. In *Sanshiro*, Sōseki accurately captures the complex spaces of the
capital: the department stores, the university campus, electrified construction zones in the city centre, idyllic natural spaces, and outer areas are well articulated through the protagonist’s “ceaseless perambulations of the city” (Maeda 2004, 336).

Having once aspired to become an architect, Sōseki provides detailed and positive descriptions of the city’s modern architecture, as well as negative portrayals of the crowded city centre. When Sanshiro first arrives in Tokyo, he is thrust violently into the unfamiliar and meaning-laden space of Shimbashi Station, which served as “the entrance to Tokyo” after the completion of the Tōkaidō line in 1899 until the opening of Tokyo Station on December 20, 1914 (Aoki 1994a, 34; Freedman 2011, 95).36 The second chapter opens with a vivid description of the Tokyo cityscape:

Tokyo was full of things that startled Sanshiro. First, the ringing of the streetcar bells startled him, and then the crowds that got on and off between rings. Next to startle him was 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, depressing old storehouses half demolished in front of them. Everything looked as if it were being destroyed, and at the same time everything looked as if it were under construction.

To Sanshiro, all this movement was terrible. (Natsume 1977, 17)

The things that startle Sanshiro upon his arrival—the streetcar bells, the crowds, the movement in the city—are all typical symbols of the ‘civilization and enlightenment’ heralded by Tokyo’s modernity. However, what shocks him the most is not grandiose architecture or bustling boulevards, but rather the constant, ever-changing quality of everything in the city. Whenever Sanshiro feels unsettled by the chaotic spaces of the city, he seeks refuge at the main Hongo campus of Tokyo Imperial University, a sanctuary of green space off-limits to city’s commotion.

36 The Tōkaidō line runs between Shimbashi and Kobe, connecting Tokyo and Kyoto/Osaka.
Hongo is situated in the north district of Yamanote, just to the north of the Imperial Palace. It is here that Sanshiro first meets Nonomiya, who isolates himself in a dark cellar, pursuing interests that have nothing to do with the “real world” (Natsume 1977, 21). The university campus is usually described as simple: “within the main gate, there were a few large pine and cherry trees, a few broad gravel lanes, nothing more. But the very fact that little work had been done on the area made it all the more pleasant to look at” (Natsume 1977, 31). The Hongo campus used to be the site of the main residence of the Maeda family, the lords of Kaga Province in the Tokugawa period, and was surrounded by other homes of important upper-class families (Jinnai 1995, 25). Since the foundation of the university in 1877, a variety of Western buildings were constructed, continuously eroding the ‘premodern’ quality of the space. Still, while the campus was the manifestation of the modern Meiji world of the intellectual, traditional architectural features left over from Edo, such as the Red Gate (Akamon 赤門), serve as a reminder of the pre-Meiji past.

Another example of heterogeneous space in the novel is the newly conceived private space of the urban bourgeois, as depicted through Sanshiro’s comings and goings in the homes of the intellectual elite in the Yamanote district. In the Tokugawa period, Yamanote was where the houses of warriors were located. By the Meiji era, it was the location of many major government and administrative institutions, as well as the private homes of the new governing elite. The area thus embodied intellectual and bureaucratic elite culture, and was “at the center of Japan’s modernization project” (Pendleton and Coates 2018, 155). Take, for example, Hirota’s house in Nishikatamachi:

Instead of the usual stone-floored foyer, a single Western room jutted out from the front of the house. This room formed an L with the matted Japanese parlor, behind which was a smaller sitting room, also matted. Beyond the sitting room was the kitchen, and beyond that the maid’s room. The house also had a second story, but he could not tell how large it was. (Natsume 1977, 65)
As Maeda points out, this type of layout, “a modest-size painted wooden Western-style room at the front with traditional Japanese-style rooms attached,” was “the latest thing in Yamanote domestic architecture of this era” (Maeda 2004, 333–34). Sōseki describes a private, individual space different from the spaces found in either Edo culture or the official public spaces of the early Meiji like the Rokumeikan.

Domestic space as depicted in Sōseki’s 1908 novel stayed the same well into the 1910s, and the majority of Japanese homes retained vernacular interiors typified by tatami floors and futon for sleeping. It was not until the 1920s that new styles of urban domestic architecture emerged against a backdrop of various social developments, including “a rapid increase in the urban population, changes in household composition, and the spread of higher education among the elite, and the emergence of a professional stratum with high income” (Inoue 2003, 80–81). Both organizations and individuals popularized ideas about adopting new styles of housing as the key to a modern and rational “culture life.” They claimed living in new style houses would not only encourage modern practices among Japanese, increasing productivity and health, but also would present a “civilized” face to the world, thus helping to secure Japan’s position as a modern nation in the world order (Teasley 2003, 58).

This idea of the new style house was given material form when Culture Village (bunkamura 文化村), composed of fourteen model “culture houses,” was exhibited at the aforementioned Tokyo Peace Commemoration Exposition. The model houses of Culture Village were an example of wayō setchū 和洋折衷 (blending of Japanese and Western), a popular domestic architectural discourse featuring a fusion of Western style and Japanese taste. During the 1920s, women’s magazines such as Shufu no tomo 主婦の友 (Housewife’s Companion) regularly featured houses of this sort in articles that often included photographs, illustrations, and
floor plans (Inoue 2003, 87). Drawing on contemporary interest in home design and housing reform, Culture Village became a popular addition to the exposition’s pavilions.

When Jōji rents a house to live in with Naomi, it is based on this sort of culture house model:

Search as we might, a good house wasn’t easy to find. Eventually we rented a shoddy Western-style house near the tracks of the National Electric Line, twelve or thirteen blocks from Omori Station. Modern and simple, it was, I suppose, what people would nowadays call a “Culture Home,” though the term was not yet in vogue then. More than half of it consisted of a steep roof covered with red slate. The white exterior walls made it look like a matchbox; rectangular glass windows had been cut into them here and there. In front of the entrance porch was a small yard. The house looked as though it would be more fun to sketch than to live in.

[. . .]

We bought some inexpensive India prints, which Naomi, with her uncertain fingers, sewed into curtains. At a Shibaguchi shop that specialized in Western furniture, we found an old rattan chair, a sofa, an easy chair, and a table, all of which we set out in the atelier. On the walls we hung photographs of Mary Pickford and several other American movie actresses. (Tanizaki 1985, 16–19)

It is not just the culture house itself that symbolizes the imported Western culture used to form the identity of the rising urban middle class, but its décor of India prints, Western furniture, and photographs of Hollywood stars that reflected the bourgeois imagination of a cosmopolitan Tokyo modernity. Naomi and Jōji’s culture house is located near Ōmori station, not far from Den’enchōfu, the first urban space in Japan planned according to the principles of the popular Western city planning movement, ‘Garden City’ (den’en toshi 田園都市). Initiated in Britain in 1898 and highly influential in the urban centres of Europe and America in the early twentieth century, the ‘Garden City’ movement attempted to find an alternative to overcrowded and industrial cities. The concept of the ‘Garden City’ was introduced to Japan by the Home Ministry as early as 1907 (Inoue 2003, 85). However, as discussed earlier, nineteenth century Tokyo still had quite a great deal of agrarian land, particularly in the west. Therefore, the Garden City ideal
did not seem to answer much of Tokyo’s situation well. It was not until 1918 that an experimental plan to build Den’enchōfu on the southwest outskirts of Tokyo was carried out. The continuous appeal of the ‘Garden City’ concept to the Meiji and Taishō officials is that it idealized an atmosphere of the ‘returning to countryside,’ which not only reconfirmed an image of ‘modern urban space’ based on the urban/rural dichotomy, but was also aided in the formation of an urban bourgeois subjectivity.

In the novel, Jōji and Naomi move geographically westward as they change their abode several times, which coincides with the westward development of Tokyo. An increase in population density in the 1910s and early 1920s brought with it a housing shortage and overcrowded transit. In response to this situation, a number of private railway companies bought up large tracts of land in the western suburbs and began building a transportation infrastructure linking them to central Tokyo (Inoue 2003, 84–85). Railroads and suburban residential areas developed by private railway companies significantly contributed to the new middle-class ideal of home ownership in the suburbs. These ideals, coupled with the image of the suburb as a “family refuge,” resulted in the relocation of the urban middle class from the city to the suburbs, greatly expanding Tokyo westward (Sand 2003, 158). The extension of the city out to the largely rural suburbs, combined with wayō setchū culture houses, further contributed to the heterogeneity of Tokyo’s landscape. Considering the urban sprawl stimulated by the development of intra-city railways and residential suburbs, it is no surprise that Tokyo looked as if it “never ended” to Sanshiro’s rural-born protagonist (Natsume 1977, 17). In addition, Sanshiro often visits Nonomiya’s house at Ōkubo in Shinjuku on the outskirts of western Tokyo, a newly developed area at the time. In 1885, the Shinagawa line (later named the Yamanote line) opened, connecting Shinjuku to the city centre by train. In the story, however, it is Kōbu Electric
Line that Sanshiro takes to Nonomiya’s house. Even for Sanshiro, who is not adept at navigating the city, the commuter train made the journey to Nonomiya’s house “an easy trip” (Natsume 1977, 38).

As for Jōji, the culture house, with its properly Western décor of armchairs and tables, allowed him to recognize and reaffirm the modernity of the Tokyo metropolis, as well as his position within it as a modern man. This image of modern life was exactly what the Lifestyle Improvement (seikatsu kaizen 生活改善) Association, set up by the Ministry of Education in 1920, promoted. In this regard, the production of the ‘culture house’ was imbued with the government’s desire to create an ideal bourgeois identity and, by extension, a ‘modern Japan,’ by remaking the spaces and practices of daily life. Although ‘Western’ additions were promoted as economical and efficient, consumers found them impractical. The majority of the educated, suburban, white-collar families targeted by the Lifestyle Improvement campaign continued living in homes that retained pre-Meiji features, such as tatami-finished rooms that functioned equally for daytime and sleeping use (Teasley 2000, 65). It is worth noting that all parts of the culture house are identified by origin as either Japanese or Western. This naming of space is emphasized in the novel when Jōji blames the culture house for making his and Naomi’s lives “disorderly,” deciding instead to move to a purely Japanese style house, which he characterizes as more “sedate” and “sensible”:

To keep an eye on Naomi while I was out, I’d hire a maid and a cook. No more “Culture Homes”—we’d move to a pure, Japanese style house, suitable for a middle-class gentleman and just large enough for a husband, wife, and two servants. I’d sell the

37 Both Shinagawa Line and Kōbu Line were nationalized in 1906.
38 The Lifestyle Improvement Association was headed by Sano Toshikata 佐野利利 (1880–1956), a professor of architecture at Tokyo Imperial University.
Western furniture we’d been using and buy Japanese-style furniture instead. I’d buy a piano for Naomi. (Tanizaki 1985, 166)

The categorization of physical space not only suggests ways of demarcating the Japanese Self against its external Other, but also consolidates new perspectives on family life. Although Jōji decides to replace all their “Western furniture” with “Japanese-style furniture,” he still plans to “buy a piano for Naomi.” It seems to him that this Western instrument does not belong to the category of “Western furniture,” and fits well into the purely Japanese lifestyle he now wants to live. Jōji likely makes this seemingly self-contradictory decision because the piano denotes a privileged social standing, and would help him build a bourgeois identity. During the nineteenth century, the piano emerged as a fixture in middle-class European households after first becoming available for domestic use in 1771. Denoting middle-class economic status, the piano can be seen as the ultimate symbol of Western bourgeois domestic values (Vorachek 2000, 26). Due to the piano’s specific class associations, Jōji’s choice of this instrument in his “pure, Japanese” style home suggests that the piano’s class identification trumps its national origin. In addition, the piano’s gendered associations implied the educational level of the household’s female members, as “learning piano was a standard part of a middle-class girl’s training” in Europe (Vorachek 2000, 26). Thus, to Jōji, a piano would not cheapen his “pure, Japanese” home as would other imitations of a Western lifestyle like the “inexpensive India prints” or “old rattan chair” in their culture house (Tanizaki 1985, 19), but instead further his dream of shaping Naomi into his ideal middle-class wife.

5.2 Trains and the Suburbs

After the nationalization of the railway network in 1906, the Tokyo government’s development policy focused their planning efforts on the layout of new access roads to train stations (Sorensen 2002). This period saw the intensive construction of railways in Tokyo, and
the development of these new forms of transportation triggered important changes to Tokyo’s physical and temporal landscape by spurring significant suburbanization and enabling people to traverse the city frequently. As portrayed in Naomi, the suburb is intricately linked to a uniquely modern middle class: Jōji, a Tokyo salaryman working as an electric engineer, lives with his young wife in one of Tokyo’s suburban culture houses. The links between space and train culture are also depicted in Sanshiro, for instance, in the protagonist’s surprise at how the vast network of electric trains changed both the structure of city and people’s lifestyles. Moreover, the division between working space and living space, which had once been the same, began to diverge after the rapid development of the rail system. This phenomenon not only isolated people by cutting off their connection to a certain land, but also transformed the lifestyles of urban dwellers—Nonomiya does not even visit his younger sister after she is admitted to the university hospital close to his office (Komori 1996, 320). Clearly, not only did the modern train system connect distant places, but it also worked to create boundaries. These boundaries were further reinforced through the development of local suburban commuter routes characterized by the outward development away from the city centre. At the same time, the circulation of materials, people, and capital is oriented towards the city centre. The dichotomous centre/periphery relation between the city centre and the suburb works in a similar manner to the urban/rural dichotomy in confirming and destabilizing Tokyo as a centre of the nation simultaneously.

**Conclusion**

The discourse of modernity was used to define Imperial Japan as a rising nation-state, whereby the modern urban space of Tokyo functioned as a stage where Japanese modernity was performed. This chapter attempts to uncover how the heterogeneity of Tokyo’s urban space was
repressed through the urban/rural dichotomy, and how Tokyo was made to be the ultimate symbol of modernity in the early twentieth century. Examining the spatial power relations represented in the novels *Sanshiro* and *Naomi* demystifies modernity’s claim to universality as the two texts simultaneously clarify and blur the boundaries between the urban and the rural. The fact that the rural is portrayed in opposition to Tokyo in the two novels reveals the appropriation of the countryside as a space outside of modernity, giving rise to Tokyo’s modernity. However, the physical manifestation of the city is often complicated and even contradictory, not conforming to a singular narrative of modernity. Both Sōseki’s and Tanizaki’s works neither stand in polemic opposition to modern society on the grounds of tradition, nor do they justify the grand narratives of modernization or westernization. Embodied in their texts are the construction and deconstruction of the urban/rural dichotomy, as well as the heterogeneous space in which the very ambiguity of Tokyo modernity is manifested. In this regard, the urban/rural dichotomy and the heterogeneity of Tokyo’s modern urban space undermines the unity of (Western) modernity, and enriches its singular narrative with layered meanings.
CHAPTER 3
Rails: Networks of Modernity

Nothing else in the nineteenth century seemed as vivid and dramatic a sign of modernity as the railroad.

– Arnold Trachtenberg

Introduction

At the beginning of Natsume Sōseki’s 1911 speech “The Civilization of Modern-day Japan,” he frequently uses the train to represent modern civilization. The train testified to the presence and legitimacy of modernity, and thus became modernity’s most prominent emblem. While the railway played a critical role in contributing to the industrial capitalism of almost every modern nation, it was crucial to Japan’s experience of modernity. Meiji elites looked to railways as a powerful means of forming a modern nation-state. Japan’s first rail line, built between Tokyo and Yokohama in 1872, inaugurated the full development of a railway network. In 1879, the road check-point (sekisho 閘所) system, which had been used to control the movement of people in Japan for centuries, was abolished. This change allowed unrestricted travel by rail and opened the door to the rapid development of Japan’s railway network (Fujii 1997, 13). With all its major cities linked by train, it is no exaggeration to say that Japan was a country consolidated by rail. Combined with crisscrossing intra-city rail lines, the railway

39 Trachtenberg 1986, xiii.
network shaped and partially formed Japan’s new landscape. As a symbol and tool of Japan’s modernization, the railway network was fundamental in building Japan’s modern space.

The railway network played “a crucial role in unifying the nation” (Fujii 1999, 108) by centralizing transportation. This centralized system integrated physical spaces outside Tokyo into the city, which in turn created a national community through a shared cultural practice of riding trains. In addition to the unification of the Japanese nation-state, the railway network was also essential in carrying out imperial Japan’s colonial project on the Asian continent. Trains with their shocking speed and power as well as the new and novel space created within them, made possible new sensibilities unique to modern people. The exploration of the railway can thus demonstrate not only the changing constructions of time and space, but also a shifting set of social relations and new perspectives.

The process of railway development also resonated in Japanese literature. Many famous Meiji and Taishō writers like Natsume Sōseki keenly responded to the enormous impact of modern rails on the individual body and the Japanese nation as a whole. Many of their works either portrayed train culture as a major theme or were set against a background of trains. Such works addressed not only the experience of traveling on inland rails, but also Japan’s colonial expansion in the Asian continent, where trains played an integral role. In short, rail transport and the narratives about it played an essential part in everything from transforming quotidian life to nation building.

This chapter focuses on the liminal space of the train, which perfectly encapsulates and condenses various spatial power relations (that is, colony/metropole, rural/urban, exterior/interior) inherent in ‘modern urban space.’ In this chapter I will examines textual representations of different types of rails (e.g., long distance trains, intra-city rails, and the South
Manchuria Railway) and how they express Japan’s national consolidation and/or its colonial expansion. I will also discuss how the railway networks traversed boundaries and mapped the contours of imperial Japan. First, the rails that crossed provincial boundaries altered people’s sense of belonging, which until the modern era had been “restricted to local geographic and political units” (Fujii 1997, 14). Secondly, Japanese rails not only transformed the landscape within the metropole, but also redefined its national boundaries materially and ideologically by aiding expansion in the colonies. In this regard, rails embodied the very essence of Japanese modernity by forming national identities and facilitating the settlement and exploitation of resources in its colonial frontiers. Through a reading of ‘railway texts’ by Natsume Sōseki, Tayama Katai, Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Hayashi Fumiko 林芙美子 (1903–51), and Nakajima Atsushi, I will show how trains provide a means to reflect on Japan’s cultural, social, and political contexts, and how the space created inside and outside the train provided these writers with a space for imagining and simultaneously challenging the narrative of (Western) modernity. Rails can be seen as the fundamental fabric of urban space constituting Japanese modernity: not only did they redefine people’s temporal and spatial experiences in a way that consolidated the nation, but they also facilitated Japan’s colonial expansion. Railways also functioned to challenge the construction of (Western/Japanese) modernity, as instability of boundaries between interior and exterior, as well as those between differently classed compartments, questioned existing hierarchical power relations and definitions of national subjectivity.

1. Development of Japanese Railways in the Tokyo Metropole
Unlike post-Haussmann Paris’ orderly network of streets and boulevards, Tokyo’s modern urban growth has been categorized by researchers as “unplanned sprawl” (Sorensen 2002, 148). As Sorensen argues, the formal urban planning system played only “a minor role” in the creation and maintenance of urban space in Japan, which was instead shaped by “the legacy of the pre-modern street layouts” and “unplanned urbanization in the modern period” (Sorensen 2002, 4). Nevertheless, Tokyo had its own distinctive system oriented to the railway network, the arrival of which had immediate and drastic influence on the city’s urban activity and growth patterns (Cybriwsky 1998, 41; Sorensen 2002, 81). There is no doubt that Tokyo’s modern space was deeply influenced by rails to an extent that railways, rather than streets, are the primary means of navigating the city. Thus, it can be considered that Tokyo’s city planning was carried out based on the railway network, and its urban development was to a great extent structured by large-scale transportation systems.

1.1 Meiji Development (1870s–1900s)

Before the Meiji period, Japan relied on an extensive system of waterways for transportation within the city and for shipping goods to and from the inland regions. In the city of Edo, water played not only a fundamental role in giving the city its spiral structure, but also provided a site for urban activities, from trade and distribution to recreation. This is best represented by sakariba, which “linked roads, waterways and riverbanks into a single complex of gathering” (Smith 1986, 30) and earned Edo its title as the ‘Venice of the East.’ Due to Japan’s insular character, the rest of the country also relied heavily on water transport to ship commodities. Although the movement of goods overland was faster and more reliable, it was costlier; thus, goods from inland areas were often transferred to ocean-going vessels, resulting in a lively sea trade between Osaka and Edo (Ike 1955, 218).
As Tokyo gradually changed to a land-based city with the development of rails, the old canals and rivers became less important methods of transportation. The building of rails both required and made possible a dramatic transformation of the cityscape, as new roads for rails possessing qualities of “smoothness, hardness, levelness, and straightness” crossed space “by means of cutting, embankments, tunnels, and viaducts” (Schivelbusch 1986, 21–23). With the increasing popularity of intra-city rails, the areas around major train stations replaced the old waterfront, becoming the new sakariba. Thus, when the first railway line between Tokyo and Yokohama was completed in 1872, it heralded a radical transformation both of Tokyo’s cityscape and its inhabitants’ lifestyle.

Japan’s railway development arguably began in 1854, when American Commodore Matthew Perry brought a miniature railroad to Yokohama, attracting the interest of Tokugawa government officials. The demonstration of the system sparked a public fascination with railways. Throughout the 1860s, representatives from the West pressured the Tokugawa government to build railroads, but it was not until after the Meiji Restoration that the Japanese government began to study railway technology. Their belief that railroads would be beneficial for “national wealth and military strength” (fukoku kyōhei 富国強兵) was the main impetus behind the development of railways well into the latter decades of the Meiji (Ike 1955, 218–19). As mentioned earlier, Japan’s first rail line was built between Tokyo and Yokohama in 1872, forty-two years after Liverpool & Manchester, the first railway in Great Britain, began operations. The Meiji government initially planned to develop a state railway system but lacked the necessary capital, forcing them to cooperate with private businesses for its construction and

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40 “Fukoku kyōhei” was a famous slogan during the Meiji.
operation (Hirooka 2000, 4). The unreliable nature of this collaboration foreshadowed the future nationalization of railways in 1906. By 1880, railways were already running on the northernmost island of Hokkaido. As awareness spread of the generous terms granted to private companies by the state, constructing railways became “something of a national mania,” and by 1897 the mileage laid by private investors “surpassed that built by the government” (Ike 1955, 223).

During this period, only the Tōkaidō line from Tokyo to Osaka-Kobe via Nagoya was built and operated by the government, while other national routes were privately run. This situation changed in 1906 with the passing of Railway Nationalization Act (Tetsudō Kokuyūhō (鉄道国有法)), in which most of the country’s private railway lines came under public control (Ministry of Railways 1921, 838). By the end of the Meiji period, the railway network ran through Honshu Island from its southernmost to its northernmost regions, heralding the arrival of Japan’s ‘railway era.’

### 1.2 Taishō Development (1910s–1920s)

From the 1910s to 1920s, Japan experienced a second railway construction boom. During this time, the national railway’s trunk network was basically completed, as were many of its branch lines (Hirooka 2000, 25). Private companies in particular built many new intra-city lines to serve major urban centres like Tokyo and their adjacent areas. The development of railways thus resulted in crucial changes to Tokyo’s urban structure. The 1910s saw a rapid growth in private railway companies (particularly short-distance electric railway companies) after private development was again allowed following nationalization in 1906 and 1907 (Sorensen 2002, 60).

It was during this time that station-front areas developed into business districts with big department stores, replacing the old waterfront sakariba. In addition, private railway companies primarily focused development on local suburban commuter routes to serve the large emerging
middle class. Thus, the development of train networks prompted large scale suburbanization, which in turn cultivated middle-class values: as Jordan Sand notes, in the 1910s Japan’s middle class considered “the suburban house and garden an essential part of the new cultural identity” (Sand 2003, 137). The intense development of commuter rails made it convenient and economical to live in the suburbs and commute to the city every day. In that sense, the very existence of the suburbs was the result of railway development. Rapid development along commuter rail lines persisted well into the 1920s, and the devastation wrought by the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923 spurred suburban expansion even more. Over the course of 1910s and 1920s, the residential suburb developed alongside rail lines, becoming an integral part of Tokyo’s landscape.

Suburbanization popularized the idea of middle-class culture, bringing about a boom in consumption. Partially stimulated by the growth of railways, Taishō middle-class consumption created a cosmopolitan modernity that had drastic impact on Tokyo’s urban landscape. The burgeoning market in suburban real estate and the cosmopolitan dream of the culture house provided the stimuli for new architectural experiments (Muramatsu 1976, 145). It was during the 1920s that contemporary architecture and urban design emerged in Japan, becoming an age “when citizens, administrators, and experts all held great dreams about the city and its architecture” (Jinnai 1995, 214). In addition, the inner-city rail system was not only used to meet people’s consumerist desires, but also played a big role in the social-political sphere. As Maeda Ai explains, electric streetcar lines transformed inner-city Tokyo into a modern grid, making possible the swift congregation of a large crowd at Hibiya Park in the Hibiya Riots of 1905, an event touched off by anger at the Portsmouth Treaty for inadequately rewarding Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War (Maeda 1982, 322). In sum, railways reshaped and expanded the borders of Tokyo while redefining its urban space both physically and spiritually.
Japan’s suburbs also emerged simultaneously with the nation’s colonial expansion overseas at the turn of the twentieth century. As Inoue points out, the mechanisms that underlie suburbanization and colonization are similar, as both processes indicate “the emergence of a systematic process of power concentration that shaped modern Japanese nation-state” (Inoue 2004, 2–3).

1.3 Meiji and Taishō Writings about Trains

The changes brought about to people’s thinking and behaviour by the rapid development of railway made it both a symbol and a means of Japan’s modernity. Rails not only became a critical issue for the modern nation, but also a popular topic for modern literature. At the beginning of twentieth century, the train was both shockingly novel and at the same time extremely mundane. Most writers of modern Japan had personal experience taking trains: the famous I-novelist Tayama Katai, for instance, once lived in Yoyogi, a western suburb of Tokyo, and commuted every day to Honchō, where he worked as an editor for Hakubunkan publishing house (Tayama 1987, 179, 188–89, 217). This kind of personal connection to railways prepared him to write “The Girl Fetish,” which is set in an interurban commuter train. Katai’s ‘fetish’ was not only limited to young schoolgirls, but included the railways themselves. In the chapter “Myself and Travel” of Tōkyō no sanjū-nen 東京の三十年 (Thirty Years in Tokyo, 1917), he proudly states that he traveled “by train, second-class, and wore Western-style clothes” while editing the Dai Nihon chishi 大日本地誌 (A Geography of Japan, 1903) for Hakubunkan (Tayama 1987, 213–14). Three years after the publication of “The Girl Fetish,” he wrote a collection of essays titled Nihon isshū 日本一周 (Traveling Around Japan, 1910), relating his travels around the country by train through sketches of various landscapes and historical sites.
Not only did the train offer writers like Katai an opportunity to observe the space extending from and expanding outside it, but the train car also provided a novel space for new experiences. Representations of space within train compartments often presented a microcosm of modern society: different coach classes in particular caught the attention of literati. While railways sometimes served as background for the story, in other works the train would take centre stage. Akutagawa’s “Torokko” トロッコ (“The Flatcar,” 1922), for example, would have no story to tell without the role of the rail track. As modern trains possessed such a powerful and innovative image, in many cases the narratives themselves were closely linked to the symbolism of the train. Another work by Akutagawa, “Kikansha wo minagara” 機関車を見ながら (“While Watching a Locomotive,” 1927) features the train as a metaphor for life, its power representing the vitality of young people that was envied by the author. At the same time, Akutagawa also ruminates on the fact that trains can never deviate from their tracks, reflecting his reluctance to accept a preordained and monotonous life. In this essay, the train embodies his extreme uneasiness towards modern life and modernity—an unease rendered more significant when we consider that the text was written around one week before his suicide and was posthumously published.

The novelty of the train not only prompted philosophizing, but its movement also inspired new rhythms in writing style. The New Sensation School (Shinkankakuha 新感覚派), for instance, emphasized “corporeal sensation” and “the representation of urban space” to signal “the collapse of a certain totalizing understanding of modernity” (Lippit 2002, 82). A foundational work of this movement is Yokomitsu Riichi’s short story “Atama narabi ni hara” 頭ならびに腹 (“Head and Belly”), published in the first issue of Bungei Jidai 文藝時代 (Literary Times) in October 1924. The story begins as follows:
It is high noon. The special express train is packed and running with full speed. The small stations along the line are being skipped like little stones. (Yokomitsu 1956, 331)

As Lippit notes, Yokomitsu’s use of “unconventional grammatical structures and tropes” aptly expresses the phenomena of urban culture (Lippit 2002, 78). Mimicking the speed of the express train, his fragmentary and intuitive writing style became a hot topic of conversation when the story first appeared (Hashimoto 1974, 33), its rhythms reproducing the pace of modern urban life.

2. Spatiotemporal Reconstruction and New Perceptions

The railway’s ability to “annihilate space and time” and “[open] up new spaces that were not as easily accessible before” made closer spatial and temporal connections between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery’ possible (Schivelbusch 1986, 37). The introduction of the train to Japan changed not only the physical and temporal landscape, but also compressed people’s sense of time and rearranged their perceptions of space. By connecting and disconnecting people, reconstructing and deconstructing time and space, the train became not only a primary space for the constitution of new identities, but a significant arena in which to challenge such constructions.

2.1 Spatial Reconstruction and the Formation of a New Spatial Identity

The railway’s contribution to the sociopolitical unification of the nation-state has long been discussed by scholars. The Japanese nation-state was formed in part through the construction of a railway network centred in Tokyo, which “provided the infrastructure for
national unification” and in turn reinforced the government’s attempts to further “centralize and standardize the nation” (Grunow 2012, 236). Trains made the “shrinking of space” (Schivelbusch 1986, 33) possible through their rapid movement, in effect negating the physical space between remote regions and the national centre. Rails provided people all over Japan with the ability to travel to Tokyo within a couple of days, creating the impression that the capital city was just a short trip away from their hometowns. Within this network, Tokyo, with its centralized political, economic, and cultural power, became an imaginary core connecting all the people within the Japanese mainland. In this sense, the railway network physically and symbolically united the Japanese landscape and its people.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Sōseki’s Sanshiro begins with the protagonist on a three-day train ride from his home in Kyushu’s countryside to Tokyo, tracing as such a centripetal movement along a rail network that connected “all corners of the nation” to Tokyo, which was located at “the physical and conceptual center” of this integrated railway network (Grunow 2012, 242). Serialized in 1908, the novel was published soon after the 1906–07 nationalization of railways. The increasing demand for transporting and mobilizing troops during the Russo-Japanese War made the Japanese government realize the significance of an efficient railway network for military strategy. It is no coincidence that the nationalization of the railways took place immediately after the end of the war. Sanshiro rides three railway lines on his journey: he first takes the Kyūshū line from his hometown Kumamoto to the port Moji, where he rides a ferry to Shimonoseki port on Honshu island;41 he then takes the San’yō line from Shinomoseki to Kobe, where he transfers to the Tōkaidō Line, riding it to his final destination at Tokyo’s

41 “The ferry” is also mentioned at the opening of Sanshiro, when Sanshiro states that it brought him from Kyushu (Natsume 1977, 3).
Shimbashi Station. While the privately-owned Kyūshū and San’yō lines were not nationalized until 1906, all three lines were used for military transport, and became part of the national rail network by 1907. As mentioned earlier, the massive expansion of cross-country railroads towards the end of the Meiji era was initiated mainly by the state’s interest in promoting “national wealth and military strength” rather than consumer demands. It is not until after the 1910s that train travel became “cheaper and more accessible to the general public” (Freedman 2011, 96). This military expansion—the backdrop against which Sanshiro is set—comes through clearly in the text. Sanshiro’s cross-country train ride would not be possible without the context of imperialism and railway nationalization, which shrank the distances between the capital city and its outer regions.

People still maintained strong regional identity well into the Meiji era: they possessed a sense of belonging restricted to local geographic affiliation rather than a sense of Japanese national identity (Fujii 1997, 14). With the abolition of the sekisho system and the regional barriers that had once been used to control travelers moving across territories, the Meiji government’s effort to establish a centralized nation-state was best realized by the railway network. Linking “temporally-distant parts of Japan into conveniently traversable land,” it helped create a sense of cultural belonging needed to form the Japanese nation-state (Fujii 1997, 12).

The integration of “temporally-distant parts” into a unified nation was apparent through, as discussed in Chapter 2, descriptions of trains as either going ‘up’ towards or ‘down’ and away

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42 The two, along with Kansai Railway, Nippon Railways (the first private railway), and the Hokkaido Tanko Railways, were called the “Big Five” in private railways before nationalization (Aoki 1994a, 34).
from Tokyo. This ‘up’ versus ‘down’ dichotomy not only connected all parts of the mainland by positioning them within the same system of spatial relations, but also established a hierarchy between the national capital and other areas. In this regard, railways reconstructed space by putting previously autonomous regions on the imperial map, of which Tokyo was the new centre (Komori 1996, 315–16). Thus, going “up” to Tokyo (jōkyō 京) became “a rite of passage for those destined to play a significant role in government, politics, commerce, or the arts” (Fujii 1997, 14) and for anyone who wanted to climb the social ladder or be a part of the metropolitan dream. Even those who did not go to Tokyo usually had ties in the cultural and economic centre, such as families, friends, or neighbours studying or working in the capital. Those who migrated from the provinces to Tokyo also kept ties to their hometowns, creating another level of connections between the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery.’ By linking outer areas into a national network as well as transporting increasing numbers of non-metropolitan people to Tokyo, railways were also able to unify the nation by creating not only spatial but also emotional, personal connections.

The following passage is an excerpt from Tayama Katai’s 1909 novel Inaka kyōshi 田舎教師 (Country Teacher), a story about a young man named Hayashi Seizō who goes to teach in a rural primary school and struggles to fit in, but fails miserably. He eventually dies of tuberculosis, just as the news reaches him of Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War. The scene depicted in the passage below occurs right at the outbreak of the war, and provides a good example of how centralized authority was disseminated through railways:

The news of the outbreak of hostilities with Russia, with the Port Arthur Incident on the eighth and the Inchon Incident on the ninth, came with a surprising swiftness. [. . .]

The fuss that was going on in Tokyo could be surmised from the daily papers. The rapid developments in the political situation over the last month could be anxiously appreciated
even in the countryside. The call-up had been issued. [. . .] There were more than three hundred conscripts from the one subdistrict of Minami Saitama, and since the Tōbu Line had not yet been built, they largely assemble at the Shinetsu Line Station of Fukiage, Kōnosu, and Okegawa, and the Ōu Line stations of Kurihashi, Hasuda, and Kuki.

In the towns that were now transportation centers national flags were rapidly hoisted and the soldiers given a good send-off. Mayors and military secretaries and school students and friends and relatives gathered in the stations and gave rousing cheers when the trains set off.

After the naval engagements at Port Arthur and Inchon even the quiet countryside was buzzing with talk. The bells of the newspaper delivery boys rang busily from town to town, village to village. The papers were full of bold type, and there were reports of all manner of plans and rumors. The twelfth was a cold day, cloudy from the morning on, and that day there came a report that, as expected, the enemy’s Vladivostock Fleet had entered the Tsugaru Strait and had sunk the merchant vessel Nagonouramaru. In order to check where exactly in the Tsugaru Strait Cape Henashi was, the principal put up a huge school map of Japan in the staff room. The old teacher, and Seki-san, and the female teacher all gathered around it too.

[. . .]

In the bathhouse, at the barber’s—talk about the war was everywhere. Some of the old men hated the Russians and wanted to teach them a lesson, while some of the other old-timers were worried about Japan’s chances of victory against such a big country. The children made flags and played at war. (Tayama 1984, 165–66)

At the end of the second passage, the author lists a number of stations in Minami Saitama where the conscripts assemble, most of which are located in relatively rural areas. From this description, we can see how railway lines like the Ōu and Shin’etsu Lines, both national railways used to transport troops, greatly facilitated mobilization from even small villages. In addition, Katai vividly describes the patriotic environment “in the towns that were now transportation centers.” Just as they had transformed big cities, railway networks also became deeply embedded in local rural life and culture. Areas located at important hubs of the railway network became increasingly busy. As in the quoted passage above, Country Teacher often describes gatherings at train stations to mobilize troops and celebrate war victories: civilians raised national flags, a symbol of the state’s authority, demonstrating their spiritual connection to the nation and
answering its call to war. In this way, trains created spaces for the public to gather, share information, and thus create a national community.

Through the extensive railway network, the state’s influence was able to reach all parts of Japan “with a surprising swiftness,” indicating that railways not only facilitated military mobilization, but helped spread information and ideas as well. Information about the political situation in Tokyo could even be disseminated to the remote countryside without delay: daily papers were delivered quickly into the hands of rural inhabitants who “anxiously appreciated” the news (Tayama 1984, 165). Newspaper readership, as Benedict Anderson explains in his influential book *Imagined Communities*, is “a synchronized mass ceremony which formed in actuality a ‘community imagining’” (Anderson 1991, 22). Each communicant is aware that in the act of reading a newspaper, a “ceremony” is being replicated simultaneously by thousands of other people they do not know personally but with whom they share a “communal experience” (Anderson 1991, 22). In Katai’s narrative, information carried by newspapers “full of bold type” delivered from the national centre was able to reach every corner of Japan so quickly that it “surprise[d]” its readers. This experience thus enabled the villagers to be keenly aware that people they did not know in Tokyo were simultaneously sharing a “communal experience” with them. This communal experience was further compounded as the quiet countryside buzzed with the news: in the bathhouse, at the barber’s, and any place neighbours might gather to exchange rumors and speculation.43 The entire country thus shared a certain emotional connection through this communal experience. The reduced temporal distance between the capital and the outer regions made sharing information almost instantaneous, thus unifying the Japanese islands not

43 Some of these places are gender specific: bathhouses and barbershops were typically male spaces. There also existed female equivalents, but Katai, being male, does not mention them.
only physically but spiritually. Therefore, by annihilating space through speed, the railway network enabled the political unification of the nation.

When Katai penned *Country Teacher*, most Japanese people had personal connections to the war, either directly or through family or friends, and thus war was a passionately debated topic. Even in the “secluded village” of Katai’s novel, everyone from the elderly to children shared this common experience with each other and the rest of the nation. Katai’s interest in the Russo-Japanese War can be explained by his personal experience in the war as a correspondent, however the war is also significant in that it enabled Japan to proclaim its separation from Asia and establish itself as an international power. As Irokawa Daikichi argues, the Russo-Japanese War gave the people “direct experience of the state as a shared national fate,” and completed the process of bonding them to the state (Irokawa 1988, 293). In representing rural communities mobilized by war, Katai’s narrative actively participated in discussions about Japan’s status as a modern nation and the (re)construction of ideas about national subjects. Because rails link disparate spaces by shrinking the space between them (Schivelbusch 1986, 38), they create an intimacy that aids in the physical and conceptual reconstruction of the Japanese nation-state. Various spaces were thus ideologically homogenized, and those in-between spaces (like the small stations described by Yokomitsu at the beginning of “Head and Belly”) were easily and inevitably neglected. This homogenization of space resulted in the loss of local identity, formerly determined by the spatial distances between them (Schivelbusch 1986, 38). In its place, a national identity was created to conveniently fill the void.

In addition to the integration of the countryside through the annihilation of space, the train car also presented a new space for people to bond as a community. Anyone with money enough for the price of a ticket could board a train, enabling people from different social
backgrounds to mix and mingle. The ability to ride trains with people from various walks of life became a fascinating part of railway culture. The railway car in a sense represented a moving miniature of the modern urban social environment. As part of the same cultural practice of riding trains, individuals from different social, economic, and political backgrounds were thus converted into members of a unified community.

In the depiction of Sanshiro’s first train ride, for example, Sōseki explains how being seated next to another person gives passengers the opportunity to share similar war experiences while “their train traverses the space of imperial Japan” (Freedman 2011, 90) and creates personal and national bonds. Similarly, in Country Teacher the Russo-Japanese War is often discussed in relation to the destruction of families; but also shows how the war connected people through a shared national ideology. In Sanshiro, the topic of the Russo-Japanese War connects two strangers on the train: a “Kyushu-color” (Sōseki 1977, 3) woman and an old farmer, whose lower-class status is emphasized through the woman’s dark skin and the farmer’s crude behaviour of stripping to the waist. Here we see the aforementioned shift in the passenger’s car from an identification with local ties to one of national unification (Komori 1996, 314). As a Kyushu native, Sanshiro feels connected to the “Kyushu-colour” woman as soon as she enters the car. This is wholly based on her physical resemblance to Omitsu and other Kyushu women, and his perception of a kind of kinship between them. Unlike the bond Sanshiro feels with her, the old farmer connects with the woman through their respective families’ similar experience during the war, one shared nation-wide and reflective of the social context of imperial Japan. Such experiences of wartime suffering created strong ties among Japanese nationals which were, as this scene implies, stronger than even the old clan-based ties they replaced in the process of national unification. These bonds between strangers not only demonstrate the train’s ability bring
together people from different backgrounds, but enable them to imagine living in the singular, unified space of the Japanese nation.

2.2 Temporal Reconstruction and Formation of a New Temporal Identity

Rails not only reconstructed space and helped form a new spatial identity, but also rewrote the industrializing world’s sense of time. As Schivelbusch argues, “the temporal foreshortening of the distances that was effected by the trains forced the differing local times to confront each other,” resulting in railway companies standardizing time (Schivelbusch 1986, 43). By the late nineteenth century, Greenwich Time had been fully accepted and, deprived of their local time, “[r]egions lost their temporal identity” (Schivelbusch 1986, 43–44). The homogenization of time occurred in Japan during the same period. After the nationalization of railways and the establishment of the South Manchuria Railway (Minami Manshū Tetsudō 南満州鉄道, abbreviated as Mantetsu 滿鉄, or the SMR) in 1906, the Meiji government adjusted domestic train schedules to coordinate with lines going to the continent (Tomita 2008, 119). The synchronization of different spaces into a singular temporal order prescribed a path of progress for backwards, non-synchronized places (Tanaka 2004, 19); only those nations synchronized to the global standard were deemed modern and advanced. Moreover, since the establishment of the SMR, Japan frequently needed to transport troops to Manchuria and natural resources back to the homeland, coordinating its domestic schedules with the continent was a strategic move.

44 There are two routes connecting Japan and the continent: one is the Shimonoseki-Busan sea route, which passes through Gyeongseong, the capital city of Korea, and ends in Manchuria. The other route is the train from Shimbashi to Tsuruga, followed by a sea voyage to Vladivostok, Siberia (Tomita 2008, 119).
By creating the need for standardized timetables, railways homogenized people’s conception of time. As Narita suggests, the adaptation to technological change was very much a learned behavior: trains taught strict punctuality and the etiquette of sharing space (Narita 1993, 19, 51). In Tanizaki’s *Naomi*, it is clearly shown that trains imposed a strict temporal organization, routinizing behaviour through schedules. Naomi gains geographic and social mobility by riding trains and by memorizing train schedules. Her affairs with other men are only possible because she knows Jōji rides the same commuter train to and from work every day and can plan her rendezvous around the train timetable. When her lover Hamada is caught red-handed by Jōji in their Ōmori residence, Hamada confesses to the affair, explaining that he and Naomi had met three times already, and that every time “Naomi would come to Ōmori one or two trains later” after Jōji left for work (Tanizaki 1985, 149). The fact that Hamada specifically uses “one or two trains later” to describe their schedule demonstrates how deeply train time is embedded in modern life.

The thirteen-year-old country girl in Akutagawa’s short story “Mikan” (Mandarins,” 1919), however, shows no such preoccupation with train schedules. The story takes place on “a Tokyo-bound train departing from Yokosuka,” and just when the narrator thinks he is the only passenger in the carriage, she bursts in (Akutagawa 2007, 9). The train had already begun to move, and he hears the conductor cursing the girl for her lateness and ignorance of the schedule. The narrator calls the teenager “a country girl” (Akutagawa 2007, 10), likely in part because of her lack of punctuality. In this regard, the standardized timetable of domestic rails introduced a new temporal aspect of modern identity. Temporal homogenization functions similarly to spatial unification as it not only facilitates people’s ability to imagine themselves as
members of the Japanese nation-state, but also consolidates the imaginary boundaries of the Japanese empire through the homogenization of schedules for all train lines.

2.3 Reconstuctions of the Social Order

The train is often taken as material evidence of modernity: with its perpetual forward motion, it represents “the engine of ‘progress’” (Trachtenberg 1986, xiii). By the 1900s, riding trains was no longer a novel experience limited to the elite, but rather could be experienced by anyone who was able to afford a ticket. Nevertheless, the seating arrangements on trains repeated spatial hierarchies, heightening passengers’ consciousness of emerging capitalist social orders. While “passengers were temporarily equal in the space of the train car,” a social structure was still “maintained through classes of tickets” (Freedman 2011, 40). In other words, the public space within the train reproduced a hierarchical space by inscribing fare divisions. Power relations were not only repeated but accentuated in the compact space of the train car. The division of train car space into first, second, and third classes also enabled strangers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds to gather. As third-class cars were more open and gathered a variety of lower-class people, they often became a popular motif for writers and artists.

However, such compartmental divisions make class transgression more apparent. In Naomi, when Jōji describes how he spent his entire income on Naomi, he explicitly mentions that she “bought a second-class commuter pass” for the line they rode every day, while he “settled for third class” (Tanizaki 1985, 75). While it may have been easy for Jōji to buy Naomi a second-class commuter pass, as everyone with the money to buy a ticket could do so, it was not so simple to cross class boundaries:

Thrilled to be taking my first overnight trip with Naomi, I wanted to leave her with the most beautiful impressions possible: we’d stay in a high-class place and not worry about
the cost. But when the day came and we boarded a second-class coach bound for Yokosuka, we were seized by a kind of timidity. The train was full of women and girls headed for Zushi and Kamakura, sitting in resplendent rows. In their midst, Naomi’s outfit, to me at least, looked wretched.

As it was summer, of course the women couldn’t have been particularly dressed up. But when I compared them to Naomi, I sensed an unmistakable difference in refinement between those who are born to the higher classes of society and those who aren’t. (Tanizaki 1985, 26)

The above depiction reveals that even though Jōji can afford relatively higher-class tickets, the class division still persists in material ways like Naomi’s outfit. More importantly, the division is made clear through a conceptual segregation, in the feeling of not fitting in and the awareness of their own socioeconomic status, manifesting in “a kind of timidity.”

This kind of timidity resulting from transgression, however, does not necessarily mean the boundaries between different spheres were solidified. While the separation and convergence of different classes in the space of the train makes such divisions more obvious, it also constantly challenges the boundaries between them. The train thus becomes a fluid space that subverts hierarchical structures and displaces old power relationships. In the aforementioned Akutagawa’s “Mandarins,” such a transgression of class boundaries is depicted through the “country girl” who mistakenly seats herself in the second-class compartment:

Finally feeling at ease, I put a match to a cigarette and raised my languid eyes to look for the first time at the girl seated on the opposite side. She wore her lusterless hair in ginkgo-leaf style. Apparently from constant rubbing of her nose and mouth with the back of her hand, her cheeks were chapped and unpleasantly red. She was the epitome of a country girl.

[. . .] In those same chilblained hands she clutched for dear life a red third-class ticket. I found her vulgar features quite displeasing and was further repelled by her dirty clothes. Adding to my irritation was the thought that the girl was too dimwitted to know the difference between second- and third-class tickets. (Akutagawa 2007, 10)

The narrator at first sees himself as a victim of this girl’s transgression, emphasizing their difference in class: “I” immediately notices that “she was the epitome of a country girl” who
“clutched for dear life a red third-class ticket.” As mentioned in Chapter 2, rapid industrialization in the early 1900s saw a growing number of people from rural regions flooding into major cities like Tokyo. The narrator’s thirteen-year-old fellow passenger is one of these migrants, “perhaps leaving home to go into service as a maid or an apprentice” in Tokyo (Akutagawa 2007, 13). In the presence of such a transgressor, the narrator is displeased and repelled by her “vulgar features” and “dirty clothes,” but is particularly irritated because she entered a second-class car with a third-class ticket. The narrator’s contempt for the “country girl,” who is undoubtedly the epitome of the disadvantaged agrarian Other, is universal in a quickly industrialized society. The disparity between the industrial and the agrarian economies is made obvious not only by their respective representatives within the train, but also by a metaphorical contrast as the fast-moving locomotive (embodying the ‘progressive’ industrial space) cuts through an impoverished banlieue with clumps of shabby “thatch- and tile-roofed houses” (embodying the disadvantaged agrarian space) (Akutagawa 2007, 12). In regards to the “country girl,” “I” naturally assumes an attitude of superiority in order to maintain the established power structure between the industrial and the agrarian, the urban and the rural. The hierarchical division of space is replicated within by the intimate yet alienating space of the train car:

If only to blot her existence from my mind, I took out my newspaper, unfolded it over my lap, and began to read, still smoking my cigarette.

[. . .]

At the same time, I was, despite myself, rather conscious of the girl sitting in front of me, as though she were the personification of coarse reality. (Akutagawa 2007, 10–11)

The inside of a train car is a place where random strangers are forced together. They are physically so close to each other that they cannot fully ignore each other’s existence. However, the narrator in “Mandarins” would rather pretend to read newspapers than interact with the girl sitting right in front of him, though their close proximity forces him to be aware of his fellow
passenger’s presence, no matter how hard he tries to blot out her existence. Later, when the girl moves to his side of the train and attempts to open the heavy window, he does not help but instead hopes “she would be forever doomed to fail” (Akutagawa 2007, 11), expressing his incomprehension at the girl’s actions, as they will soon be inside a tunnel and unable to enjoy any scenery.

The narrator’s logic is later proven to be besides the point: the country girl, leaving her home and family for the first time, is trying to open the window in order to toss a couple of mandarins to her brothers as a farewell gesture. The country girl thus offers the narrator a totally new perspective: at the end of the story, “I” again mentions the country girl’s “third-class ticket,” but this time, it is no longer a sign of division or symbol of hierarchical class relations. Rather, it is a reminder of how fluid that boundary is. By depicting this melancholy middle-class man who is eventually delighted by a grimy country girl he first despises, Akutagawa subverts the hierarchical structure formed by the third- and second-class division, and redefined relations between these two strangers and what they symbolize. With the narrator’s reconciliation with the country girl, the author also questions the legitimacy of industrial modernity as being necessarily better than agrarian civilization.

2.4 The Loss of Landscape and New Possibilities

2.4.1 The Loss of Landscape

The train established speed as “a new principle of public life” (Trachtenberg 1986, xiii), bringing with it new patterns of behavior, thought, feeling, and expectation. Unlike people today, who see rail travel as routine, those present at the moment of its inception had to accommodate themselves to its technological newness, resulting in a heightened physical sensitivity towards
rails. These new bodily sensations were often portrayed in detail by writers at the time. For example, steam trains appear at “either the beginning or the end of almost every Sōseki’s novel”; his frequent metaphorical usage of trains reflects the author’s “fascination” and “ambivalence” towards rails (Freedman 2011, 90). Sōseki ends his novel Sorekara それから (And Then, 1909) with the protagonist Daisuke’s bodily reaction to a moving tram:

When he came to Iidabashi he got on a streetcar. The streetcar began to move straight ahead. Inside the car, Daisuke said, “Oh, it’s moving, the world’s moving,” loudly enough to be heard by those around him. His head began to spin at the same speed as the train. The more it spun, the more flushed it became from the heat. If he could ride like this for half a day, he thought he could be burned to ashes. (Natsume 1978, 256)

Here, the speed of the train is not only a metaphor for Daisuke’s spinning head, but also the very thing that causes his head spin. As Freedman points out, Sōseki’s time in Europe convinced him that “trains were spaces in which to observe modern behaviors and pathologies,” and thus he frequently emphasized their influence on “the construction of both his characters and his theories of Meiji modernity” (Freedman 2011, 82). Sōseki notes in “The Civilization of Modern-day Japan,” “one quality most indispensable to a train [is] motion” (Natsume 1992, 260), and this new physical experience of riding trains shaped people’s identity as modern subjects. Such experiences forced people to separate their individual bodily existence from the background “landscape” (Karatani 1998, 19), thus aiding in the formation of modern individuality and identity.

The newly “discovered” “landscape” (Karatani 1998, 19), however, was again lost as railways created new conditions that ‘mechanized’ travelers’ perceptions. According to Schivelbusch, the train diminished visual senses while other perceptions, such as smell and sound that were important part of travel experiences before rail era, simply disappeared due to its velocity (Schivelbusch 1986, 55). Hence the evanescence of the landscape as seen from a
moving train, which disappears not only owing to speed, but also because the track cuts through hills and dark tunnels. The outside landscape thus disappears in an entirely concrete sense. The narrator in “Mandarins” also details his experience in one tunnel, positing it as the very reason that he ignores the scenery outside the train car:

All at once the light from outside was eclipsed by the electric illumination within; now the badly printed letters in some column or other stood out with a strange clarity. We had entered one of the Yokosuka Line’s many tunnels.

[. . .]

Yet surely she could have seen that the hillsides, their dry grass alone illuminated in the twilight, were moving inexorably closer toward the glass panes—and known that at any moment we would again be in darkness. (Akutagawa 2007, 10–11)

The narrator does not notice that the train is entering a tunnel until the light has changed, indicating that he has not been paying attention to the landscape outside. He thus renders the landscape outside as monotonous and forgettable, mere hillsides with dry grass that will soon be left behind. What isolates the passenger from the landscape is the “machine ensemble” (Schivelbusch 1986, 16) interjected between them. The experience thus serves as a perfect metaphor for his uncertain attitude towards industrialization and all its attending sociocultural changes.

As the disappearance of landscape inevitably led passengers to focus more on the space inside the train car, reading while traveling emerged as a new practice (Schivelbusch 1986, 64), as demonstrated by the narrator reading a newspaper in “Mandarins.” The newspaper is a mediated space that neutralizes the diversity of distant places, giving readers the illusion that the world is a flattened one, no matter how far the location of a specific event may be. In this sense, the narrator prefers a space of purported neutrality, objectivity, and homogeneity as mediated by
the newspaper to the immediate space he physically (but reluctantly) shares with other passengers like the “country girl.”

In contrast, the third- and fourth-class carriages utilized by the proletarian traveling public, which were more open but crowded, “characteristically promoted continuous communication” over reading or gazing (Schivelbusch 1986, 66–67). In Hayashi Fumiko’s essay *Shiberiya no santōressha* シベリヤの三等列車 (*Third Class Train Car on the Trans-Siberian Railway*, 1931), which describes the author’s onboard experience traveling to France via the Trans-Siberian Railway in November 1931, she states that it is “not bad at all” and “fun” to travel with different kinds of passengers in the third-class train (Hayashi 1977, 250–51). Thus, despite spending part of her journey in the second-class compartment as well as having seen first class, the author still recommends the third-class car.

### 2.4.2 Other Possibilities

The forward-moving quality of the locomotive makes it the machine most symbolic of modernity; the railway, or more specifically the idea of the railway, also in a sense became the carrier of modernity. Despite this inexorably forward-moving quality, in Akutagawa’s “Mandarins” there is an intriguing description in which the narrator experiences the illusion of the train “somehow rever[sing] direction” upon entering a tunnel (Akutagawa 2007, 11). Such ‘reversal’ also occurs in the hierarchical power relation between the melancholy middle-class man and the country girl.

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45 Many thanks to my supervisor, Atsuko Sakaki, for bringing to my attention the notion of the print media as flattening space.
As mentioned earlier, Schivelbusch argues that olfactory and aural perceptions that had once been a part of travel in the pre-rail era disappeared, and that visual perceptions diminished because of the train’s velocity (Schivelbusch 1986, 55). However, I would argue that the act of not looking outside the train does not necessarily indicate a diminishment of visual perception. The enclosed environment of the train car offers passengers the opportunity to develop another kind of gaze within it. The protagonist of Katai’s “The Girl Fetish” centres around a middle-aged salaryman’s obsession with staring at schoolgirls on the train. He contrives a way to watch them without being noticed, vividly revealing the gaze made possible by rails: “It’s too direct to watch them face on, whereas from a distance it’s […] likely to arouse people’s suspicions; therefore, the most convenient seat to occupy is one diagonally opposite” (Tayama 1981, 175). By isolating the passenger from the outside, the train also heightens bodily senses, which in part led to the final reversal of power between the two passengers in “Mandarins.” When the “country girl” finally opens the train window and the narrator is engulfed by the soot-laden air pouring in, he would have “barked at” her to shut the window, “had it not been for the outside view, which was growing ever brighter, and for the smell, borne in on the cold air, of earth, dry grass, and water” (Akutagawa 2007, 12). At this moment, all kinds of bodily senses come rushing back to him: in addition to the smell of “earth, dry grass, and water,” he hears “the chirping voices of the children” and sees “the railway crossing bathed in evening light,” and “the dazzling color of the oranges raining down” (Akutagawa 2007, 12–13). All these sensations, experienced through the opening of the window, “passed in a twinkling of an eye,” but are vividly burned into his mind, giving him “a strangely bright and buoyant feeling” (Akutagawa 2007, 13). The outside landscape is still evanescent, but the window, which formerly closed off the train’s interior space from the exterior, introduces the exterior sensuous world back into the machine. The before-and-after contrast highlights the narrator’s bodily senses, putting the world-weary man back in the
mood to enjoy life. In this regard, the teenage “country girl” who opens the heavy window becomes his savior, toppling the previous power relations between the two as well as the respective spaces they embody.

3. Railway Imperialism

The railway network was not only used by the state to transform spatiotemporal relations in the metropole, but was also an intrinsic part of Japan’s imperial project. Since the late nineteenth century, railway imperialism in various forms was widespread around the world, with or without the political and legal superstructure of a colonial state (Matsusaka 2010, 37). For Japan, the railway was a key method used to extend Japan’s imperial influence and redefine its national boundaries materially and ideologically. By developing railway connections via Korea in the early twentieth century, the project of imperial integration bound Manchuria more closely to Japan. As rail transport became more and more fundamental to Japan’s expanding colonial project, narratives on railways were extended past experiences in the metropole. Works featuring Japan’s railway imperialism reveal the multiple manifestations of Japan’s colonial project. Railway imperialism played an integral role in Japan’s self-assertion as a modern nation on par with its Western counterparts, and it enabled Japanese subjects throughout the empire to imagine and participate in Japan’s colonial expansion. The most prominent Japanese railway network in the Asian continent was unquestionably the South Manchuria Railway. This section explores how Japan’s colonial expansion was reflected in literary representations of imperial railways and the spaces they produced along the line, such as railway towns. I will also discuss how railways simultaneously expressed Japan’s assertion of itself as a modern nation and challenged the ways in which modernity was defined by a centre/periphery diffusionist logic.
3.1 Historical Background of the South Manchuria Railway

After the Meiji Restoration, government policy placed a high priority on the development of railways. By the early twentieth century, much of the Japanese empire had been linked by an expansive rail network. As discussed earlier, railways in the metropole reconstructed Japanese mainland physically and conceptually. Overseas, Japan used railways to expand its colonial projects in the Korean peninsula and in Manchuria. The SMR is a perfect showcase of such imperial missions: based on the southern branch of the Russia-run Chinese Eastern Railway (the CER), the SMR was acquired by Japan after the Russo-Japanese War. Imperial Russia had begun to build the CER as part of its Trans-Siberian Railway network using a concession from the Qing dynasty in 1897. The CER advanced Russia’s interests in East Asia, but inevitably hindered Japan’s colonial projects in the area, directly leading to the Russo-Japanese War in 1904. In short, the Russo-Japanese War actually stemmed from disputes over railways as they essentially defined the scale of influence in Manchuria. After acquiring the southern branch of the CER, Japan immediately set up the Minami Manshū testudō-gaisha 南満州鉄道株式會社 (South Manchuria Railway Company) in 1906 and began a large-scale development of railway networks in Manchuria (Paine 2010, 16, 24–26).

Manchuria was considered to be the jewel in the crown of the Japanese empire. It was a vast storehouse of natural resources such as coal and steel, with seemingly unlimited agricultural and industrial potential. At the turn of the twentieth century, Japan began sending large numbers of its citizens to Manchuria to maintain its political and economic influence in the area, which required a radical improvement in transportation in order to meet logistical demands. Like the nationalization of railways in the metropole, the establishment of the SMR not only made a radical improvement in transportation methods, but had a crucial impact on the political,
economic, and cultural presence of Japan in Manchuria (Matsusaka 2010, 37–38). Thus, rails can be seen as Japan’s principal instrument in the colonization of Manchuria, and to a great extent embodied the very existence of imperial Japan in Manchuria.

3.2 Colonial Spaces in Natsume Sōseki’s *Travels in Manchuria and Korea*

After the Russo-Japanese War, an increasing number of literary texts about gaichi (the colonies) appeared, firing the imaginations of readers in the metropole. These texts reveal the ways in which Japan envisioned the colonial project and their own roles within it. In this sense, such representations of the imperial railway network, like Sōseki’s 1909 travelogue *Mankan tokoro dokoro* 満韓ところどころ (*Travels in Manchuria and Korea*, hereafter referred to as *Mankan*), mobilized colonial rhetoric and served the imperial cause in significant ways.

In 1909, Sōseki traveled to Manchuria and Korea on the invitation of his school friend Nakamura Yoshikoto 中村是公 (also known as Nakamura Zekō, 1867–1927), who was at the time the chairman of the SMR. The SMR picked up all travel expenses, and the *Asahi shinbun*, which Sōseki had joined in 1907, encouraged the project, hoping he could write a series on the trip. Sōseki was the first major modern Japanese literary figure to visit Manchuria, and *Mankan* became the first important account of travel to the Asian mainland (Fogel 1996, 252). By the time Sōseki was invited to tour Manchuria and Korea, he was already one of the most popular writers in Japan, with works such as *Gubijinso 虞美人草* (*The Poppy*, serialized from June 23 to October 29, 1907) and *And Then* (serialized from June 27 to October 14, 1909) appearing in the *Asahi shinbun*. The young railway company no doubt expected that Sōseki’s distinguished name and publication in a daily newspaper would lend weight to their promotion of the glories of the far-flung Japanese empire, serving the government’s purposes (Aoyagi 1996, 137). For Sōseki,
Manchuria came to play a symbolic role in works written after his visit, such as *Mon* 门 (The Gate, 1910), *Higan sugi made* 彼岸過迄 (*To the Spring Equinox and Beyond*, 1912), and *Meian* 明暗 (*Light and Darkness*, 1916), which all feature characters who leave for Manchuria or Korea, gesturing towards Japan’s expanding colonial rule during that time.

Sōseki visited Manchuria as the Japanese government began accelerating colonial expansion after its victory in the Russo-Japanese War: Japan set up colonial rule in Korea and claimed its rights to Manchuria, which was supported by the creation of the SMR. Departing from Tokyo, Sōseki traveled first by sea to Dalian (also known as Ryojun or Port Arthur), and then by the SMR into inner Manchuria. From September 2 to October 17, 1909, he spent fourty-six days traveling through Manchuria and Korea, the account of which was serialized by the *Asahi shinbun* as *Mankan*. It was published in fifty-one installments starting on October 21, only four days after Sōseki’s return, lasting until December 30, 1909. Though the title includes both Manchuria and Korea, the account only traces his itinerary as far as his arrival in Fushun, ending before he reached Korea.

In *Mankan*, Sōseki frequently recounts reunions with old school friends who had become important figures in the Japanese colonial system. These connections made it possible for him to make considerable use of SMR facilities throughout his travels: not only was he able to ride the SMR, but was also permitted to visit its central research laboratory, and was given access to observe employees’ working and living environments. It becomes clear throughout the text that the SMR played a significant role in developing Japanese political, economic, and cultural presence in Manchuria. Sōseki begins his travelogue by asking Nakamura Zekō, “What exactly is the South Manchuria Railway Company anyway?”—to which Zekō replies, “Old boy, you really are a fool!” (Natsume 2000, 33). From Zekō’s reaction, it is clear that the imperial project
had been increasingly attracting attention and was well known to the Japanese public.

The railways facilitated a large influx of people from Japan and northern China alike into major Manchurian cities such as Dalian, Shenyang (also known as Fengtian or Mukden), and Changchun. Those from Japan mostly filled posts in the SMR and the newly established government in Kwantung Leased Territory (*Kantōshū* 関東州), while Chinese migrants largely worked in the rail yards, coalmines, or docks, as well as in the rapidly developing soy processing industry. This is made obvious in *Mankan* through its depiction of the Japanese as high officials and the colonial natives as coolies. The author’s different experiences with these two classes of people inevitably left traces in his narrative, showing certain privileges enjoyed by Japanese colonizers as a whole. As they could not entirely rely upon racial difference to distinguish themselves from their colonial subjects, Japanese colonists often utilized a hierarchy of ‘social progress’ in the form of ‘modernization.’ In this sense, the colonization of space by the railway network was not only material but also ideological, which greatly helped to forge a Japanese national and middle-class identity. The SMR Company, which existed exclusively as an expression of Japanese colonial power with direct connections to the highest levels of the government, created an artificial space that allowed passengers to see themselves as part of a large network connecting the metropole and the colony. As Marian Aguiar contends, the representational space of the train is charged with the binary of “inside and outside,” which stands at the centre of modernity’s rhetoric of exclusion (Aguiar 2008, 79). In this way, the train can be seen as a metaphor for the Japanese nation-state, inscribed with hierarchies and divisions

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46 The SMR was founded by the Japanese government, and though organized under Japanese law as a private, joint-stock corporation, a state charter, which mandated the government’s position as majority shareholder and its concomitant power to appoint or approve all top management officials, gave it quasi-official status (Matsusaka 2010, 37).
that establish difference; the boundaries of the train carriage that mark interior from exterior can be seen as a metaphor for the boundaries of the Japanese Self.

This division between the interior and exterior of the railway carriage becomes particularly visible when Sōseki describes his experience on the toro, a narrow-gauge railway carriage, in Chapter 32 of Mankan:

Seen from the outside, the wagon gave the impression of traveling smoothly. But once inside, one was shaken about as if sitting in a fruit tree—so much so that one could feel it in the stomach. The men propelling it [needless to say] were Chinese. They pushed as hard as they could for about fifty meters, 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. (Natsume 2000, 95, emphasis mine)

The author quite openly expresses his distaste towards the Chinese coolies propelling the toro, who are placed outside of the interior space of the wagon. In emphasizing that they are “needless to say (munon 無論) [. . .] Chinese,” the narrator obliterates the possibility of other groups working as coolies. In other words, the scene projects a homogenized image of ‘Chinese’ onto this specific group of coolies, setting up an ethnicity- and class-based distinction between ‘Chinese coolies’ and ‘Japanese passengers.’ Here, the privileged passenger is granted the role of spectator, and the observed native is situated in the exterior space. The narrator, like all privileged passengers on the SMR rail, is supported by an imagined Japanese empire located within the interior space of a carriage created by the SMR’s colonial project. By making the division between the interior and the exterior obvious through a condescending gaze from within,
the rail carriage helps create a safe distance between the Japanese traveler and the colonial Other, designating a hierarchical power relation between them.

However, this established hierarchy is also challenged by the coolies jumping on and off the wagon. In this transgression of the boundary between inside and outside, the narrator can no longer maintain the distance (physically and existentially) from the Chinese coolies. The near-skin contact makes fluid the boundary between inside and outside, and blurs the presupposed division between the privileged Japanese and the colonial Other entailed by such an interior/exterior binary structure. The moment the coolies jump on the wagon, they stop being labourers propelling the carriage and become quasi-passengers similar to the narrator. This fluidity creates anxiety for the narrator, which manifests in a form of abjection, expressed through his description of the coolies’ unpleasant odour. His comment on the coolies’ pants “touch[ing] the hem” of his jacket in particular shows that he could no longer remain an unconcerned bystander watching “from the outside” (yoso kara miteiru 餘所から見てある).

Threatened by their clothes making contact, the narrator again tries to set himself apart from the labourers by expressing repulsion towards the transgressors. In this sense, colonial rule is not only made possible by high officials, but also enforced by individuals like the train travelers on the imperial rails, regardless of social status. However, the porous boundary of interior/exterior was made especially obvious on the imperial rail, as the extreme compression of spatiotemporal distance often results in a crushing of unstable hierarchical relationships.

While traveling along the SMR, Sōseki receives a high standard of courtesy as a guest of the chairman of the SMR company: he rides in a luxurious compartment that he “never in [his] life” has boarded (Natsume 2000, 94), and is accommodated in the high-end SMR-run Yamato hotels throughout his stay in Manchuria. This was completely different from his experience
living in London as a student from 1900 to 1902. While he was miserable and alienated as a Japanese in England, he has no qualms about identifying himself as “a symbol of the Japanese presence” (Brodey 2000, 9) in colonial Manchuria. This is especially obvious in an episode when a foreign man asks Sōseki if he is Japanese. The author confirms this quite openly, wondering “with some anxiety what other nationality” (Natsume 2000, 44) the man had imagined for him. The anxiety Sōseki feels about the question indicates his horror at being mistaken as Chinese or Korean. Such experiences within the colonial space of Manchuria made it necessary for Sōseki to repeatedly identify himself as a Japanese national in order to differentiate himself from the colonial Other.

Considering that he was a distinguished writer and a close friend to many high officials in the SMR, Sōseki’s experience was different from most Japanese travelers and settlers in Manchuria. As noted throughout his travelogue, Sōseki suffered from chronic stomach illness throughout his trip, which often forced him to stay in his hotels. Thus, his direct interactions with middle- or lower-class people were probably quite limited. After the establishment of the SMR, there were a large number of Japanese settlers in Manchuria who had struggled economically in Japan and moved to the colony in search of a better life. Such travelers often appear in works by Nakajima Atsushi, an author Kawamura Minato describes as a quintessential writer of the colonial period (Tierney 2005, 155), and to whom I now turn my attention.

3.3 (De)Colonization in Nakajima Atsushi’s “Sketches of D. City in July”

Less well known outside Japan, Nakajima Atsushi was born just one year before the annexation of Korea, and died the year after the Pacific War broke out. He lived through an era in which Japan gradually gained international status and expanded its colonial rule over Asian countries. Nakajima spent several years of his adolescence in Keijō (Kr. Gyeongseong 경성, 亁成),
城, now Seoul), the capital of Japanese-controlled Korea, where his father taught Japanese, and served as a colonial official in Micronesia from July 1941 to March 1942. Nakajima’s life echoed Japan’s colonial expansion; although his writing reflected a belief in “a benevolent colonialism” that would “benefit its colonial subjects” (Kleeman 2003, 64), his early works seem to display a more complicated stance towards Japan’s colonial rule.

In 1925, while Nakajima was still a student at the elite Keijō Middle School,47 his father moved to Dalian to teach in Kwantung State Second Middle School for six years. During this period, Nakajima visited Dalian every year, and his experiences in the colonies deeply influenced his writing. Many of his early works depicted life there. In 1930, when he was still a third year high school student, Nakajima published his short story “D-shi shichigatsu jokei” 七月七日 （“Sketches of D. City in July,” 1930, hereafter referred to as “D. City”) in Volume 325 of his high school (Tokyo First Higher School) magazine, Kōyūkai zasshi 校友会雑誌 (Alumni Journal). The story is set in the titular railway town of “D. City,” a thinly-disguised Dalian. Such railway towns were usually built around the main stations within the South Manchuria Railway Zone (Minami Manshū Tetsudō Fuzoku-chi 南满鉄道附属地, or the SMR Zone), a track-bound wide strip of areas where Japan had extraterritorial rights, located on either side of the SMR tracks extending from Dalian to Changchun (Coox 1990, 3). Dalian came under the territorial control of Russia in 1898, but was ceded to Japan after the Russo-Japanese War. During Russian rule, Russian planners applied the most up-to-date urban planning theories to the city, giving it a European-style urban atmosphere. This orderly but alien form of urban space,

47 He graduated from Keijō Middle School in 1926 and returned to Japan for high school and university.
which closely resembled Western cities like Paris or St. Petersburg, was inherited and further developed during Japanese rule.

Set in July of 1929 (Fujimura 2006, 3), “D. City” is divided into three parts, for characters from upper, middle, and lower classes. The first part centres on Mr. Y, “the chairman of M company.” Nakajima describes Mr. Y as follows:

 Truly, the king of south Manchuria—Indeed, he was nothing but the king. The minister of Kwantung, who merely holds power over the Kwantung Leased Territory, is no match for him. He is—Mr. Y, the chairman of M Company. (Although it’s a company, we don’t call him “president” here.) (Nakajima 1976a, 66–67)

Based on historical context, it is believed that M company refers to Mantetsu (SMR), and Mr. Y to Yamamoto Jōtarō 山本条太郎 (1867–1936), who was the chairman of the SMR from 1927 to 1929 (Yasufuku 2001, 75). During his tenure, Yamamoto oversaw a successful period of imperial expansion. It is no wonder that Nakajima refers to Mr. Y as “the king of south Manchuria.” Ironically, though, this “king” is not portrayed as an absolute authority, but as deeply troubled by incurable hiccups. This unusual health issue serves as a metaphor for difficult periods in Mr. Y’s life, such as “that serious incident” (ano jūdaijiken あの重大事件) in which “T cabinet suffered from unprecedented criticism” (Nakajima 1976a, 67–68). According to Yasufuku Tomoyuki, “that serious incident” published in “Newspaper K” (Nakajima 1976a, 67) may refer to a story appearing in the Manshū nippō 満州日報 (Manchuria Daily) on August 18, 1929, which reported the assassination of Zhang Zuolin 張作霖 (1875–1928) by Kwantung Army on June 4, 1928 (Yasufuku 2001, 75). When the incident occurred, the Japanese government tried to cover it up by ordering the Japanese media to only refer to it as ‘a certain serious incident in Manchuria’ (Manshū bō jūdaijiken 満州某重大事件). Eventually Yamamoto, taking responsibility for the incident, resigned his position. The draft of Mr. Y’s resignation
letter in the story, which is almost identical to Yamamoto’s resignation letter published in the *Manchuria Daily* (Yasufuku 2001, 75), bluntly describes M company’s development in Manchuria and Mongolia as “the fastest way to remedy the current economic recession and social unrest in Japan,” and describes the coalmine in Fushun as “a gift of nature given to Japan” (Nakajima 1976a, 70). What is most ironic in the story is that “the king of south Manchuria,” who could not even control his hiccupping, could only gain satisfaction through picturing the importance of M company and Manchuria for the Japanese empire in an eloquent resignation letter.

The second part of this story focuses on a middle-aged Japanese employee of M company who has a happy family and makes a decent life in D. City. Originally from Tokyo, he escaped to Dalian for a better life, and often expresses his longing to take his family back to Japan:

Before he knew it, he was thinking about his life in Tokyo fifteen years ago, a poor man who had no father. Soon after his eldest son was born, through the help of an acquaintance, he fled to Manchuria to escape from that painful life. Life was more pleasant than he had expected. His income almost doubled that in Japan. He has not left this company since.

[...]

Manchuria was a paradise for him. Nevertheless, he thought about returning to Japan, and was just waiting for his kids to grow up a little more. He wanted to show his children, who never knew Japan, the country where their father was born, the storm door, the
The old man, at all costs, wanted to make his dream, typical of the Japanese, come true: living in a tiny house surrounded by the modest landscape of his hometown, with the mandarin orange, a stream and a distant sea. (Nakajima 1976a, 78–80)

At first glance, his desire to go back to Japan appears to be homesickness, as he longs to be surrounded by the landscape of his hometown (furusato 故郷). Yet, without even mentioning the name of his hometown, he makes it clear that his biggest motivation for going back is to let his children know “the country where their father was born,” a dream he characterizes as “typical of the Japanese” (Nihonjin-rashii 日本人らしい). Rather than conforming to a regional identity, he identifies himself with the Japanese nation.

This sentiment is unsurprising considering the identity crisis that a Japanese settler like this character (and perhaps like those around Nakajima himself) might have experienced living in Japan’s colonies. After the annexation of Korea in 1910, the Japanese government’s colonial policy gradually shifted away from one that defined its colonies as external properties towards one that stressed their integration into Japan itself. In order to maintain the considerably expanded Japanese empire, Japanese national imagination stressed not only internal homogeneity but also the ability to assimilate putative foreigners into itself (Oguma 2002, 41). The hybridity was emphasized to legitimize Japan’s colonial rule; however, it also brought challenges to Japan’s internal homogeneity, as the boundary between ‘Japanese’ and ‘non-Japanese’ became blurred.

Beginning in the 1910s, Japanese officials strongly advocated sending Japanese citizens to Manchuria to protect their colonial interests. As new colonial interests were gained by the Japanese government in Manchuria following World War I, an even larger number of Japanese began to settle in Manchuria after 1916. Even though material realities in Manchuria did not live
up to some Japanese emigrants’ expectations, the tale of this new land, popularized in settlement campaigns, promotional speeches, and fictional works, inspired about 216,000 Japanese to move to Manchuria. By 1929, 40 percent of them were living in Dalian, with further expansion occurring in the year following the Mukden incident (Tsukase 2004, 37).

It was within this climate that Nakajima wrote “D. City”; however, few Japanese settlers in Manchuria actually lived lives like the aforementioned M company employee (Nishizawa 1999, 74). Thus, some Japanese settlers experienced an anxiety surrounding definitions of ‘Japanese,’ as they were unable to entirely rely on racial difference or even class difference to distinguish themselves from the colonial Other. Thus, qualities imagined “typical of the Japanese” became an important part of their self-identification. It is no surprise that in the early 1930s, a period when Japanese assimilationism grew fast along with the expanding empire, Nakajima invented an M Company employee who, despite living a much more affluent life in D. City, longs to eventually go back to Japan. Such tenuous links to Japan engendered anxiety in the colonialists, who then tried to reinforce their connection with homeland. In evoking symbolic images of Japan, such as “the storm door, the arbor, and tsukiyama,” the middle-class character attempts to solidify his and his family’s identities as Japanese.

In addition, as discussed in Chapter 2, rural migrants to the metropole were often seen as backwards and unsophisticated in opposition to civilization and progress of Tokyoites. While acting as an Other to their urban compatriot, Japanese farmers moving to Manchuria found their positions changed when read against local colonial subjects like the Chinese and the Koreans. These two sets of spatial power relations created a duality that further complicated the identity of Japanese settlers in Manchuria. In other words, in colonial contexts where Japanese subjects felt their status as colonizers being threatened, the need to assert a stable Japanese identity became
more important in the maintenance of colonial hierarchy.

The third part of Nakajima’s story follows two Chinese coolies. In contrast to the beautiful coastline scenery depicted in the second part, their story takes place among “the blood of slaughtered pigs, blow flies, and putrid gutters” in a “narrow street reeking of urine” (Nakajima 1976a, 85). The contrast made between the Japanese-settled areas and the homes of Chinese locals highlights the hierarchical relationship between the privileged Japanese and the underclass of Chinese natives. By separately portraying upper, middle, and lower classes in the story’s three sections, Nakajima is not only able to show his awareness of the injustice of colonial rule, but also the contradictions within the Japanese government’s unification of the empire based on the proposed equality among different ethnic and racial groups.

Nakajima’s questioning of such differentiation may not be obvious in “D. City,” as it seems the middle-aged Japanese employee is the most positively portrayed character. In addition, the repeated association of the Chinese coolies with the word “yellow”—as seen in their “yellow and weak-looking faces” (黄色く力の無い顔), “dull yellow eyes” (鈍い黄色い目), and even their consumption of an “over-ripe yellow Korean melon” (黄色く熟れすぎたまくわ瓜) (Nakajima 1976a, 73, 82)—is key. Compared to Sōseki’s self-imposed label of “yellow” to indicate his racial inferiority in his London-based works like “Jitensha nikki” 自転車日記 (“Bicycle Diary,” 1903), Nakajima’s emphasis on the yellowness of Chinese coolies in D. City where most of the residents are “yellow” is more complicated. As mentioned earlier, the railway town Dalian that D. City stands for had a conspicuously European urban style, the orderliness and Westernness of which provided a severe contrast to the chaos of the Chinese-inhabited area and the ‘yellowness’ of its Asian inhabitants. Thus, the story’s repeated association of the colour “yellow” with the Chinese coolies provides a way for the Japanese to escape the white/yellow
racial hierarchy. By emphasizing the ‘yellowness’ of the Chinese coolies, the Japanese inhabitants’ own yellowness is obliterated.

3.4 Hayashi Fumiko and Train Travel to Europe

For Japanese in the early twentieth century, Manchuria was not only a new world of unlimited opportunity, but a ‘dream route’ to the European continent. This ‘dream route’ was realized in 1906 through the nationalization of railways in the metropole, the establishment of the SMR, the completion of the Japanese-run Gyeongbu Line (Gyeongbu bonseon 경부본선, 釜本線) traveling the length of Korea, and the opening of a ferry service between Shimonoseki and the peninsula (Nakano 2007, 2). This network not only facilitated Japan’s military transport, but also enabled people from all over the country to travel to the Eurasian continent. The transcontinental journey, made possible by the connection of Japanese-run railway networks across Korea and Manchuria to trans-Siberian railways, was three times faster than a voyage by sea. By 1927, travelers could purchase international train tickets to European cities at major train stations within the Japanese empire, including Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Pusan, Pyongyang, and Dalian (Koshiro 2013, 45), which significantly heightened the sense of connection between Tokyo and Europe. With an increasingly affordable and convenient transportation infrastructure, Japanese middle-class enthusiasm for travel skyrocketed, driven even higher by a highly developed tourism industry. The Japan Tsūrisuto Byūrō ジャパンツーリストビューロー (Japan Tourist Bureau, or JTB) was established in 1912 with the help from Japanese Government Railways (Tetsudō-in 鉄道院), and it remains the largest travel agency in Japan to this day.

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More importantly, tourism also played an important role in colonization: by investing capital in the colonies and encouraging visitors and settlers to explore ‘virgin territory,’ it increased the metropole’s consciousness of its role as the seat of colonial power.

With the expansion Japan’s colonial ambitions in the 1930s, Japanese literature became an important venue for responding to new colonial conditions. A variety of texts dealing with the imperial railway network appeared, such as the aforementioned *Third Class Train Car on the Trans-Siberian Railway* (hereafter referred as *Third Class*) by Hayashi Fumiko. Hayashi, perhaps most famous for her autobiographical novel *Hōrōki 放浪記* (*Diary of a Vagabond*, 1930), traveled to Europe in 1931 via continental rail, a trip described in the diary-like essay, *Third Class*. Early in the essay, the author describes being served by a “Manchurian JTB employee” who offers to upgrade her to the second-class compartment between Changchun and Harbin (Hayashi 1977, 245), indicating the close cooperation between the tourist company and the SMR. Like the rails in the metropole, the imperial railway also aided in the conceptual construction of the Japanese empire beyond the physical redefinition of its boundaries. The ‘imagined community’ emerging from encounters and conversations on trains was even more evident in the colonial frontier. The beginning of Hayashi’s *Third Class* presents such a scene:

“Recently, on the way between Harbin and Changchun, one SMR employee was dragged off the train. It’s still unknown if he’s alive or not”; or “I heard the consular of Qiqihar was brutally murdered”; and so on. Those are stories discussed on the train when it passed Mukden station. People everywhere are talking about the war, but I feel a bit unconcerned about it. (Hayashi 1977, 244–45)
In this paragraph, the author talks about the atmosphere inside the third-class train car as the train passes through Mukden station. Mukden station is close to the site of the Mukden Incident (also known as The Manchurian Incident), in which a railway sabotage staged on the SMR became a pretext for Japan’s full invasion of China, ultimately leading to its occupation of Manchuria. The incident occurred on September 18, 1931, just two months before Hayashi’s trip to Europe.

Considering this historical context and the fact that their train is traversing territory where Japan had increased its imperial expansion, it is no surprise that “people all over the train car [we]re talking about the war.” This passage shows how a new national community and identity was being formed through the act of discussing and speculating about the country’s imperial projects within the semi-secluded space of the train, while traversing the empire’s frontier.

### 3.5 Narrating Ambiguous Homogeneity at the Periphery of Japanese Empire

As mentioned earlier, with the government’s colonial policy shift towards assimilation, the homogeneity promoted by the state was not only counteracted by increasing anxieties over defining ‘Japan’ and ‘Japanese,’ but also challenged by the heterogeneity of colonial space. In this section, I would like to revisit Sōseki’s and Nakajima’s narratives to complicate their conceptions of the empire’s ‘periphery.’ I consider their literary representations as not only producing but also challenging the rhetoric of the singular modernity narrative that undergirds Japan’s colonial projects.

#### 3.5.1 Dalian Modernity in Sōseki’s *Mankan*

In *Mankan*, Sōseki’s attitude is in line with “the nationalist temper of the newspaper readership in the time following the Russo-Japanese War” (Natsume 2000, 136). One conspicuous example is his use of the pejorative word *chan* (chink) (Natsume 2000, 40).
He also criticizes the SMR chairman Zekō’s excessive politeness to the Chinese coachman, saying the man “was not Japanese: with unconcealed pride, he let his hair hang down in a long, knotted pigtail” (Natsume 2000, 67). However, the production of such hierarchical power relations is often interrupted or made ambiguous by his other expressions in the narrative, especially when the third party of ‘the West’ comes into play. Japan’s political and economic power in Manchuria ensured Sōseki received a privileged experience—he rode elegant carriages that “one could not easily have found their like even in the very heart of Tokyo” (Natsume 2000, 40), boarded trains that he had “never boarded as such in [his] life” (Natsume 2000, 94), and lived in modern accommodations throughout his trip—that was likely more upscale than his lifestyle back in Japan, let alone his miserable existence as a foreign student in London. Sōseki touches upon his impoverished status in London when he is invited by Zekō to attend a ball, but is unable to go because he does not have the proper attire:

I remembered that when I was staying in London doing research, I had had the cheapest possible evening suit made for me at a shabby tailor’s on Tottenham Court Road. [ . . . ] Even though Dairen might turn out to be a place where one dressed well, it had never occurred to me when I left Tokyo that this old evening suit might be useful in any way [ . . . ] (Natsume 2000, 45)

However, the inferiority he invokes here is soon repressed when he compares his knowledge of Western social conventions to the uncultured ways of Zekō, who offers to lend him a haori and hakama to attend the ball:

I had not wanted to tell him that if it was a ball that we were going to, it would be silly not to dance and that if we wore Japanese clothes we would be unable to do so. But as Zekō was a very simple, uncomplicated man, I was afraid to offend him by acquiescing to his suggestion in these terms, so instead I simply turned him down, saying that the haori and hakama were really not suitable. (Natsume 2000, 45)

Sōseki’s notion of what one ought to wear to a ball vastly differs from that of his more rustic friend Zekō, who was born in a Hiroshima village and is “widely known for his vulgarity by the
SMR staff” (Fogel 1996, 254). This difference enables him to dismiss his friend’s proposal of going in formal Japanese garb, which would prevent them from dancing, an activity that would be silly not to partake in at a ball. In this power structure, the Japanese ignorance regarding what is appropriate for a ball, represented by Zekō, is put into an inauthentic, improper, and inferior position in relation to the Western understanding represented by Sōseki. Furthermore, by emphasizing that Zekō is “a very uncomplicated man” and “[born with awkwardness in his way of talking]” (Natsume 2000, 46), the proud Tokyoite Sōseki also introduces the urban/rural dichotomy into the equation. The use of a Western lens to observe the chairman of the SMR challenges the unquestioned homogeneity of Japan’s superiority in Manchuria, obscuring clearly defined hierarchical relations. This heterogeneity is further revealed in the scene when Sōseki and Zekō go to a bar managed by a Chinese native and frequented by Westerners. Noting that “[w]e ordered drinks in a language unrecognizable as English, Chinese, or Japanese” (Natsume 2000, 46), Sōseki highlights the heterogeneity in Manchuria that challenges the empire’s formation and promotion of a standard national language.

Immediately after the description of this hybridized bar experience, the narrator observes the cityscape the next morning from his accommodation in the Yamato Hotel (Yamato hoteru ヤマトホテル):

From the top of the stone steps [at the front of the hotel] where I was standing, I looked at the broad avenue that extended in a straight line from the hotel entrance as far as the Nihonbashi Bridge. (Natsume 2000, 46)

The Nihonbashi Bridge, depicted by the author as “an elegant and robust structure that one could really have imagined oneself in the heart of Europe” (Natsume 2000, 45) was more than a mere
crossing but “a potent symbol of Japan’s power and presence” in Dalian (Denison and Ren 2017, 91). It was featured on many postcards published in the early twentieth century, as were the Yamato Hotels in which Sōseki stayed throughout his trip. The upscale Yamato Hotel chain was owned and operated by the SMR from the 1910s to 1940s. Shortly after the establishment of the SMR Company in 1906, the formerly Russia-owned Dalniy Hotel was renamed Dalian Yamato Hotel in 1907. However, it was too small to cope with the increase in guests, so in May 1909 the hotel was relocated to the former SMR headquarters, which was originally Dalniy city hall. It was in this hotel that Sōseki resided. Dalian Yamato Hotel was especially important as the city of Dalian was a hub connecting the Euro-Asia Railway network and the seaway to Shanghai. The hotel thus showcased to both imperial subjects and Westerners the achievements Japan had made (Tomita 2003, 195–96).

Five years after Sōseki’s visit, the Dalian Yamato Hotel opened in a new building in the Dalian Central Plaza. Thought to be designed by the SMR engineer Ōta Takeshi 太田毅 (1876–1911), the hotel’s façade and interior featured architectural elements appropriated from European style and technology (Tomita 2003, 195–96). The Dalian Central Plaza, which was originally built by the Russians and called Nikolayevskaya Square, was later reformed and renamed Ōhiroba 大広場 (Large Square) by the Japanese. According to Edward Denison and Guangyu Ren, Russian planners Kerbech and Saharoff had proposed that Dalian’s structure “be an arterial circus in the city centre from which major roads radiated that created a sense of formality and grandeur,” however only a tiny fraction of this plan was ever realized, and it was the SMR that built up Dalian’s modern look throughout the 1910s (Denison and Ren 2017, 22). The planning of Dalian was headed up by civil engineer Katō Yonokichi 加藤與之吉 (1867–1933), who was appointed by then-SMR chairman Gotō Shinpei 後藤新平 (1857–1929).
The urban structure of Dalian, as shown in the bird’s-eye view of the city on many postcards published in the 1920s,\textsuperscript{50} not only reminds us of post-Haussmann Paris with its large plaza and radially spreading streets, but also echoes the ‘Garden City,’ with its symmetrically decorated greenbelts. Such projects were difficult to actualize in Tokyo because they conflicted with the interests of entrenched landowners (Henry 2005, 660). As discussed in Chapter 2, the Land Tax Reform resulted in the “fragmentation of land ownership and irregular patterns of property divisions,” which became “significant obstacles to orderly, planned urban growth” (Sorensen 2002, 58). These kind of “obstacles” are also mentioned in an exchange between Sōseki and Zekō in \textit{Mankan}: after Sōseki expresses his amazement at the view of the cityscape, he feels he is again “treated like [a] country [bumpkin]” as Zekō proudly tells him that “Electricity Park”—the likes of which have never been seen before in Japan—will begin operations in a couple of weeks, along with a train that uses new construction methods more advanced than “the Japanese way” (Natsume 2000, 47–48). Zekō further notes, “[I have [the engineers’] instructions carried out to the letter […] That’s how one gets such good work done, [It seems in \textit{naichi}, such projects would be interfered with as there are many people nosily minding others’ business]” (Natsume 2000, 47–48).\textsuperscript{51} From what Zekō says, it is clear that while urban planners within the space of \textit{naichi} were limited by the numerous compromises they had to make, carrying out radical urban plans in the ‘periphery,’ imagined as a blank slate, was much easier.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{51} Translation modified.
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Throughout *Mankan*, Sōseki often expresses his amazement and admiration at the SMR’s achievements in major colonial cities where boulevards, parks, public buildings, and hotels were similar to if not better than those in the imperial capital Tokyo. In the last chapter of the travelogue, Sōseki describes his visit to the Fushun Colliery, one of the richest and most productive coal mines in East Asia at the time. As Sōseki puts it, “Fushun is a place [. . .] one found coal everywhere, no matter where one prospected, and it would be a century or two before the mine was exhausted” (Natsume 2000, 132–33). It not only provided the SMR’s locomotives, steamships, and electrical power plants with a cheap and easily accessible source of fuel, but also represented an increasingly important export commodity. The urban landscape of Fushun, another key railway town, is depicted as follows:

When we went up on to the embankment where the water tower had been erected, I was able to take in the whole town at a glance. It had not yet been completed. But apart from the fact that all the buildings were brick, one would never have imagined from the architecture—which incidentally was worthy of illustration in the English journal *Studio*—that this place was managed by Japanese. I was also astonished at how all or almost all of the neat little houses varied from one another in their appearance. For every ten houses, there were ten different [styles]. The building included a church, a theatre, a hospital, a school, and, needless to say, the miners’ living quarters. [All of these are things that you would want to see in Tokyo’s Yamanote area or somewhere similar]. In reply to the question that we asked him, Matsuda informed us that they had been built exclusively by Japanese engineers. (Natsume 2000, 133)\(^{52}\)

The SMR’s extensive research and development were on the cutting edge of industrial technology in the Japanese empire, some of which were far more advanced than those back in the metropole. As evidenced by the descriptions of Dalian and Fushun, the new railway towns had become the main arena for exhibiting the activities of the SMR and were conceived as models of urban planning, “a showcase of a specifically East Asian modernity” (Scherer 2012, 52).

\(^{52}\) Translation modified.
Not only were renowned urban planners like Sano Toshikata and Katō Yonokichi appointed to design railway towns such as Dalian and Shenyang, but other urban planners whose plans were frustrated in the metropole went to Manchuria to realize their visions (Denison and Ren 2017, 31, 108). This point is implied in *Mankan* in Zekō’s complaint regarding the obstacles within *naichū* that prevent the actualization of innovative and ambitious new plans. While the metropole did not pass the first city planning law (City Planning and Urban Buildings Laws) until 1919 (Sorensen 2002, 85), Manchuria already had urban planning ordinances in place more than a decade prior (Denison and Ren 2017, 31). Using modern theories of zoning, infrastructure, and architecture, Manchuria’s modern urban landscape and roads were, according to some Westerners, “far better than [those] in Japan” (Denison and Ren 2017, 31). In this sense, Dalian’s cityscape was not only the symbolic exhibition of Japanese imperialism, but a ‘showcase’ for what Japan could achieve.

At the same time, Dalian also presented a challenge to the centre-periphery diffusionist model, as the railway towns became a “laboratory” for testing policies that were “difficult to implement in Japan proper”; and urban planning in colonial cities like Dalian and Fushun deeply influenced the reconstruction of Tokyo (Low 2010, 202–203). As many scholars have observed, Tokyo’s urban structure did not change fundamentally until the disastrous 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, which reduced almost half of the city to a wasteland. Soon after the catastrophe, proclaiming the necessity of “the restoration of the Imperial Capital […] for the restoration of the Empire” (Cybriwsky 1991, 82), the Japanese government concentrated its efforts in the reinvention of Tokyo as a modern metropolis, which gave radical planners previously working in colonies the opportunity to transform the city’s framework (Cybriwsky 1991, 82; Cybriwsky 1998, 96). Gotō Shinpei, the former Civil Administrator of Taiwan (1898–1906) and Manchuria (1906–16), played an important role in the process. Upon his return to Japan in 1916, he became
the Mayor of Tokyo in 1920 and was then appointed the Minister of Home after the Great Kanto Earthquake. He viewed the earthquake as a chance to execute an ambitious city plan through the implementation of a new infrastructure. Equipped with knowledge and experience gleaned from city planning and urban administration in the colonies, he began his radical plan to transform Tokyo (Sorensen 2002, 109–10). In this regard, those colonial cities became “an important part of urban Japan” (Tucker 2003, 158), not only because they were assimilated into the Japanese empire, but because they also provided preliminary models for reconstructing Japanese cities in the homeland. In this context, Sōseki’s comment that the Fushun railway town featured “all of these things [. . .] that you will want to see in Tokyo’s Yamanote area or somewhere similar” is unsurprising (Natsume 2000, 133). By juxtaposing the railway towns with one of the most highly developed areas in Tokyo, Sōseki’s observation makes the hierarchy between the metropole and periphery fluid.

Meanwhile, the SMR’s business interests sometimes violated what was regarded as the proper division of labour between the metropole and periphery. For instance, low-cost Fushun coal offered serious competition to domestic Japanese producers in the Asian coal market. In the 1920s, this competition extended to Anshan Iron Works and other industrial projects of the SMR (Matsusaka 2010, 45), which further highlighted the fluid boundary between the metropole and periphery.

3.5.2 Nakajima Atsushi’s “Landscape with an Officer: A Sketch in 1923”

Many of Nakajima’s works reflect his experiences of the heterogeneity of the Japanese empire. His 1929 short story “Junsa no iru fūkei: Senkyūhyaku nijūsan-nen no hitotsu no sukecchi” (巡査の居る風景——一九二三年の一つのスケッチ (“Landscape with an Officer: A Sketch in 1923”), published in Volume 322 of Kōyūkai zasshi, is narrated through the eyes of
Korean officer Chō Kyōei, who struggles in his role as a servant of the Japanese empire.

Nakajima paints a vivid picture of the unfair treatment of colonial subjects under Japanese rule. By setting the story in Keijō in 1923, he points to the massacre of Koreans after the Great Kanto Earthquake, demonstrating an awareness of and sympathy towards the awakening of a Korean national consciousness.

In one scene, the mingling of various people on a train in the city of Keijō not only forms a microcosm of colonial hybridity (a characteristic Nakajima stresses by depicting different kinds of shoes worn by Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, and Belarusians), but also creates a space in which tensions among different parties are heightened. On the streetcar, Officer Chō witnesses a dispute regarding the use of the word yeobo ヨボ between a poorly dressed Japanese woman and a young Korean man who appears to be a student.53

——折角、親切に腰かけなさい、いうてやったのに。——と女は不平そうに言って居だ。

——併し、何だヨボとは。ヨボとは一体何だ、——

——だから、ヨボさんいうてるやなかか、

——どっちでも同じことだ。ヨボなんて、

女には何にもわからないのだ。そして怪げんなそうな顔付をして、他人達の諒解を得ようとするかの様にあたりを見まわして、

——ヨボさん、席がいてるから、かけなさいて、親切にいふてやったのに何をおこつてんのや。 (Nakajima 1976b, 52)

“I was just being nice, asking you to sit!” the woman gtumbled.

53 Yobo ヨボ is a transliteration of the Korean word yeobo 여보, which in Korean is used to address someone who is close to the speaker. It has no particular meaning, and functions more or less like the English word ‘there.’ However, around the time when Korea was annexed by Japan, the word yeobo was transliterated and repurposed as the loan word yobo, which was used mainly by Japanese in the metropole as a derogatory term for ethnic Koreans.
“But why did you say ‘[yeobo]’? What was that supposed to mean?”

“I said ‘[yeobo-san].’”

“That doesn’t matter—either way you’re calling me a yeobo.”

The woman was completely lost. She looked around, perplexed, in an appeal for sympathy.

“All I said was ‘[Yeobo-san], there’s an empty seat here, so why don’t you sit down?’ Why do you have to be offended when I was just being nice?” (Nakajima 2013, 146–47)54

While inviting the Korean student to sit down, the woman uses a pejorative term to address him. She clearly knows the derogatory undertone of the word, but justifies her use of it by pointing out that she added the honorific suffix -san さん to it. Her invitation subtly indicates an underlying exclusion: the gesture of inviting the Korean student to sit down and the emphasis of her kindness in doing so ironically echoes the Japanese government’s colonial policy of assimilating putative foreigners. At the same time, her condescending tone and justification for using the derogatory term indicates the deep anxiety hidden behind such hybridity.

Nakajima’s subversion of power hierarchies is further evidenced by his negative portrayal of the Japanese woman: she is described as “dressed in shabby clothes” (somatsu na sugata 粗末な姿) and “clueless” (muchi 無智) in contrast to the Korean student, a “moderate protestor” (onken na kōgisha 穏健な抗議者) (Nakajima 2013, 146–47). This contrast of negative and positive depictions challenges the hierarchical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. Furthermore, the Japanese woman speaks with a Kansai accent rather than modern standard Japanese, the ‘national language’ (kokugo 国語) that was created along with the

54 Translation modified.
Japanese nation-state and had been used elementary textbooks since 1904 (Ōta 2006, 22–23). Through standardization, the once “grammatically and phonologically diverse, multivocal vernacular” of Japan evolved into “a unitary, prescriptive” national language (Kleeman 2003, 144). The importance of standard Japanese can be seen in its emphasis in the curriculum as a tool of character formation, particularly in the countryside and its colonies. As Komori points out, the nation-state’s choice of Tokyo dialect as the correct pronunciation of the national language produced a hierarchy between the local and the centre (Komori 1996, 310–11). When this centre/local hierarchy in Japan’s homeland was transferred to its colonies, where compulsory education of the recently formulated standard Japanese was at the core of its assimilation policy (Kleeman 2003, 122, 229), it became intertwined with the metropole/periphery dichotomy. The transfer of this linguistic hierarchy to the colonies produced new power relations that problematized the very hierarchy it worked to establish in the homeland. Thus, by contrasting the Japanese woman’s ‘local’ accent against the Korean student’s standard Japanese, Nakajima undermines the tired mode of power relations and presents a challenge to the homogeneity of the Japanese empire.

As demonstrated above, hierarchical colonial relations have always been volatile. In order to render them ‘natural,’ tropes of ‘modernity’ were frequently evoked, significantly contributing to Japan’s colonial discourse. Through their various representations of modernity, writers actively participated in discussions about Japan’s status as a modern nation, situating Japanese subjects as farther along the linear temporal scale of modernization than their colonized counterparts. However, within the colonial context, different sets of spatial power relations were often intertwined, complicating Japan’s already fractured modern identity and further challenging the diffusionist narrative of modernity.
Conclusion

It is clear that railways in both Japan and its colonies on the Asian continent played an important part in the transformation of Japan into a modern, imperial nation. The railway network not only helped reconstruct time and space in the metropole and unify the nation, but it also anchored Japan’s imperial mission. The textual representations of rails discussed in this chapter reflect on the ways in which trains and railway networks influenced the contours and textures of both cities and states in the modern period. The railway network also opened up new lands to settlement, and new resources to exploitation. Japan’s economic growth rate in the early twentieth century would not have been possible without its railway network linking the metropole and its colonies, enabling the transport of goods and resources while concealing their origins: people in Tokyo could enjoy a cosmopolitan life of affordable commodities without thinking about how this was complicit in the exploitation of the colonies. In the next chapter, I will discuss how certain commercial products constituted an important part of Japan’s modernity, and how their colonial origins have been similarly erased.
CHAPTER 4
The Discursive Space of Hygienic Modernity

Medical science was not simply an agent of modernization in Japan, but was itself thoroughly political, constituting one form of centralized power.

– Karatani Kōjin

Introduction

Previous chapters have examined how the representations of physical space, be it colonial space in Shanghai, rural space in Japan’s countryside, or liminal space on trains, helped to construct and challenge Japanese national identity, as well as Japanese modernity. This chapter will expand on these discussions of space in its physical forms by turning to the discursive space of modern hygiene.

During the nineteenth century, the construction of urban space was partially shaped by a discourse of hygiene. Hygiene was considered to be a sign of modernity in countries like Germany, France, and Britain, where it became a central concern in the transformation of urban space. The rhetoric of hygiene not only provided a tool for the consolidation of power and the creation of governmental systems, but also, by equating hygiene with progress and modernity, became a means of legitimizing empire and justifying colonial rule. The hierarchical narrative of

55 Karatani 1998, 111.
hygiene was thereby complicit with forms of domination and exclusion in both the metropole and the colonies.

In Japan, from the Meiji period, hygiene was increasingly deployed as a discourse to reveal the distance between Japan and ‘modernity’ as defined by Western criteria. The elimination of what was deemed to be ‘unhygienic’ was considered vital to securing Japan’s position as a modern nation-state and imperial power. The issue of hygiene thus became a crucial element in Japan’s literary narratives, as writers increasingly linked unhygienic behaviours with infectious diseases, and metaphorically with the health of the Japanese nation. Their works had an impact not only on the reconfiguration of physical urban space but also on common people’s public behaviour. By the early twentieth century, Japanese considered hygiene to be a cornerstone of urban modernity and a central marker of Japan’s superiority over the rest of Asia, justifying its imperial expansion. Tokyo is often the focus for discussions of hygiene in modern Japan, not only due to its status as Japan’s capital city, but more importantly because it was often placed under the gaze of both domestic intellectuals and foreigners as a showcase of Japanese modernity.

In this chapter, I will explore how texts by Mori Ōgai, Sōseki, Akutagawa, and Tanizaki were mobilized to imagine a healthy and homogeneous national community, and how the heterogeneity introduced in their texts at the same time challenged this construction. First, I will contextualize hygiene discourse and its relation to the concept of modernity by showing the complicity between the norms of modern hygiene and the construction of national identity. In order to examine hygiene discourse, I will analyze the scientific works of Mori Ōgai. I will then read Ōgai’s and Akutagawa’s literary texts related to hygiene, with an emphasis on the intersection of textual and historical networks, to demonstrate how the narrative of modern
hygiene was demarcated and simultaneously complicated by rejecting hierarchical power relations. Furthermore, revisiting Sōseki’s *Travels in Manchuria and Korea* and Tanizaki’s *Naomi*, I will also draw attention to one particular hygiene commodity: soap. By discussing the relationship between hygiene discourse, the production of soap in Japan’s colonies, and the marketing of soap in the metropole, I will show how the use of hygiene products such as soap became a path to enter a hygienic modernity imbedded with a repressed coloniality.

1. The Empire of Hygienic Modernity

In the twentieth century, the development of modern hygiene was taken for granted as a necessary and universal feature of progress. The concept of modern hygiene was one of the most symbolic characteristics of modern society. However, many social and historical approaches argue for the contingent roots of modern hygiene, as well as the complicity of hygienic practice with forms of domination and exclusion. Scholars such as Foucault provoked various re engagements with the social and political meanings of the process of hygienic modernization, and there are an increasing number of scholarly works that study the relations between modern hygiene and colonialism. Rather than suggesting that modern hygiene is necessarily invalid, those studies demonstrate how it played an essential part in sociopolitical and cultural movements that were intimately linked to ideologies of ‘the modern’ and ‘the nation.’ Furthermore, some scholars argue that modern hygiene partially originated in imperial expansion, as hygiene discourse had been heavily adopted by colonial projects. Japan, too, appropriated the discourse of hygiene in order to prove its legitimacy as an advanced modern nation at the turn of the twentieth century. This hygiene discourse was not only used to facilitate
the Japanese government’s effective governance of its homeland, but also used to justify its colonial projects in Asia.

1.1 Hygienic Modernity, Nation, and Empire

As scholars like Foucault have pointed out, new social knowledge does not simply respond to the given needs of a perceived society, but restructures the perceptions and needs of public and private participants. Considered the only solution to many major health problems, practices related to modern medical science became a prominent representation of modernity. The promotion of such practices also created new perceptions and new tastes. For instance, Tanizaki’s Sasameyuki 紺雪 (The Makioka Sisters, 1936–41) opens with one of the protagonists, Sachiko, wanting a vitamin B injection for beriberi, a detail demonstrating their modern lifestyle. Beriberi (kakke 脚気), which is caused by a vitamin B-1 deficiency, only began to be regarded as a disease along with the emergence of its treatment when Western medical practices became widely accepted in Japan. In early Japanese literature, kakke was instead considered a mark of gentility, caused by eating refined grains like polished rice. After its ‘discovery’ as a disease, the ability to treat it became associated with a modern status in the Japanese imagination. The treatment itself, such as the vitamin B injection mentioned in Tanizaki’s novel, became a symbol of modern life. In this sense, it is not the medical treatment but rather how it was imagined that played a key role in constituting modernity.

In the nineteenth century, hygiene emerged as a powerful discourse and was seen as a prerequisite for being modern, as it was thought to be an effective method for dealing with many health problems. The praise of modern hygiene’s superiority over other ‘traditional’ practices contributed to the creation of the discursive space of modernity. This became more obvious as
cities’ anxiety over regulating health increased drastically in the face of rapid industrialization and the massive influx of laborers from the countryside and Japan’s colonies. Modern hygiene promised a remedy that enabled a power structure to control and transform modern urban space. The appearance of modern urban space became increasingly connected to the health of its inhabitants. Meanwhile, the need to create a hygienic modern space reinforced the necessity of controlling cities’ social and physical environments by means of state institutions. In this way, hygiene discourse and state power “regularly reinforce[d] one another in circular process” to control the populace (Foucault 1995, 224).

The task of promoting health thus became less an exclusively individual responsibility and more a national cause, closely related to the construction of a modern nation-state and its citizens’ national identity. Hygiene discourse often associated uncleanliness not only with personal fault, but also national backwardness. A nation’s ability to manage public health became a basic criterion for determining the viability of a government. As Ruth Rogaski points out, the link between health and the nation undergirded the reformation of the Euro-American urban space in the nineteenth century—“the functioning of sewers, the salubrity of water, the banishment of odors” were deemed “hallmarks of urban modernity” (Rogaski 1999, 31). In other words, modern hygiene, combined with an assumption of cultural superiority, became necessary for the empowerment of the modern nation-state.

To the general public, notions of hygiene, aimed at producing a healthier populace for the benefit of the nation, offered a common ground for building a national identity. Used to rank races within a hierarchy of superior and inferior, modern hygiene was also complicit in justifying such projects as colonial expansion. As many Western observers considered the government administration of hygiene to be not only “a central emblem of modernity” but also “an elemental
characteristic that distinguished West from East,” the rise of state intervention in matters of health thus coincided with European imperial expansion (Rogaski 1999, 31). In this regard, modern hygiene was deployed as a seemingly universal standard of modernity—one that was nonetheless based on Western criteria—that justified the colonial expansion into and modernization of ‘unhygienic’ nations.

1.2 Hygiene Discourse in Japan

1.2.1 The Birth of Eisei and the Maintenance of Sovereignty

Eisei 衛生, the Japanese word used to describe the conception of modern hygiene and one of the keys to Japanese modernity, was coined by the leading Meiji medical doctor and statesman Nagayo Sensai 長与専斎 (1838–1902). In 1872, Nagayo served as a medical observer on the Iwakura Mission to the United States and Europe, where he perceived that state attention to health had become an essential cornerstone of governance. During the mission, he became exposed to the German concept of hygiene and hoped to find a Japanese word that could adequately translate European concepts of national health. In his 1895 memoir, Nagayo used a Chinese-inspired term, eisei (Ch. weisheng), to translate the German word for hygiene, Gesundheitspflege. The Chinese word weisheng 衛生 is from the chapter “Gengsang chu” 庚桑楚 of the ancient Daoist text Zhuangzi 莊子, and originally means ‘nourishing life.’ The character wei 衛 (Jp. ei) means ‘guard,’ and sheng 生 (Jp. sei) means ‘life.’ The term weisheng originates from a Chinese cosmology that was associated with a diverse regimen of “diet, meditation, [and] self-medication” (Rogaski 2004, 1), while the German word Gesundheitspflege mainly refers to “both the government management of the people’s health and the creation of hygienically disciplined citizens” (Johnston 1995, 179). This conspicuous difference shows that
the ancient term *eisei*, after becoming the translation of the newly transplanted concept of ‘hygiene,’ took on a radically different meaning. This redefinition of an ancient term is similar to Rogaski’s observation of changes that happened to the Chinese word *weisheng* around the same period, which shifted its meaning from a Chinese cosmology of individual practices to “encompass state power, scientific standards of progress, the cleanliness of bodies, and the fitness of races” (Rogaski 2004, 1).

The relatively easy acceptance of hygiene discourse in Japan can be explained both by pre-existing Japanese intellectual traditions and by the political circumstances of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Japan. The Meiji elite singled out ‘cleanliness’ as one of the specific features in their analyses of Japanese national character, particularly expressed in so-called *Nihonjinron* 日本人論 (Theories about the Japanese) works. *Nihonjinron* was first produced by *kokugaku* in the eighteenth century, and was revived in the late 1870s “to support the nation’s colonial agenda,” reaching its peak in the 1930s (Jones and Inouye 2017, 8). *Nihonjinron* focuses on issues of Japanese national and cultural characteristics, among which the most significant two are ‘national consciousness’ and ‘cleanliness.’ Almost all authors of *Nihonjinron* indicate that these two characteristics are inherent to the Japanese. By emphasizing cleanliness as an inherently Japanese trait, Meiji intellectuals were able to make the foreign nature of *eisei* ambiguous, if not invisible. At the same time, Japan also felt it was necessary to acquire a Western discourse of hygiene to maintain sovereignty when under pressure from Western colonial powers. Facing the threat of Western imperialism, Nagayo and other Meiji officials came to realize that the ability of a nation to compete in the world arena could be displayed through its clean streets, as well as the consciousness of hygiene and hygiene practices among the general public. Within the new global order, a country lacking proper modern hygiene
knowledge and practices was deemed backwards and thus incapable of maintaining sovereignty. In other words, achieving hygienic modernity had become a basic requirement for maintaining sovereignty.

A lack of hygiene became symbolically and socially viewed as a threat not only to individual health but to the health of the nation. The Japanese government categorized things ‘unhygienic’ as being of the past—things that could only be displayed among people who were not yet modern. In this way, a lack of hygiene was framed as an obstacle to the country’s progress in catching up with Western powers. Spatial differences were reconfigured into temporal differences, becoming an anachronism that had to be resolved. Beginning in the early Meiji period, the state encouraged the reform of public appearance and actions, or fūzoku kairyō (custom reform), in the name of progress. Wanting to emulate the West, Japan dissociated itself from its old customs, which were interpreted as being ‘unhygienic’ and thus in need of ‘reform.’ In an effort to inculcate modern hygienic values, traditions such as public nakedness were forbidden in the early 1870s as part of the process of ‘civilization and enlightenment’ (Gluck 1987, 184).

In this sense, the hygienic transformations that shaped Japan’s urban space during the Meiji period emerged in response to external pressure. Certainly, there is no question that the Japanese government’s extensive campaign to introduce hygiene discourse was also related to official concerns over the epidemic of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis in the early Meiji. However, the direct causes of the sudden tuberculosis epidemic—changes in living patterns that accompanied the rise of industrial capitalism, such as increased freedom of movement and bad working conditions (Karatani 1998, 104–106)—were ignored in official discourse, and instead the outbreak was attributed to the spread of the tubercle bacilli through unhygienic behaviours.
In this regard, hygiene discourse, more than a response to the needs of society, in fact created the need for modern hygiene by restructuring perceptions. The rapid hygienic transformation of the cityscape and contemporary customs in turn reinforced hygiene as a significant marker of modernity.

1.2.2 Hygiene Discourse and Japan’s Imperial Project

Hygiene discourse was not only a crucial element in the formation of the ‘modern’ Japanese nation-state, but also played a key role in Japanese imperialism at both the material and conceptual level. Meiji government officials such as Gotō Shinpei considered national hygiene to be a prerequisite for colonial expansion (Low 2010, 199). At the material level, it was felt that the promotion of hygienic thought and practices had contributed greatly to Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War, wherein “the Japanese soldier [was] drilled in the techniques of modern hygiene” (Bourdaghs 2003, 49). At the conceptual level, during its imperial expansion into Asia, the question arose as to how Japan-as-colonizer could distinguish itself from Asia-as-colonized, since this hierarchy could not be easily based on differences in physical appearance. Although scholars like Koyama Eizō 小山栄三 (1899–1983) insisted race was the key to Japan’s role as leader of a new Asian order and that ‘the study of race’ (jinshugaku 人種学) was necessary to support Japan’s colonial expansion in Asia, racial/ethnic divisions in the Japanese colonies were always ambiguous and contentious. Thus, a discourse of modernization such as hygiene was needed even more by Japan than its Western colonial counterparts to distinguish the hygienic ‘modern’ Japanese from the filthy ‘primitive’ colonial subjects. Both at the official level and in popular discourse, Japan positioned itself against a homogeneous, unhygienic colonial Other. In short, the justification for Japan’s discrimination against its Asian neighbours could not entirely
rely on the notion of racial superiority as in Western imperialism, and required discourses like hygiene to establish a colonial hierarchy.

Moreover, hygiene discourse was not only used as a tool to differentiate Otherness and solidify a hygienic Japanese national image, but was also used to implement colonial policies of control and assimilation. Hygienic projects were carried out in the colonies to prove the Japanese government’s capacity for colonial governance. For instance, Gotō Shinpei actively advocated for the creation of a public health network that would “‘join the dots’ between the capital and the colonial cities in the growing empire” (Low 2010, 195). After the 1910 annexation of Korea, as Michael Bourdaghs points out, the late Meiji period in particular saw colonial policy shift from defining Japan’s colonies as external properties towards their integration into Japan itself (Bourdaghs 2003, 71). Todd A. Henry (2005), in his examination of Japanese colonial policy in early colonial Seoul, explains that this discourse of assimilation was applied to hygiene in order to efficiently control colonial space and bodies. Henry also points out that these Japanese-led projects to sanitize the colonies were simultaneously being carried out in the metropole with regard to the urban poor (Henry 2005, 641). Hygiene discourse thus performed a kind of ‘cultural authority’ in the metropole and in colonies alike.

In his 2003 book on Shimazaki Tōson’s 島崎藤村 (1872–1943) Hakai 破戒 (The Broken Commandment, 1906), Michael Bourdaghs emphasizes that the hybridity of Japanese nationals in the metropole, which included the marginalized group known as burakumin 部落民 or eta 社多, further complicated hygiene discourse. Although some Japanese intellectuals such as

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56 The burakumin or eta were a marginal Japanese outcaste, whose occupations had social stigmas of filth (kegare 社れ) attached to them. In the feudal era, the outcaste were called eta, literally meaning “filthy mass.” In 1871 the
Kagawa Toyohiko 賀川豊彦 (1888–1960) tried to attribute the problem of *burakumin* to their different racial origins as Chinese or Korean (Fowler 2000, 13–16), which was echoed in Shimazaki’s *The Broken Commandment*, the boundary between the Japanese colonizer and its colonized Asian neighbours was still undoubtedly porous. Considering that historically Chinese and Korean immigrants to Japan had been of relatively high status, it is telling that Japanese intellectuals categorized *burakumin*, Chinese, and Koreans together at a time when Japan was expanding its colonial projects on the Asian continent (Fowler 2000, 17–18). The blurring of boundaries between the colonizer and the colonized produced an anxiety over the fluidity of Japanese identity, and there again emerged the need to identify Japan through its difference from various Others.

Hygiene discourse in particular provided an effective means for Japan to maintain its difference as a modern superior nation while also working towards assimilation. After the Japanese army seized the port of Dalian in April 1905 during the early stages of the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese separated their residential area from that of the Chinese to isolate the ‘filthy’ Chinese from ‘clean’ Japanese. Chinese businessmen and craftsmen were initially allowed to live within the Japanese residential area for practical purposes; however, in September of the same year, the Japanese colonial government forced more than 14,000 Chinese to vacate, purporting that their lack of hygiene would spread disease (Han 2008, 582–89). The tension between assimilating the colonized and maintaining differences from them also meant

identity of *eta* as a special caste was officially abolished, and the term *burakumin* was coined. By 1873 the general population had set them apart as the “new commoners” (*Shinheimin* 新平民).

57 In the novel, the *eta* protagonist Ushimatsu is specifically told by his father that their family was descended from runaway samurai, differentiating them from other *eta* whose ancestors “were foreign immigrants or castaways from China, Korea, Russia, and the nameless islands of the Pacific” (Shimazaki 1974, 9).
that colonial subjects could never fully escape the unhygienic characteristics ascribed to them. In this way, modern hygiene functioned as a crucial means for the colonial administration to both assimilate and exclude colonial Others.

2. Mori Ōgai and Hygiene Discourse

As hygiene discourse was so central to the construction of modernity, Meiji Japan saw an outpouring of writing on the topic. Mori Rintarō, better known as Mori Ōgai, was one of the most prominent advocates for reforming the Japanese nation in the name of eisei. In this section I will explore the implications of his multivalent views on hygiene by looking at both his scientific and literary works.

2.1 Mori Ōgai’s Scientific Works on Hygiene

Ōgai was born into a former samurai family in the remote castle town of Tsuwano. As the eldest son of a family that served as doctors to feudal lords during the Edo era, he was expected to carry on the family tradition. He thus studied Western medicine from Rangaku (Western learning) scholars, and later entered Tōkyō Igakkō (Tokyo Medical School, now University of Tokyo’s Faculty of Medicine). Upon graduation, he enlisted in the Japanese imperial army as a medical officer and was sent to imperial Germany to study military hygiene. From 1884 to 1888, he studied in Leipzig, Dresden, Munich, and Berlin under the guidance of

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58 Rangaku literally means ‘Dutch Learning.’ During the Edo period, as the Dutch trading post in Nagasaki was the only exception to Japan’s policy of sakoku (isolationism), Japanese people often learned about Europe through Dutch texts. The term later became synonymous with Western learning in general.
such famous scholars as Max von Pettenkofer (Bowring 1979, 15), the founder of experimental hygiene. Ōgai was one of the most prolific writers on hygiene in Meiji Japan, penning thousands of pages on eisei and contributing greatly to shaping the meaning of eisei in the late nineteenth century. His activities and writings helped clarify and define eisei as a cornerstone of the modern Japanese state, and helped to give eisei a central role in the formation of the Japanese empire.

As a part of the growing number of Japanese scholars who received academic training at German universities, Ōgai’s attitude towards eisei as a material and cultural marker of civilization and sovereignty was similar to that of Nagayo. While some Meiji officials acknowledged the crucial role that hygienic projects played in the process of modernization, they considered Japan to be inherently deficient in hygienic matters and that the hygienic enlightenment project was motivated externally by the coercive influence of the West. Ōgai, on the other hand, firmly believed that the modern hygienic reforms occurring in Japan were not an imitation of Western powers.

In Doitsu nikki 独逸日記 (German Diary, 1937), Ōgai mentions that Aoki Shūzō 青木周藏 (1844–1914), the Foreign Minister of Japan, had told him that it would be difficult to put what he had learned about hygiene into practice immediately since “discussions about hygiene are meaningless to people who go about with geta thongs between their toes” (Mori 1971, 82). Such an attitude was likely shared by Westerners who visited Japan at the time. In response to this remark, Ōgai questioned Western superiority and defended Japanese practices in an essay

59 German Diary is most likely a rewriting in Japanese of his original kanbun diary Zaidokuki 在德記 (Record of My Stay in Germany), chronicling his stay in Europe beginning on August 24, 1884. It was first published posthumously in 1937 in Iwanami’s Ōgai zenshū (Keene 1999, 190, 204; Brazell 1971, 78–79).

Ôgai’s stance is perhaps most evident in his response to what has become known as the Naumann Debate (Naumann ronsō ナウマン論争). Edmund Naumann (1854–1927) was a German geologist who had taught in Japan from 1875 to 1885. After returning to Germany, he gave a talk about Japan at the Annual Meeting of the Geological Society held in Dresden on March 6, 1886, which Ôgai attended. In his diary, Ôgai expressed surprise towards Naumann’s unfriendly feelings towards Japan. According to Ôgai, a central theme of Naumann’s talk was that Japan only realized their inferiority to Europe and attempted to progress due to external pressure, and that they had accepted Western civilization wholesale too quickly, rejecting their own traditions in the process (Keene 1999, 207). Although Ôgai was incensed by Naumann’s critique of Japan as being a poor imitator of the West, he did not confront him directly. On June 26 and 29, 1886, however, Naumann published a long article titled “Land und Leute der japanischen Inselkette” (“Land and People of the Japanese Island”) in the newspaper Allgemeine Zeitung, in which he criticizes some of Japan’s ‘unhygienic’ customs. Ôgai responded to Naumann’s argument by submitting a rebuttal to the same newspaper, published on December 29, 1886, under the title “Die Wahrheit über Nipon” (“The Truth about Japan”) (Fukumoto 2004, 123–24). 60 This debate was, as Katō Shūichi explains, “a confrontation and comprehension of Western modern culture and Japan’s cultural heritage since the Tokugawa period” (Kato 1991,

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60 Naumann responded in two more articles in Allgemeine Zeitung titled “Rintaro Mori’s ‘Wahrheit über Nipon’” (“Rintaro Mori’s ‘Truth about Japan’”) on January 10 and 11, 1887. Mori again offered a counter-argument titled “Noch einmal ‘the Truth about Japan’” (“Once Again, The Truth about Japan”) printed in Allgemeine Zeitung on February 1, 1887 (Fukumoto 2004, 123–24).
Ōgai’s response reveals his ambiguity towards Japanese westernization. Though he maintains that Japan’s process of westernization is necessary, rational, and natural, he also concedes that Naumann is correct about the superficiality of Japan’s adaptation of Western culture, arguing that Japan should not discard its own past wholesale. Ōgai explains that some of Japan’s traditions are not necessarily inferior, and that certain things such as urban planning and daily food consumption should follow Japan’s traditions instead of Western methods. Not only did he believe in the suitability of Japanese traditions for the country’s own development, but he supported his claims through his scientific research.

Ōgai argues elsewhere that contemporary Japan was on a par with, if not better than, the West in terms of hygiene. In 1888 he published a paper in Berlin concerning the problem of Japanese housing, which he wrote first in German and later translated into Japanese himself. In the article, Ōgai asserts that Western housing was not intrinsically better than that of Japan, as Japanese houses were suited to the Japanese climate for their superior ventilation and the excellent absorbing properties of wood. He concludes his article with such a comparison:

凡そ一都会の人の健康に適すると否とは其住民の死亡数にて明なる者なり、三年間の東京の死亡数を平均すれば二十四、四「プロミルレ」なり、是れ西洋大陸の平均数二十五、七「プロミルレ」より小にして之に優れること著明なり、其他小児死亡数は「ウッフェルマン」等の論に依るに大に家屋の制と相関す而東京にては二十六、五「プロセント」の数を獲たり之を龍動の二十五、五に比すれば劣れども之を柏林の三十乃至三十五、若くは民顕の四十に比すれば其優れること幾何ぞや。

Whether or not a city is suitable to people’s health can be judged by its mortality rate. During these past three years, the mortality rate in Tokyo is 24.4 per mil, which is lower than the average mortality rate in Europe of 25.7 per mil. In addition, child mortality, according to theories by Julius Uffelmann and others, is closely related to the housing standard. And the child morality in Tokyo is 26.5 percent, which, though worse than 25.5
percent in London, is much better than the 30-35 percent in Berlin and 40 percent in Munich. (Mori 1974c, 47)

By comparing detailed mortality rates in Tokyo and European cities, Ōgai persuasively argues the suitability of Japanese housing to its environment. Although he accepted the importance of hygiene as conceived and propagated in the West, his assessment of hygiene, for instance, in relation to urban housing statistics suggests that to some degree he separated the notion of ‘superior hygiene’ from that of ‘the superiority of the West.’ He appreciated the variety of customs and architecture produced by different natural environments, and believed Tokyo’s urban planning to be no worse than Europe’s on many counts, especially concerning hygiene standards. Thus, to Ōgai, the West did not provide an absolute model of scientific modernity.

Drawing on his extensive knowledge of the scientific background of hygiene discourse, Ōgai also noted that Japan’s hygiene practices were as good as or better than those of the West, a perspective supported by later research. It has been pointed out that sanitation in Tokyo through the mid-nineteenth century was indeed better than in the West, as it possessed an efficient water supply and waste disposal method that had been passed down from the Edo period (Henley 1997, 104–105). As for personal hygiene, Ōgai mentions that the Japanese bathed more often than Europeans before the early modern period due to the humid weather. This has also been proven true, as regular bathing was not an important part of Western culture until the nineteenth century (Joshi and Tewari 2003, 1261), whereas in Japan bathing had already been a widespread custom by the eighteenth century, as evidenced by the popularity of the public bathhouse (ukiyo-buro), which, as discussed in Chapter 1, was a symbol of Edo culture and continued to thrive during the Meiji period.

Ōgai’s contributions to hygiene discourse show that at this time “Japan was as involved in the production of this new form of knowledge as any nation” (Bourdaghs 2003, 51). His
debate with Naumann was thus likely motivated by a desire to refute the European sense of Japanese inferiority vis-à-vis the West, and to contextualize his country’s situation for a European audience who was mostly ignorant about Japan. What is perhaps even more significant is that Ōgai’s research draws into question hygiene’s Western roots in a way that enables us to problematize the ahistoricity of hygiene discourse. For example, in his Berlin notes “Eindrücke” (“Impressions,” 1887), Ōgai reveals that he is interested in the fact that modern European medicine has its source in Arabic medicine (Bowring 1979, 23).61 His attitude towards this is clearly expressed in his 1889 article, “Nihon igaku no mirai wo toku” (A Treatise Promoting the Future of Japanese Medicine), in which he says, “Medicine is neither Western nor Japanese. Medicine is international and there is only one way to achieve this nirvana, that is research” (Mori 1974b, 170). In this regard, his challenge to the equation of modernization and westernization rejects the idea of modernity within a singular, Western perspective. The conclusions he drew from his scientific study of hygiene thus put Western powers’ absolute superiority into question.

Ōgai’s emphasis on hygienic modernity set the tone for his efforts in reconstructing Japanese urban space. Upon his return to Japan in September 1888, he assumed a high rank as a medical doctor in the Japanese army, first becoming a senior surgeon in 1888, then Surgeon General after participating in the Sino-Japanese War, and finally head of the Bureau of Medical Affairs at the Ministry of War in 1899 (Reichert 2006, 199). During this time, he published

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61 Along the same lines, Tanizaki in his 1933 essay *In Praise of Shadows* (In’ei raisan 陰翳礼讃, 1933) offers a much more progressive attitude in questioning Western standards of hygiene. In this piece, he is critical of the Western divide between “clean” and “unclean.” He considers the Japanese toilet as “a place of spiritual repose,” and installing Western sanitary facilities in the toilet destroys all affinity with the “beauties of nature” (Tanizaki 1977, 3, 5).
several scientific articles in which he advocated for the concept of *eisei*, such as “Joshi no eisei” (Women’s Hygiene,” 1889), “Eisei tojō no ki” (A Record of Hygienic Cities,” 1889), and “Kōshū eisei ryakusetsu” (A Brief Outline of Public Hygiene,” 1890). In 1889, he started two medical journals of his own, *Eisei shinshi* (New Journal of Hygiene) and *Iji shinron* (New Medicine), launched in March and December respectively, which were then merged the following year into the journal *Eisei ryōbyōshi* (Journal of Hygiene and Treatment, 1890–94). There is no doubt that Ōgai made a significant contribution to the promotion of modern hygiene in Meiji Japan, and was greatly responsible for its rapid adoption in the Japanese empire.

Following the failure of Rokumeikan diplomacy, which dashed Japan’s attempts at gaining international recognition as a modern nation through the construction of Western-style architecture, Ōgai, based on his extensive knowledge of European cities, wrote a number of articles on Japanese housing and city planning from the viewpoint of hygiene. He focused on issues like water supply, sewage services, and urban sanitation. As demonstrated by the title of one of his most important articles, “Isn’t City Renovation Basically a Hygiene Problem?” (Shiku kaisei wa hatashite eiseijō no mondai ni arazaruka? 市区改正ハ果シテ衛生上ノ問題ニ非サルカ, 1889), Ōgai believed that urban modernization should primarily be concerned with hygiene. Hygiene was thus a central term through which Ōgai delineated modernity in Japan’s urban space. In his scientific texts, he explains how *eisei* plays a crucial role in transforming landscapes, and made efforts to provide precise ways of producing a more hygienic urban environment.

*Eisei* also played a significant role in Ōgai’s participation in Japan’s wars of colonial
expansion. During the First Sino-Japanese War, Ōgai was sent to Manchuria as the head of the Japanese army’s medical services. His scientific research and reports from the field repeatedly emphasize how hygiene was key to Japan’s military success in Asia. Reiterating his hygienic diet reforms based on his laboratory work in Germany, he argued that traditional Japanese foods provided the best possible diet for the Japanese Army, since they were ideally suited to the Japanese physique and far easier to prepare and carry while on the march (Bowring 1998, 646).

When Ōgai returned from the war in 1897, he published a treatise entitled *Eisei shinron* 衛生新論 (*A New Treatise on Hygiene*), later retitled *Eisei shinpen* 衛生新編 (*A New Compilation on Hygiene*). It relied partially on statistics acquired during the war and dealt with a wide range of hygiene issues related to urban space and housing reconstructions, the goal being to popularize public health and reform Japanese cities.

Given his combination of German scientific education and connections to military authority, it is not surprising that Ōgai’s works on hygiene made a significant contribution to hygiene discourse in Japan. While most of his scientific works about hygienic modernity were still relatively discipline-bound and mostly circulated and read by medical professionals and bureaucrats, these ideas would also be processed and mass consumed through the press, radio, and advertising, as I will discuss later. For Ōgai, hygiene was a crucial element in the definition of modernity, one that was not simply imported from Europe but also had origins in Japan. He was not convinced that compliance with Western hygiene standards were markers of modernity. This conviction brings to the fore the domination and exclusion involved in the new discourse of (Western) modernity, opening a site for the subversion of such a narrative. In this sense, Ōgai’s understanding of modernity was established on the basis of hybridity from the very beginning, which was then developed in his literary works later.
2.2 Mori Ōgai’s Literary Works and Reflections

Ōgai’s career as a novelist began after his return from Germany. In 1890, he published the short story “Maihime,” based on his experiences and observations while studying in Germany, in the journal Kokumin no tomo 国民之友 (The Nation’s Companion). The story follows Ōta Toyotarō, a young Japanese man studying in Berlin, and the struggles he faces when he is forced to choose between his German lover Elise and his career, social status, and homeland. The short story functions as a kind of narrative reversal of the Orientalist novel Madame Chrysanthème by Pierre Loti (whose work I touched upon in Chapter 1), which was published three years before “Maihime.” While Loti’s narrative tells of a French officer who abandons his Japanese geisha wife when he returns to his home country, “Maihime” subverts this stereotype, depicting instead a Japanese student who eventually abandons his pregnant German lover. Through this reversal of roles, this story puts into question the stereotypical power structure of the West over the East.

Ōgai’s stay in Germany coincided with its emergence as a modern nation, during which time Germany was seen as a model for Japan to follow in its own modernization. “Maihime” begins with the narrator walking down the Unter den Linden boulevard, expressing his awe at the brilliance of Berlin, “this most modern of European capitals” (Mori 1975b, 152). From Toyotarō’s perspective, evidence of modernity is revealed everywhere along the main thoroughfare. However, the stereotypical dichotomy of a progressive modern Europe instructing a stagnant Japan does not repeat itself in this story, as demonstrated by Toyotarō’s use of proper high German and his correction of Elise’s working-class accent. Similar to Japan assuring its status of a modern nation-state to justify its colonial rule over other Asian countries, for Toyotarō, it is not race but rather his status as a modern, civilized man that determines his
dominant position in this “teacher-pupil relationship” (Mori 1975b, 157). Moreover, Germany’s positioning as a model for Japan to follow was not simply due to its being “the most modern” (Mori 1975b, 152) nation in Europe, but because the German state was even younger than Meiji Japan, having just been formed after unification in 1871, immediately after the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. The relatively recent origins of both nations and even more recent emergence of the two capitals, Berlin and Tokyo, made them comparable. The development the young German state had achieved impressed the members of the Iwakura Mission so much that the country was set as a model for Japan’s modernization.

However, German modernity was ambiguous as well. Its lingering sense of cultural inferiority to French culture, even after defeating France militarily, led to its desire to rebuild Berlin using Paris as a model. Berlin’s Kaisergalerie, opened in 1873 and a premier symbol of Berlin’s status as the capital of the German empire, was built in emulation of the Paris arcades (Goebel 2003, 1286). The complex relationship between Germany and France reveals the unevenness and multiple modes of modernity within the geography of ‘the West.’ Ōgai, who was certainly aware of this historical background, must have been inspired by Germany’s negotiation with French culture when considering Japan’s own difficulties negotiating a European diffusionist discourse of modernity. Therefore, it is no surprise that Ōgai was not convinced of Japan’s status as a latecomer, or as intrinsically deficient to the West in terms of its modern status.

Ōgai’s literary writing not only undermined the narrative of Western modernity but also deviated from the national narrative of Tokyo’s modernity. His 1910 short story “Fushinchū” (Under Reconstruction) takes place in contemporary Tokyo, and opens with the
protagonist Watanabe entering a restaurant in a Western-style hotel in Ginza to meet his ex-girlfriend, a German singer:

It had just stopped raining when Councillor Watanabe got off the tram in front of the Kabuki playhouse. Carefully avoiding the puddles, he hurried through the Kobiki district in the direction of the Department of Communication.

[...]

[His shoes became quite muddy, so he carefully cleaned them, and then opened the glass door and went inside. Inside, he found a wide passage. Here it was similar to the outside, and there was a pile of little cloths for wiping one’s shoes, and next to these a palm fibre doormat. While thinking, “there are others like me who came wearing dirty shoes,” he again cleaned his shoes.]\(^ {62} \) (Mori 1994b, 149)

The author gives a prolonged description of the muddy road and draws the reader’s attention to its uncleanness by emphasizing several times that the protagonist cleans his shoes. The description of the unclean road in Ginza Bricktown—which, as observed earlier, was the showcase of Tokyo’s modernity—suggests that the project of metropolitan hygienic improvement was ongoing and far from complete. As he waits for his ex-girlfriend to arrive, Watanabe notes the ill-assorted mixture of Eastern- and Western-style decorations in the restaurant, and observes “a row of wooden buildings” competing with a massive red brick structure from the window (Mori 1994b, 159). These details all contribute to the protagonist’s conclusion that the city—and ultimately Japan—are still “under reconstruction” (Mori 1994b, 149, 152) as the story’s title indicates. In much the same way that he demonstrates the hybridity within the European empires in “Maihime,” here Ōgai is able to express the unevenness that characterizes Japan’s modernization of its own capital city.

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\(^ {62} \) Translation modified.
Ōgai’s reflection on Western superiority is also apparent in his 1911 semi-autobiographical memoir “Mōsō” 妄想 (“Daydreams,”), which concerns a fictive narrator who returns from Germany to Japan. The narrator-protagonist defends Japan’s customs of city planning, spelling, and diet to his friends, who propose to westernize those aspects of Japan. Through the narrator, who obviously echoes the author himself, Ōgai clearly expresses his opinion that “Western attitudes are [not] always the right ones” (Mori 1994a, 171). When his friends suggest that the Japanese eat meat instead of rice and fish, echoing the Meiji government’s official promotion of Western clothing and meat-eating during the ふぞく花柳 campaign mentioned earlier the narrator-protagonist argues that the Japanese diet is more suitable for the Japanese physique. Nevertheless, the fact that Ōgai needed to defend and rationalize Japanese customs by complying with Western scientific discourse also reveals to an extent his complicity with the West’s coercive role in Japan’s modernizing process (LaMarre 1997, 62).

3. The Ambiguity of Hygienic Hierarchy in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s *Travels in China* and “Christ in Nanking”

As discussed earlier, *eisei* not only played a key role in the construction of the Japanese nation-state, but was also mobilized during Japan’s imperial expansion to distinguish Japan from its Asian neighbours. The Japanese empire, like many countries in Europe, had to confront the “persistent fear of dissolution against the background of a broadly heterogeneous population” (Hill 2002, 367). Japan’s imperial expansion in East Asia intensified Japan’s need to differentiate itself from its racially indistinguishable colonial subjects. Moreover, unable to fully assure its cultural superiority over countries like China, the colonial hierarchy between Japan and its Asian
neighbours was often ambiguous and contentious. The Japanese government thus had to often mobilize the notion of modernity to legitimize itself as a qualified colonizer. This included utilizing hygiene as a marker of modernity, both in official propaganda and popular discourse, to distinguish a clean ‘modern’ Japanese body from a homogeneous colonial Other that was associated with negative values such as ‘unhygienic,’ ‘sick,’ and ‘backwards.’

Here I would like to revisit Akutagawa’s *Travels in China*, in which, as discussed in Chapter 1, the Chinese are frequently depicted as ‘filthy.’ Akutagawa’s “first glimpse” of China in the travelogue describes his disembarkation onto the dock at the outskirts of Shanghai’s International Settlement, where he is touched by rickshaw drivers with dirty hands. His description of the rickshaw drivers as “filth incarnate” (Akutagawa 1997, 12) echoes Sōseki’s description of Chinese coolies in his travelogue *Mankan*. Akutagawa describes in detail the unsanitary and foul-smelling parts of Shanghai inhabited by the Chinese, where people carelessly dispose of their own human waste into the city’s lake, giving the water a “sickly green” colour (Akutagawa 1997, 17). Even the comparison made between Chinese and Japanese beggars revolves around hygiene: Chinese beggars were “equipped with that kind of supernatural filth,” a level of uncleanness that Japanese beggars could never rise to (Akutagawa 1997, 18). In drawing such comparisons, Akutagawa seems to claim that the terrible hygiene of the Chinese in Shanghai was intrinsic to their national character. As such, he is able to construct a cultural difference through hygiene, one that was necessary to consolidate the concept of ‘Japaneseness’ in the face of its colonial neighbours. In this sense, the characteristic of the Japanese as being ‘clean’ does not exist outside hygiene discourse, but rather is enabled by it.

Not only does the text focus on the unhygienic habits of the Chinese, but it also imagines the Chinese as secretly carrying invisible pathogens:
The rickshaw first passed through an extremely primitive slum with only huts jammed together. [...] Everywhere inside and outside those huts, men and women were wandering around with ghastly looking faces. Gazing at the flourishing reeds over the roof of the hut, I once again felt as if I were going to get infected with smallpox.

“How about that dog?”

“How about that dog?”

“Dogs with no fur at all are indeed unusual. But also creepy.”

“They all suffer from syphilis. I heard that they were infected by coolies or something.”

(Akutagawa 1935e, 150–51)

Here colonial bodies are described as sources and transmitters of contagious diseases like smallpox or syphilis, while Japanese, represented by the author himself, are imagined as innocent victims, constantly threatened by the contamination of the unhygienic Other. The remark that dogs are also diseased functions metonymically to underscore the uncleanness of the environment. The enthusiasm expressed by writers like Akutagawa in portraying the filthiness of Chinese people shows how the colonizer both rejected the filthy colonial Other by blocking physical contact, but also eagerly sought visual confirmation of the Other’s abject difference in order to imagine the ‘clean’ self through its negation in the Other. Taking into consideration Akutagawa’s own vulnerable and diseased body (he required hospitalization due to pleurisy upon arrival in Shanghai and was eventually afflicted by gastroenteritis upon his return to Japan), his emphasis on hygiene reveals an anxiety towards what ought to be overcome or repressed, or “the abject that returns repeatedly to disturb identity” (Anderson 2006, 206). Since to disperse this anxiety the rejected Other could “never be radically excluded from the colonialists’ own
"embodiment” (Anderson 2006, 129), it is no surprise that writers like Akutagawa would be obsessed with describing the filthiness of imperial Japan’s Others.

Contagion has often been used in literature both literally and metaphorically. In *Travels in China*, unhygienic colonial bodies are repeatedly described as a threat to both the health of the people and the nation. Hygiene is used in this way to justify Japanese reform: Japan’s ability to administrate hygiene projects gave it the right and duty to bring modern hygiene to unhygienic Asian societies as part of a ‘civilizing mission.’ Hygiene, as a site of modernity, became an important articulation of the distinctions drawn between the colonizer and the colonized. It was not only conducive to Japan’s colonial expansion but also helped reassure writers and their audiences of Japan’s hygienic and thus ‘modern’ identity.

However, Akutagawa’s perspective towards hygiene discourse is often complicated by his contestation of the narrative of hygienic modernity. The following passage from the section “The West,” discussed in Chapter 1, in which two interlocutors exchange questions and answers, can help illustrate Akutagawa’s complicated position on hygiene and modernity. After one of the speakers, simply called “Answer,” claims that “just because it’s Western doesn’t mean that it’s advanced” (Akutagawa 1997, 26), the other speaker, “Question,” responds:

**Question:** But isn’t it nice to find so many foreigners when you walk along the road? You can’t find that in Japan either.

**Answer:** Now that you mention it, I did see a foreigner without a nose the other day. It really would be difficult to find a foreigner like that in Japan.

**Question:** Oh, that? He was the first one to don a mask during the flu epidemic. Anyway, all the Japanese you see on the street look awfully out of place compared to Westerners.

**Answer:** You mean those Japanese dressed in Western clothes?

**Question:** Wouldn’t it be worse if they were dressed in Japanese garments? Japanese folks don’t much think about their skin being seen by other people.
Answer: If they think of anything at all, it’ll be something salacious. For that reason, the hermit of Kume fell from the sky.

Question: In that case, are Westerners salacious?

Answer: Of course, in that respect. Customs unfortunately belong to the majority. So Japanese, too, will soon begin to think that walking outdoor barefoot is beneath them. In short, things are becoming more salacious than ever, don’t you think? (Akutagawa 1997, 26)

“Question” defends the “foreigner without a nose” as “the first one to don a mask during the flu epidemic,” adding that all the Japanese on the street “look awfully out of place compared to Westerners.” By claiming that the Japanese appear to be “out of place” when compared to this Westerner’s display of modern scientific knowledge of germ theory, “Question,” via the lens of the West, connects hygiene to ‘civilization.’ In the early twentieth century, the emergence of a germ theory of disease, which prompted such hygienic actions as donning masks to prevent contagion, not only became a platform to showcase the nation’s modern scientific consciousness, but also often associated diseases with the inherently ‘unhygienic’ racial habits of indigenous populations (Anderson 1996, 113). “Question” also claims that dressing “in Japanese garments” is worse than “Western clothes,” and criticizes “Japanese folks [who] don’t much think about their skin being seen by other people.” These opinions conform directly to the fūzoku kairyō movement discussed earlier, which banned such traditions as public nakedness as contrary to ‘civilization and enlightenment’ (Gluck 1987, 184) in an effort to inculcate Western hygienic values. The hegemonic vision of hygiene as defined by this modernization discourse was widely applied to the Japanese people to ‘reform’ their old customs.

However, Akutagawa then undermines the sophistication of Western ‘customs’ banning bare skin by suggesting that the very mindset that sees bare skin as scandalous comes from the Westerner’s own salacious thoughts towards bare skin: that bare skin is not in itself salacious, but made so by salacious thoughts. In this sense, by revealing that certain customs are only
deemed ‘improper’/‘unhygienic’ through Western interpretations of such behaviours, Akutagawa challenges the universally recognized Western discourse of modern hygiene by exposing its subjectivity and its hidden (salacious) motives. As such, he resists identifying the Japanese as inferior to their Western counterparts in Shanghai.

Akutagawa’s subversion of the modern hygiene narrative is not only limited to the binary structure of Japan and the West, but extends also to the West and China. His writings simultaneously construct and deconstruct power relations between the colonizer and the colonized. For instance, contagion that unsettles the narrator of *Travel in China* can also work to unsettle the boundaries between clean/unclean, colonizer/colonized, and boundaries that in practice are always ‘contaminated’ by the abject Other. In “Nankin no Kirisuto” 南京の基督 (“Christ in Nanking,” 1920), for example, Akutagawa challenges the stereotypical view of disease as being transmitted from the ‘savage’ colonial body to the ‘innocent’ colonizer’s body, thus undermining the divisions and power structure that sustain imperial projects.

“Christ in Nanking” (1920) is a response to Tanizaki’s “A Night in Qinhuai” (1919), both of which depict the riverside of Qinhuai Canal in Nanking, a famous pleasure quarter from ancient times and a well-known topos in Chinese literature. The protagonist of Akutagawa’s story, Chin-hua, is a fifteen-year-old prostitute of the Qinhuai riverside and a sweet and gentle Christian. Chin-hua contracts syphilis, and is told that the only cure is to give it back to a customer. She refuses to transmit the disease, until a half-Japanese, half-American rascal, who she believes to be Jesus Christ, tricks her into bed. At the end of the story, the girl is healed, while the half-Japanese, half-American man contracts syphilis and goes mad. In contrast to Tanizaki’s “A Night in Qinhuai” in which the Qinhuai riverside is portrayed as covered in “urine or cooking oil” and full of prostitutes everyone of whom “looked unclean, just like a rat”
(Tanizaki 2016a, 94, 103), Akutagawa’s narrative, despite its depiction of the place where Chin-hua receives her clients as dusty and her contracting of syphilis, by no means portrays its protagonist as dirty.

As female prostitutes are often depicted as powerless, they can be discursively linked to colonized people. From the late nineteenth century, as scientific knowledge of sex spread in Japan, medical experts and government officials developed a concern that prostitutes were endangering public hygiene (Oharazeki 2013, 199), which led to representations of prostitutes in literature as the main source of venereal diseases. In Akutagawa’s story, the disease is indeed transmitted from the native body of the Chinese prostitute to the half-Japanese, half-American man, but the young prostitute is presented as a victim, while the foreign man is a predator. Akutagawa writes that Chin-hua rejects the man many times even after his offer of ten dollars, “an enormous sum for a prostitute” (Akutagawa 2011, 185). This is not because he is a foreigner, as it was “not unusual for Chin-hua to spend a long night with a foreigner” (Akutagawa 2011, 184), but rather because of her disease. She eventually does take the foreign customer, however, but only because she believes him to be Jesus Christ. Later, the narrator reveals what he knows about the man:

I know that foreigner. He’s a mixed-blood, half Japanese and half American. His name was something like George Murray. He bragged to a friend of mine who’s a correspondent for Reuters that he’d paid for a night with a Christian whore in Nanking and that he’d slipped away while she was peacefully sleeping. […] He claimed he was a reporter for an English-language newspaper, but he was a perverse fellow, not at all in keeping with his good looks. Maybe it was being infected with this woman’s disease that ultimately made him go mad from a nasty case of syphilis. But even now this woman believes that this contemptible half-bred was Jesus Christ. Should I enlighten her? Or should I say nothing and leave her forever to dreams that are no better than an old European legend . . . ?

When Chin-hua finished her story, […] with deliberate zeal he posed the ultimate question: “Really? How unusual! But . . . but have you never been sick since then?”
“No. Not once,” Chin-hua answered without any hesitation, her face glowing as she crunched on the melon seeds in her mouth. (Akutagawa 2011, 189)

In addition to what Chin-hua tells the narrator about the man “haggling with gestures and body movements” that night (Akutagawa 2011, 185), most of the information given about “that foreigner” is directly from the narrator’s internal monologue at the end of the story, including the fact that he is “half Japanese and half American.” Compared with the narrator’s portrayal of the “mixed-blood” foreigner as “perverse” and “contemptible,” he shows sympathy for Chin-hua. He tells that she only turns to prostitution to help her poor father, yet “sadly” contracted syphilis, and does not get better even after keeping herself confined and trying remedies such as mercury chloride pills and calomel (Akutagawa 2011, 182). In particular, the author emphasizes that the young Chinese prostitute stubbornly refuses to take on any clients, even after she was told that she would be healed if she passes on her disease to a customer, knowing that it will harm the client’s health. At the very end, the narrator highlights Chin-hua’s body becoming ‘clean’ again as she is healed from the disease, saying her face is “glowing” (Akutagawa 2011, 189). By contrast, the “mixed-blood” rascal goes mad from a nasty case of syphilis, which the narrator deduces was transmitted by Chin-hua. In this way, the Chinese prostitute Chin-hua appears to transgress and blur the supposedly firm and closed boundary of a diseased colonial body and that of the healthy colonizer.

Boundaries are further complicated by Chin-hua’s depiction as a devout Christian. Christian missionaries were always closely intertwined with colonial administrators and military forces in European colonialism. As hygiene discourse was often deployed metaphorically in accordance with a Eurocentric model of diffusionism, both evil and disease were imagined as being transmitted from the East to the West, from non-Christian to Christian. However, in Akutagawa’s story, there is a complex counter-diffusion: disease is being transmitted from an
innocent Chinese Christian girl to an evil half-Japanese, half-American who she believes to be Jesus Christ. The author’s description of Chin-hua’s dream of having been saved by Jesus Christ as “no better than an old European legend” (Akutagawa 2011, 189) further demonstrates his reversal of European diffusionism, creating a heterogeneity that troubles the simple dichotomy of the clean, healthy colonizer versus the dirty, diseased colonized.

Furthermore, the strongest proponents of the anti-prostitution campaign in 1910s Japan were Protestant reformers. They often evoked national rhetoric and the modernity discourse, declaring that prostitution was a custom to be discarded in the period of modernization, and that women had to liberate themselves from this “barbaric custom of the past” to reach the same status as women in “enlightened American and European countries” (Oharazeki 2013, 185). In this context, Akutagawa’s portrayal of the prostitute as a “pious” (Akutagawa 2011, 182) Christian further shows his ambiguity towards the process of westernization. As a Christian, the protagonist, like her “small brass crucifix” bearing a cheaply carved Christ (Akutagawa 2011, 181), functions as a subversive ‘colonial mimicry’ of the West—compounded even more by the fact that she is a Christian in a line of work considered to be a “barbaric custom of the past.” Nevertheless, she is the one who is depicted as gentle, honest, pure, and ultimately clean, while the mixed-race man’s contraction of syphilis is framed as just punishment. In this regard, the story, on one level represents the stereotype of disease as transmitted from the colonized body to the colonizer’s body, yet it also simultaneously undermines this structure. The permeable boundary of clean and filthy in Akutagawa’s “Christ in Nanking” not only provides an alternate narrative to the notion of a clean national body, but also challenges the neat borders sustaining the hegemonic construct of Western/Japanese modernity.
4. Soap, Empire, Text, and Image

4.1 Soap and Hygienic Modernity

The global dissemination of hygiene discourse in the late nineteenth century was not merely a scientific process, but more importantly a fundamental aspect of sociocultural movements intimately linked to concepts of ‘the modern’ and ‘the nation.’ Hygiene discourse, imperial economies, and modernity were intertwined and facilitated each other. As a crucial element in the formulation of modernity, ‘hygiene’ was not only frequently evoked in conjunction with the reconstruction of physical spaces, but also used to regulate personal behaviours in order to create a healthier populace for the nation. The penetration of hygiene discourse into the private sphere was implemented through methods such as government propaganda, school textbooks, public lectures, and, perhaps most importantly, hygiene commodities. With their status as symbolic representations of hygienic modernity, hygiene commodities were at the centre of modern consciousness, helping to overcome perceived deficiencies in hygiene, as well as to create new ‘modern’ tastes.

Without the popularization of such hygiene commodities in both the metropole and the colonies, hygiene discourse would not have been able to penetrate into everyday life so profoundly and so quickly. Soap, in particular, was one of the most influential material products of modern hygiene discourse. Invested with fetish powers, it played an important role in how different agents constructed hygienic modernity. As discussed earlier, writings about hygiene by Meiji intellectuals such as Mori Ōgai often appeared in scientific journals and official reports, but were still relatively inaccessible to the general public, who did not have the means or education to read these materials. In contrast, soap, as a mundane and affordable product, could be marketed in a way that disseminated hygiene discourse on a much broader scale. In this sense,
soap enabled the public to absorb institutionalized notions of a healthy body and reinforced the self-understanding of hygienic modernity.

Soap was not merely valued for its ability to clean the body, but also celebrated for its almost magical powers to morally purify, as dirt was equated with disorder and moral impurity. This is particularly true when European colonizers evoked soap as a metaphor for purification, mobilizing it to subjugate ‘dirty’ colonial subjects and to legitimize the violent enforcement of European cultural values (McClintock 1994, 145). While initially soap was mainly promoted for its health benefits, over time this emphasis was gradually shifted towards its cultural value as a signifier of ‘modernity.’ Soap increasingly promised consumers an imagined status of hygienic modernity, not just by cleaning away dirt but also by producing new desires for a modern status that could be achieved through consuming everyday hygiene products. In this sense, soap consumption became a fetish “with spiritual enlightenment and imperial grandeur” that transformed “nature (dirt, waste and disorder) into culture (cleanliness, rationality and industry)” (McClintock 1994, 137, 141).

As discussed earlier, hygiene discourse was invaluable to Japan’s colonizing project as an ideological means of managing the threatening intermixture of races and social ranks, especially in the colonies. Facing these forms of disorder, soap use became a convenient means of establishing distinctions of race, culture, and class. This symbolic function of soap also worked in the metropole, where using or not using soap was used to differentiate class and social groups. This was particularly the case since soap was initially a precious and expensive commodity. Though it became cheaper and more accessible to much of the public over time, it preserved its function as a symbol of conspicuous middle-class consumption. People could feel as if they were achieving a certain modern status if they could purchase soap. In this regard, consuming soap
was a performative act that created an imagined space of modernity and provided legitimacy to middle-class beliefs and values.

Soap was introduced to Japan by Portuguese traders in the mid-sixteenth century. Commonly known as savon サボン, only a small sector of Japanese society used soap, mainly for medicinal purposes, while the majority of the Japanese population used things like rice bran, pumice, and loofahs for washing. It was not until late 1880s when Proctor and Gamble began to distribute mass-produced, higher-quality commercial soaps that soap began to appeal to a larger body of Japanese consumers. By the turn of the century, as a result of the promotion of hygienic modernity, changing conceptions about the body and social groups, and the intensification of foreign imports, soap was transformed from a luxury product to a mass-market consumer good in Japan (Weisenfeld 2004, 544–45). Soap consumption thus began to intertwine with a desire to achieve modern status, especially for the burgeoning urban middle-class, whose unstable identity could easily be confirmed through the purchase of a foreign-imported bar of soap. The popularization of soap in turn also consolidated the belief in the value of modern hygiene as a concept.

4.2 Hygienic Modernity, Soap Production, and Text

Within the rhetoric of hygienic modernity, the consumption of soap was considered to be a sign of civilization. Soap was a relatively scarce item in the early nineteenth century, not only in Japan but also in the West. However, by the turn of the twentieth century, soap output soared, and it was redefined from a luxury item to a necessity of everyday life (Weisenfeld 2004, 545). This increase in soap output both in the West and in Japan stemmed largely from the imperial economy, which was mediated through a complex system of colonial production and power relations. In Japan’s case, it was closely related to the soybean industry, one of the primary
agricultural industries of Manchuria. Cheap resources from the colony stimulated an increase in soap production, which in turn reinforced the heightened attention to cleanliness and helped form the fetishization of soap. In short, high-quality commercial soap would not have become affordable for the general public in the Japanese homeland without the cheap raw materials and coerced colonial labour from its colonies.

The popularization of hygiene discourse in Japan was closely associated with its colonial projects, as it was mobilized to form a distinction between colonizers and the colonized that helped solidify Japanese national identity. The formation of Japanese national identity through an emphasis on ‘cleanliness’ as a national characteristic is echoed in Sōseki’s Mankan. The text often uses pejorative terminology to express the narrator’s feelings of repulsion towards Chinese people, with his general impression being that they are ‘filthy.’ This characterization as unhygienic also extends to drinking water, tableware, and local shops. For example, Sōseki describes Mukden as a city where the ground “had for countless centuries been saturated with urine and excrement,” and states that the natives have never realized the necessity for cleanliness (Natsume 2000, 125). Japan’s hygienic modernity was not only made possible through the establishment of the binary division between the clean colonizer and the filthy colonized, but also through colonial economies, such as the soybean industry, which contributed to the production of hygiene commodities that spread to the metropole. In other words, hygienic modernity in Japan would not be possible without its colonial context, and to some extent is a product of Japan’s colonial projects.

In Mankan, soybean production appears in six out of fifty one chapters, two of which mention soybean soap. In Chapter 17, Sōseki draws a vivid picture of a busy soybean mill where soybean oil is extracted, in which he uses such descriptions as “nothing but soybeans” or “soy
mountains” (Natsume 2000, 64) to show his amazement at the quantity of soybeans being processed every day. He also writes about the strong physiques of coolies working at the mill in great detail, describing “their perspiring bodies glowing like red copper, laboring valiantly” (Natsume 2000, 65). Like his disciple Akutagawa, who suffered from health issues while traveling in China, Sōseki also suffered from a chronic stomach illness during his trip, with descriptions of his pain and anxiety appearing throughout the text. And like Akutagawa, Sōseki expresses a fear of the Chinese coolies’ filthy and supposedly diseased bodies. He depicts in detail the dirty coolies he sees on the pier when his ship has docked at Dalian, saying, “Looking at one of them, I had the immediate impression of dirt. Any two together were an even more unpleasant sight. That so many of them had gathered together struck me as most unwelcome indeed” (Natsume 2000, 38–39). Even from a “distant observation point,” the author expresses repulsion, stating that he has no courage to get close to the Chinese coolies (Natsume 2000, 39).

However, this fear is replaced by admiration when he depicts the coolies working in the Japanese-run soybean factory: they are energetic, physically strong, and perseverant. The difference may stem from the fact that unlike the wandering Chinese coolies, whose persistence pose an uncertain threat to the colonizer’s superiority, the Chinese soybean factory workers become “tractable” (Natsume 2000, 65), hard-working colonial labourers, silently contributing to the burgeoning industry of the Japanese empire. In other words, their value as cheap labour overshadows their supposedly dangerous racial or cultural qualities: as the narrator emphasizes,

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63 Sōseki describes his symptoms in the following passage: “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. […] There was no getting around it: something was definitely wrong. I felt anxious, since my stomach had been consistently letting me down. […] The dull pain only insidiously spread itself everywhere like clouds gradually gathering in the sky (Natsume 2000, 57)
the coolies “pass by each other but hardly exchange a single word,” commenting that “the only thing they know how to do is working without pause” (Natsume 2000, 65). To Sōseki, in this particular act of “laboring valiantly” (Natsume 2000, 65), the workers form a uniform, “identical” (Natsume 2000, 65) force of colonial labour in compliance with the empire’s rules, without a particular personality or characteristic that could qualify them as an ethnic Other. For this reason, watching them at their work becomes “a source of pleasure” (Natsume 2000, 65) for the author—even their sweat stops emitting odour, and instead adds a glow to their copper-coloured bodies. This last detail is especially remarkable considering that the author is highly sensitive to odours and expresses his particular disdain for “a strange and clinging smell” that the Chinese leave behind, one that persists however hard “the fanatically clean Japanese try to remove it” (Natsume 2000, 136). There is also a stark contrast between the narrator’s pleasant feeling of watching the coolies’ perspiring bodies and his repulsion to the wagon propellers’ “smelling of sweat” (Natsume 2000, 95), which was examined in Chapter 3.

In short, as long as the coolies remain a mechanically labouring force, the narrator’s gaze remains unchallenged; he can thus observe the diligent and docile coolies with sense of security and “pleasure.” In order to stress the mechanical quality of their labour, he repeatedly comments that they were “silent as people who had lost their tongues” (Natsume 2000, 65), which is in total contrast to his earlier depiction of the “vociferous” (Natsume 2000, 40) Chinese crowd that scares him at the dock. Deprived of their voices, the coolies become less threatening to the traveling colonizer, and are reduced to a spectacle for his privileged gaze. Sōseki’s use of the metaphor “shadows [of] fate” (Natsume 2000, 65) to describe these workers is also intriguing: though he does not elaborate on what “fate” he has in mind, the “fate” of this group of silent and industrious Chinese coolies can certainly be linked to that of all indistinguishable colonial labourers coerced into building up Japan’s flourishing imperial industry in the colonies. The
enormous work they put into constructing the Japanese empire as anonymous labourers is emphasized again at the end of the chapter, when the author expresses his admiration for their work to his guide:

“The coolies really work well, don’t they? And at the same time how calmly!” I exclaimed full of admiration.

“Yes, the Japanese are incapable of copying them. The coolies spend five or six sen a day on food. Where do they get their energy? That is what I can’t understand,” my guide added with a stupefied air. (Natsume 2000, 65)

It is worth noting that Sōseki’s guide responds with a comparison between Chinese coolies and the Japanese, saying that the Japanese are incapable of working at a similar level of intensity as the Chinese with so little money and food each day. By stating that the more delicately-made Japanese are “incapable of copying” the robust Chinese coolies, the guide implies a sort of discrimination against ‘beastly’ Chinese and ‘civilized’ Japanese. At the same time, the guide’s response also reveals the exploitation of colonial labourers in the construction of Japan’s imperial modernity.

In addition to the exploited Chinese labourers, Sōseki’s text also touches upon the raw materials of this imperial project, namely soybeans. He observes a large stock of soybeans at Dalian’s wharf and describes it as follows:

According to Mr. Aioi’s [the SMR Company wharf manager] explanations, in periods of abundant harvests, the quantity of soybeans arriving at the wharf averaged 5000 tons a day.

[. . .]

In the vicinity of the wharves, soybeans alone were piled over an area stretching 500 meters from north to south and 1400 meters from east to west. This fact alone shows how prosperous this trade had become. (Natsume 2000, 71)

The prosperity of the Manchuria soybean industry is no surprise considering its historical context. In 1908, the year before Sōseki visited Manchuria, the Natanson Firm of Russia began
to export Manchurian soybeans to Europe through Vladivostok, while the Mitsui Company
began selling soybeans to the UK for the first time. At the time there was a shortage of vegetable
oils such as cottonseed and linseed oil, the original raw materials of soap, so soybean oil was
needed as a substitute. Given its low cost of production, soybean oil began to be used by large
soap-making manufacturers such as the Lever Brothers.

Prior to Manchurian soybeans entering the global market, soap was a luxury product in
Japan, due to the small scale of local soap production and the high cost of imported raw materials
(Kaneko 1991, 223). According to research done by the South Manchuria Railway Company,
millions in foreign capital, largely from Japan, poured into Manchuria to be used in developing
its rich stores of raw materials for new industries (South Manchuria Railway Co. 1922, 38). One
investor was Nisshin Soybean Meal Company (Nisshin Tōhaku gaisha 日清豆粕会社), known
today as the Nisshin OilliO Group (Nisshin oirio gurūpu 日清オイリオグループ), which began
its industrial empire in Dalian in 1907. Sōseki mentions the company in Mankan as a major
trader of soybeans at the time. This influx of foreign capital transformed the harvesting of
soybeans, Manchuria’s chief crop, into the leading manufacturing industry in Manchuria in the
early twentieth century.

Companies also invested in technology that could be used to develop cheaper and higher
quality soybean oil. In particular, the SMR’s research laboratories contributed significantly to the
industry by improving the quality of the soybean and exploring new uses for it. Sōseki mentions
that he was informed about the advantages of soybean oil by an engineer during his visit to the
SMR’s Central Laboratory in Dalian, which was responsible for notable industrial advances such
as the hardening of bean oil and the manufacture of substances like olein and glycerine that made
the supply of raw materials much more stable (South Manchuria Railway Co. 1922, 19). The
engineer at the Central Laboratory told Sōseki that soybean oil could establish great practical advantages for Japanese industries, as it was significantly cheaper than animal fat abroad.

In addition to the technological advances, the imperial transportation network also facilitated the rapid development of the soybean industry in Manchuria. Manchuria’s railway network significantly improved the efficiency of soybean transportation and boosted the soybean industry, as in the past crops had to be transported through inadequate waterways (South Manchuria Railway Co. 1922, 17). Sōseki even comments on this fact in *Mankan*: “‘Since soybeans are now sent to Dairen by rail, has the amount transported by river boat decreased?’ I asked, striving to seem knowledgeable” (Natsume 2000, 113). The SMR began to profit greatly from soybeans after connecting its rail lines with the Russian-operated Chinese Eastern Railway in 1907 and beginning exports from Manchuria to Europe in 1908 (Wolff 2015, 104).

Japan’s colonial economy gave rise to an international soybean industry that facilitated soap production and consumption in Japan’s homeland. As a matter of fact, soap production in the West also went through a very similar process. After technical improvements in the early nineteenth century made it possible to produce soap from vegetable oil rather than animal fat, soap companies began to develop large plantations for soap-oil. By 1911, many big European soap companies such as the Lever Brothers had plantations in their countries’ colonies, greatly facilitating the expansion of their business around the world (Nworah 1972, 248–64). Cheap raw materials from the colonies were essential for any empire, including Japan, to compete with other great powers in the industrial world. At the end of Sōseki’s visit at the SMR’s Central Laboratory, he is gifted with a box of three soybean soaps developed by the laboratory that can dissolve in salt water. Sōseki is so “pleased to own the soaps” that he cannot wait to take them with him, “greedily shut[ting] the lid” (Natsume 2000, 49). Indeed, his pleasure at receiving
these soaps can perhaps be attributed to their status as emblems of modernity, embodying both technological advancement and economic development.

The increase in soap consumption resulted from several factors. First, its disinfectant properties were promoted by the government in order to exploit the public’s new fear of ‘newly found’ germs. Moreover, the new modern tastes and lifestyle promoted and embraced by the emerging urban middle class in early twentieth-century Japan also stimulated the rise of soap consumption. For this new urban community, soap that had been packaged with an identifying wrapper and sold at the grocery store had a distinctly different meaning from a chunk of homemade soap made from wood ashes and animal fat, as the former helped them to imagine themselves as equal participants in a global hygienic modernity. It was cheap oil and labour from colonial Manchuria that facilitated the production of large quantities of low-priced commercial soaps, making it possible to penetrate the market and further create new desires and demands for this product. As a result, soap became a daily necessity, which possessed the power to enable an imagination of hygienic modernity.

Soap would have not been accessible to the mass public without the exploitation of the colonial economy. Considering the colonial roots of this hygiene commodity, modern hygiene can indeed be said to have partially originated from colonial expansion. Within this context, the consumption of soap reveals connections between Japanese colonialism and Japan’s hygienic modernity, which rested on the transfer of massive corporate profits through the exploitation of natural resources and colonial labour. However, during the promotion of the discourse of hygienic modernity, the indispensable role Manchurian soybean oil and colonial labour played in the production of Japanese modernity was erased from consumer consciousness, and thus so was the connection between the Japanese metropole and the colonies. Instead, the discourse of
modern hygiene relied upon a rhetoric of middle-class taste and new urban lifestyle, one that was 
popularized through soap advertising.

4.3 Soap Advertisement and Imagination of Modernity

According to Anne McClintock, soap advertising has long been at the vanguard of 
Western empire’s “new commodity culture and its civilizing mission” (McClintock 1995, 129). 
In early twentieth-century Japan, modern hygiene not only became a popular subject in scientific 
and professional publications, but was also processed for consumption by a broader audience 
through mass media such as advertisements. Mass media enabled individuals to compare and 
relate their own views about hygiene to a wider society, and to imagine their modern status 
alongside their fellow nationals. Advertising campaigns not only directed the popular 
imagination linking cleanliness and health, but also offered an allegory for modernity. The 
fetishization of modern hygiene and soap consumption would not have been so popular without 
this allegorical connection between hygiene and modernization. In the pages that follow, I would 
like to explore how this allegory functions in the construction of modern identity by analyzing 
several advertisements for commercial soaps.

The cosmetics companies Shiseidō 資生堂 and Kaō 花王, whose advertisement will be 
discussed in the following pages, were founded respectively in 1872 and in 1887, and both still 
enjoy commercial success today. When Shiseidō and Kaō opened their first stores, as Gennifer 
Weisenfeld explains, cosmetic soap was still “not commonly seen in the average Japanese 
household” (Weisenfeld 2004, 573). An examination of how Shiseidō and Kaō advertised soap 
reveals how they mobilized various images and ideologies associated with modernity to 
courage soap’s mainstream adoption.
The two Shiseidō soap magazine advertisements I discuss below, were published in 1923 and 1925 respectively. The 1923 Shiseidō advertisement shows a woman in Western dress surrounded by European-style furniture. While the image gives no indication that it is an advertisement for soap, it is made clear in the slogan, “Shiseidō Soaps: Great Quality, Great Lather, Great Smell, Low Price.” Rather than featuring the product itself as Japanese soap companies’ early advertisements usually did at the turn of the twentieth century (Weisenfeld 2004, 574), in this early 1920s advertisement the pursuit of cleanliness is solely embodied by a female figure. As hygiene discourse relates to domestic space, it is unsurprising that this advertisement would target women’s role in society. The Meiji state ideology of ryōsai kenbo, discussed in Chapter 2, depicted women as the guardians of the home, whose duties included keeping the family clean. From the beginning, then, women were represented as having a close relationship to hygiene.

During the Taishō period, an emerging group of middle-class women began to increasingly define themselves through the consumption of ‘modern’ commodities. The 1923 Shiseidō advertisement demonstrates this by associating their soap (and its Japanese consumers) with a ‘modern’ Western female figure. The European-style furniture further reinforces this message, as using European furniture in Japan had already become a symbol of civilization in the early twentieth century (Esenbel 1994, 162–63). This advertisement thus created a desire for the product through its depiction of a new middle-class lifestyle. A similar technique is deployed in a

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64 For the figure of the 1923 Shiseidō soap advertisement, see MIT Visualizing Cultures: Shiseidō Ads & Posters (1875–1941), accessed August 30, 2018, http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/shiseido_03/sh01_1875_1941_ads/pages/sh01_1923_a043_MagazineAd.htm
1925 Shiseidō magazine advertisement.65 The female signifier of modernity is still present, though rather than sitting on European furniture she stands at the top of a flight of stairs. Stairs, an element of Western-style houses, functioned as a symbol of modernity, but they can also be interpreted as a symbol for climbing the social ladder. In this way the advertisement associates upward social mobility and modern status with the use of Shiseidō soap.

In Sōseki’s The Gate, the protagonist Sōsuke’s younger brother Koroku recalls living with a law student who “used to stop on the way home from a walk and casually [stop by a Shiseidō store and] spend as much as five yen on [a box of three soaps and toothpaste]” (Natsume 1972, 86).66 Koroku sees this as a luxury and laments his own poverty. His envious remark referencing the brand by name gestures towards the value of Shiseidō soap as a signifier of bourgeois lifestyle.67 However, the price for cosmetic soaps marketed to a broader demographic of middle-class consumers went down to around ten sen per bar in the 1920s (Weisenfeld 2004, 574). Both the Shiseidō soap advertisements discussed above advertise its “low price” (renka 廉価), and show that commercial soap was redefined as an affordable mass-market commodity for Japanese consumers.

In Tanizaki’s Naomi, soap also plays an important role, as it is associated not only with Jōji’s desired middle-class lifestyle but also his fixation on Naomi’s physical allure. At the

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66 Translation modified.

67 According to Weisenfeld, by 1926 the average monthly household income for labourers was 102.07 yen, and a little over 7 percent (around seven yen) was designated for medical and hygiene expenses (Weisenfeld 2004, 574).
beginning of the novel, Jōji explains that it is after he began to wash Naomi every night with soap that their relationship entered a new phase, and this event inspired him to “[start] a diary” to record everything about Naomi that caught his attention (Tanizaki 1985, 33). It is no doubt that the soap and the “Western-style bathtub” Jōji installs in their “culture house” (Tanizaki 1985, 31) serve for him as emblems of a middle-class lifestyle. In other words, daily consumption of hygiene commodities served as a confirmation of an urban, bourgeois social status. This developed into a sort of fetishization of ‘cleanliness,’ which transformed soap from a material hygiene product into a product that could enhance physical appeal, a quality that was increasingly emphasized in its advertisements, which featured alluring female figures on display.

In Naomi, Jōji’s fetishization of Naomi’s body is performed through a ritualistic use of soap: he expresses his infatuation with her smooth skin, recording in his diary the way that “the soap bubbles dissolved and ran down against her skin” (Tanizaki 1985, 33); later he fetishizes Naomi’s white foot by recalling that he “washed it with soap in the bath every night since she was a girl” (Tanizaki 1985, 112); and he lathers up Naomi’s back with soap, calling it a “landmark of [his] love” upon which he “frolicked joyfully” (Tanizaki 1985, 229). It becomes increasingly obvious as the narrative develops that Jōji associates soap less with domesticity than with sexuality, an association that reaches its climax when Naomi entices Jōji to shave her and the two end up “covered with soap” (Tanizaki 1985, 231). This fetishization of ‘cleanliness’ charged with eroticism, performed through the use of soap, constituted and promoted the idea of hygienic modernity that enabled the new middle class’s imagination of modern status.

In addition, soap, as a participant in the eroticism of the bath, not only cleanses the body, but creates a protective veil between the eye and skin that invites the gaze. It also gives the body an aesthetic allure beyond the visual, through its scent and the pleasant touch of clean skin. In this sense, using soap creates a particular dynamic between the gazer and the object, but reverses
the power relation between them. Because the gazer is seduced into gazing, soap can be considered to endow the objectified with control, as in the case of Naomi’s seduction and control of Jōji. Unlike, for instance, the objectification of so-called barbarians displayed at world expositions. Soap allows Naomi to express sexual attraction, demonstrating her ‘modernness.’ At the same time, she is also ‘unmodern,’ in the sense that she challenges the modern identity of Japanese manhood by unsettling the patriarchal nationalist imaginary of ryōsai kenbo.

While the two 1920s soap advertisements discussed earlier embodied the cosmopolitan environment of the Taishō period, the soap advertisements of the 1930s need to be tied to the history of Japanese imperialism during the Shōwa. In the 1930s Japanese corporate advertising campaigns were “often keyed to state policy initiatives tying private sector goals to national interests” (Weisenfeld 2009, 14). While Weisenfeld describes the Kaō Company’s 1930s show window display as reproducing “the excitement of the urban factory environment in the consumer theater to underline the company’s image of productivity” (Weisenfeld 2004, 589), a more noteworthy feature in the display is the message delivered on the middle white cogwheel in large font, which reads, “soap patriotism.”68 This indicates that the company’s soap production, as with industrial production in general, was a way to serve the nation. Soap consumption is also propagated to be a part of this “soap patriotism”: the advertisement rallies its target audience to wage war against bacteria for the sake of the nation as one of their patriotic duties. In contrast to the soap advertisements of the 1920s, which placed emphasis on consumerism, soap advertisements in the early 1930s contributed to a program that attempted to mold individuals

68 For the figure of the 1930s Kaō soap show window display, see Weisenfeld 2004, 589.
into imperial subjects, in conformity with the atmosphere after Japan’s 1931 invasion of Manchuria.

This historical context is more conspicuous in a 1933 Shiseidō soap poster. In the poster, what takes up the whole poster is a girl depicted as ‘Chinese’ through the use of certain signifiers commonly associated with images of Chinese women, such as wearing a *qipao* (cheongsam). Japan’s invasion of Manchuria generated a fascination with all kinds of products associated with China, and this is mobilized in the advertisement’s use of an exotic image of continental beauty. The advertisement indicates not only the scope of Japan’s industrial power, which extended into the Asian continent, but also reflects how images of Asia were being deployed as a means of imagining the contours of Japan’s expanding empire.

Publicized in the same year as the Shiseidō poster (1933), a Kaō soap advertisement that appeared on back cover of the magazine *Hinode*, is dense with signifiers of the state ideology being disseminated at the time. Unlike the other advertisements discussed above, all of which put emphasis on images and contain very few words, this Kaō advertisement is text-filled and reads almost like state-sponsored propaganda. The text in the advertisement asserts that “[s]cholars claim that the amount of soap consumption is a barometer to measure the degree of civilization of a nation.” By closely associating personal hygiene with the degree of a nation’s civilization, national reform was symbiotically linked to bodily reform. Moreover, by virtue of advertising,

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69 For the figure of the 1933 Shiseidō soap poster, see MIT Visualizing Cultures: Shiseidō Ads & Posters (1875–1941), accessed August 30, 2018, http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/shiseido_03/sh01_1875_1941_ads/pages/sh01_1933_e038_poster.htm

70 For the figure of the Kaō soap advertisement on back cover of *Hinode* 2, no. 2 (Apr. 1933), see Weisenfeld 2004, 595.
this scholarly opinion, which otherwise may have only had a limited readership, was circulated widely among the general public.

The major part of the advertisement is a bar chart superimposed over the image of hands being washed illustrating how soap consumption in Japan is much lower than in other advanced nations, such as United States, Britain, France, and Germany. Such comparisons helped form viewers’ national identity by connecting their desire for hygienic modernity with Japan’s quest for international recognition. The paragraph at the bottom right of the advertisement is also noteworthy:

きれい好き入浴好きの国民といえば日本国の検疫率と小児死亡率の何と多いこととでせう。

各文明国の中日本の石鹸消費率は少し高いのを見てもまだまだ清潔についての関心が足りないといわれます。

石鹸で手を洗うだけで二十七種の細菌が除かれます。石鹸は美しく清潔にするばかりでなく目に見えぬ細菌と戦ひます。

Although known as a nation whose citizens like bathing and being clean, the rates of epidemic and infant mortality in Japan are still high.

The fact that Japan has the lowest level of soap consumption among advanced countries shows that there is still not enough attention paid to cleanliness.

Washing hands with soap alone could eliminate twenty-seven kinds of germs. It not only keeps you beautiful and clean but also fights against invisible germs.

The text opens with the assertion that a fondness for cleanliness is a known characteristic of the Japanese people, and thus makes ambiguous the message that Japan is not as civilized because of its relative lack of consciousness surrounding hygiene, which is implied in the other parts of the advertisement. At the same time, it directly associates epidemic and infant mortality rates with hygiene, concealing the fact that these high rates were actually related to the change in living patterns that accompanied urbanization, as outlined by Ōgai in his scientific works. Furthermore,
the verb “fight” (tatakai 戦ひ) used in the last sentence vividly paints bacteria as a public enemy of foreign nature, projecting the image of the Japanese subject fighting against a common enemy as part of a national community. In this way, the advertisement enables consumers to identify with a national collective when they consume these commodities, which also promise them a way to achieve hygienic modernity.

**Conclusion**

The trope of hygiene needs to be understood in relation to Japan’s construction of (Western) modernity. Hygiene discourse became a powerful tool to control people’s everyday life in both metropoles and colonies. Scientific writings, literary works, and advertisements all participated in the formation of the nation-state and the production of a consciousness of (hygienic) modernity. While the works of the Meiji and Taishō writers discussed here presents and consolidates the hierarchical power relation between the hygenic and unhygenic, they also express an ambiguity towards modernization and hygiene discourse. In doing so, they complicate the binaries constructed between Japan and its colonies, clean and unclean, centre and periphery. In this sense, the ambiguity of their narratives both construct and deconstruct these dichotomies. From their polyphonic representations, it is clear that conditions in the ‘periphery’ do not represent an early stage of development or an incomplete mimicry of the ‘centre,’ but an equally modern consequence of historical change.
EPILOGUE

The space in which we live, from which we are drawn out of ourselves, just where the erosion of our lives, our time, our history takes place, this space that wears us down and consumes us, is in itself heterogeneous.

– Michel Foucault

The central concept of “colonial modernity” in this dissertation, borrowed from Tani Barlow (1997), provides a useful platform to explore the central role that colonialism played in the construction of ‘modernity’ in both colonized and colonizing nations. The way I employ the term “colonial modernity” in the Japanese context of my project is broader and more inclusive than Barlow’s original usage. In the present study, it does not only refer to material colonial relations, but also to an ideological construct that can be used to critically reassess prevalent images of modernity.

In exploring the concept of “colonial modernity,” I was particularly drawn to literary representations of Japan’s modern urban space, which are not only symbolic of Japan’s colonial modernity but also actively construct it. Therefore, my dissertation historicizes and contextualizes representations of such space within Japan’s colonial context, arguing that ‘modernity’ of cities like Tokyo was constructed and legitimized by binary power structures, such as centre versus periphery. At the same time, the heterogeneity of urban space represented in literary narratives also undermines a singular diffusionist narrative of (Western) modernity.

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71 Foucault 1997, 331.
In this study, I attempt to redefine the modern not as temporal but as spatial, borrowing Foucault’s term “heterogeneous space” (Foucault 1997, 331). Concepts like the ‘modern’ are generally perceived in linear, temporal terms. Popular definitions of ‘modern’ or ‘modernity’ are also charged with European history and thought, and lay claim to a universal history that follows a teleological narrative of progress. In order to rethink modernity outside this framework, this project attempts to interpret modernity in spatial terms. Conceiving of modernity in spatial terms is key because it is easier to see physical space as heterogeneous and diverse. Moreover, the juxtaposition and interaction of these spaces make the constant shifting of urban space apparent. Therefore, if we examine modernity in terms of urban space, not only will the heterogeneous characteristic of space bring forward the heterogeneity of the ‘modern,’ but its complexity can also reveal the intricate relationship between different modernities, and demonstrate how the narrative of Western modernity became dominant.

Heterogeneity of urban space certainly should be seen as a common phenomenon in all nations. However, I consider Meiji-Taishō Tokyo a unique case for a couple of reasons. First, as Sakai (1989) pointed out, Japan’s modernity occupies a unique role in questioning the narrative of a universal (Western) modernity, not only because it is a non-Western context, but because Japan cannot be easily integrated into the construct of ‘premodern’ East versus ‘modern’ West. Also, as Sōseki noted, the colonial threat of Western civilization forced Meiji Japan to “condense into ten years all the developments that it took the West a hundred years to accomplish” (Natsume 1992, 280). It is exactly because Japan’s modernization and westernization occurred within such a compacted time frame, inconsistencies in the Western modernity narrative were made more obvious in Japan’s case. And literary imagination responded to this rapid transformation, as Japan went through major industrialization and expanded its colonial project.
Secondly, I chose to focus on writings about Tokyo, rather than other major Japanese cities like Osaka, because no other city occupied the same status as the centre and symbol of the Japanese nation-state. From the early Meiji period, both modernity and empire were closely connected to the idea of building a nation with Tokyo as its center. Tokyo epitomized Japanese modernity and was a central theme in both official and popular discourse in Japan, an image that helped form national identity and symbolized Japan’s growing geopolitical importance. In addition, Tokyo’s urban space was particularly defined by its heterogeneity. Rapid urbanization within a short time period resulted in extensive co-existence of rural and urbanized landscapes, vernacular and foreign architectures, old and new social relations, to name a few. Moreover, the centripetal flow of people from the peripheries to the metropolitan centre meant that Tokyo was heterogeneous than ever in terms of its class and ethnic demographics. The presence of colonial and temporal Others also resulted in the physical segregation of urban space into various neighbourhoods. Such heterogeneity led to diverse and often contradictory representations in literature. Tokyo’s hybridity thus not only provides a useful platform to challenge the state’s official narrative of a uniform Japanese modernity; in fact, it reveals heterogeneity as an intrinsic part of being modern. Similarly, I also chose to write about Shanghai in Chapter 1 for its heterogeneity. During that time, Shanghai was a semi-colonial city in which the ambivalent cultural hierarchy and power relations between China, Japan, and the West and its increasingly segregated and multivalent urban spaces presented Japanese writers with opportunities to better understand complexity and contradictions latent in Tokyo.

In this dissertation, each chapter reads a different kind of spatial power relations against its formative historical backdrop. Chapter 1 examines Akutagawa’s and Tanizaki’s works on Tokyo and Shanghai, centering on the construct of metropole versus colony. By investigating the triangulated power relations between Japan, China and the West, this chapter highlights the
ambiguity and complexity of Japan’s self-identification vis-à-vis China and the West during its modernization process. Reading Tokyo through the lens of Shanghai’s colonial space brings forward overlapping colonial logics operating in Shanghai and the Japanese metropole.

Chapter 2 uses two canonical texts, Sōseki’s *Sanshiro* and Tanizaki’s *Naomi*, to analyze the hierarchical spatial relations between the urban and the rural within the Japanese homeland, through which the complex notion of Japanese modernity was made visible. This chapter mainly explores how different characters in the two novels engage the cityscape in similar ways. However, there are also differences in terms of relationships between the characters of the two novels and the modern. For instance, Mineko and Naomi represent Tokyo’s modern urban space quite differently through their respective class. Although they are both Tokyo-born, Mineko is from a Yamanote middle-class household, is well educated, and has financial freedom. As a symbol of ‘new woman,’ she is associated with the intellectual elite through high culture spaces: such as the university, Yamanote houses, and museums. What constitutes these spaces as modern is that they embody the power of the nation-state to showcase a civilized Japan. Tanizaki’s Naomi, on the other hand, is from a lower-class family in Shitamachi. This prototypical modern girl is associated with the new, vibrant urban scenes of mass culture—like cafés, dance halls, and department stores, which are the main representations of modern urban space in *Naomi*. The two novels’ definitions of modern urban space are not contradictory, but focus on different parts of the city as representative of the ‘modern.’

Chapter 3 draws on works by writers like Sōseki, Akutagawa, and Nakajima Atsushi, analyzing textual representations of different types of trains, such as long-distance trains, intra-city rails, and the South Manchuria Railway. The train is both intimate and enclosed while being open and exterior; confined in itself, yet able to traverse boundaries. This chapter investigates
how the trains, containing various sets of spatial power relations in an ultracompact form, express either Japan’s national consolidation or its colonial expansion. In addition, it also examines representations of railway towns which present a challenge to the centre/periphery diffusionist model for the progress of modernity.

Expanding on the discussion of physical space in the previous three chapters, Chapter 4 takes on the discursive space of modern hygiene. Using texts by Ōgai, Sōseki, and Akutagawa, this chapter explores how their works were mobilized to imagine a healthy and homogeneous modern nation-state, and how the heterogeneity introduced in their texts challenges such constructions. It also examines how the production, consumption and promotion of such a trivial hygiene commodity as soap helped create a consciousness of modernity. In this chapter, I briefly touch upon the consumer’s corporeal experience of soap through the discussion of the bathing scene in Naomi, and how we might also think about soap invites voyeurism and functions as a form of seduction. Representations of urban space are vital to understanding Japan’s colonial modernity. However, colonial modernity’s role in shaping representations of Japan’s urban space lacks visibility in existing Japanese literary scholarship. While some journal articles and book chapters have appeared to date, there remains no book-length treatment of this topic. In addition, existing scholarship deals with Japan’s colonial modernity within a framework of East versus West, or colonial Japan versus the colonized. While a few works examine the colonial relation within the Japanese metropole, they seldom explore the complicated triangulation of Japan vis-à-vis China and the West. Historicizing and contextualizing this triangulation, my dissertation aims to fill this gap by exploring Japan’s ambiguous position as both colonizer and “self-colonized” (Komori 2001, 8). As my approach is interdisciplinary, I employ methodologies gleaned from history, sociology, and cultural studies to offer new insight into dominant understandings of those works.
There are more authors, works, and cities than I can feasibly examine in one dissertation, so I hope to expand the scope of my research to include more varied material in the future. Considering that my dissertation focuses mostly on male writers, an examination of works by female writers would provide a more intersectional approach to colonial modernity, incorporating gender dynamics in addition to race and class. In addition, I plan to engage more writers with different trajectories across Japan. In *Struggling Upward: Worldly Success and the Japanese Novel* (2016), Van Compernolle claims the centripetal flow of people to Tokyo played an influential role in modern Japanese literature—a theme that I also discussed in relation to *Sanshiro*. But authors themselves also demonstrate the same trajectories, with some coming from other major cities like Osaka, and others from the countryside. Their understandings of Tokyo would likely differ from Tokyo-native writers. Thus, it would be intriguing to study how authors’ different trajectories created different patterns of spatial power structure in their works, for example in descriptions of Tokyo’s relationship to their hometowns.

To conclude, rather than being intrinsically ‘modern,’ new urban phenomena and social relations were interpreted and emphasized as ‘modern’ through the delineation of spatiotemporal Others, who were defined as ‘non-modern’ by a singular narrative of (Western) modernity. I use the heterogeneity of Tokyo’s urban space to question how Tokyo’s ‘modernity’ was defined. And it is this heterogeneity that is the very essence of the ‘modern.’
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