

Japanese Neo-Victorian Fictions: Looking Back to the Victorian Age from Japan

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Abstract:

Japan has seen an expansion not only in Japanese neo-Victorian anime and manga but also in novels that dramatise Victorian images by rereading late nineteenth-century London through the lens of modern Japan. Through an examination of three Japanese detective and gothic horror fictions set in Victorian London, Futaro Yamada's 'A Yellow Lodger' (1953), Soji Shimada's *Soseki and A Case of Mummies in London* (1984), and Ryu Togo's *The Adventures of Kumagusu* (2013), this article explores how and why these works enable readers to experience a re-vising of Japanese scholars' and authors' first encounters with Britain and the British Empire during the late nineteenth century, a time of opening up to the West and simultaneously a moment that galvanised Japan's subsequent imperialism. A close-reading of the pre-existing fiction and historical contextualisation reveals distinctions between England and Japan and between past works and present pastiches. This paper will consider how these texts bind themselves to the afterimage of Britain and Japan in the late nineteenth century, which saw both nations emerge as economic and colonial powers.

Keywords: Sherlock Holmes, Japanese detective novel, Meiji era, nostalgia, pastiche, Soji Shimada, Ryu Togo, trauma, Futaro Yamada.

The Victorian period has influenced the Japanese people since the end of Japan's two centuries of isolation in 1853.¹ During the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, a number of Japanese young men visited the West and devoted time and attention to acquiring Western knowledge in all fields, including politics, economics, science, technology, arts and literature. After the Pacific War (1941–1945), academic studies of Victorian literature developed steadily. Since the late twentieth century, images of the Victorian age have appeared in popular culture genres such as anime, manga, and TV dramas. The imagery inspired by the Victorians – whether luxurious dress for the rich, livery for servants, or rags for the poor – inform the clothing of characters in Hayao Miyazaki's animations such as *Laputa: The Flying Island* (or *Castle in the Sky*) (1986) and in the manga series *Emma* by Kaori

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Mori (2002–2006). The special fashion, called Gothic Lolita, adopted by some young women also takes inspiration from Victorian maids and upper-class fashion in Victorian Britain. Furthermore, the Victorian detective Sherlock Holmes has been adapted, directly or indirectly, for popular Japanese detective TV dramas. The afterimage of the Victorians has been retained and remediated in Japanese culture whether or not people are conscious of it.

Although Japanese popular culture's borrowing of Victoriana is gradually being acknowledged worldwide, I want to examine not anime and manga but fictions that rewrite Victorian culture from a Japanese point of view. Like the young, albeit re-named Charles Dickens in Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997), these novels depict characters who are fictionalised versions of real Japanese writers and scientists, interacting with fictional characters from Victorian novels, usually Sherlock Holmes and Watson. Japanese neo-Victorian narratives skilfully blur the boundary between fiction and fact in the same way as does canonical, Anglophone neo-Victorian fiction. Close-readings of Victorian literary texts and non-fiction, along with careful historical research can shed light on the relationship between the West and Japan in the nineteenth century and its continuation in the present.

The artistic works described by the term 'neo-Victorian' have flourished in Japan for many years. Along with neo-Victorian anime and manga or steampunk art products,² a body of Japanese fiction has dramatised Victorian images and themes: among these are Futaro Yamada's short story 'A Yellow Lodger' (1953); Soji Shimada's *Soseki and A Case of Mummies in London* (1984); Ryu Togo's *The Adventures of Kumagusu* (2013)³; Naohiko Kitahara's collection of short stories adapting Victorian culture, *The Hanging Girl* (2010), and his three casebooks of Sherlock Holmes (2012–2014)⁴; and Chinatsu Hayase's *The Diaries of John Eliot* (2012), the story of a butler at an English country house. The writers of these works have a profound knowledge of Victorian culture and literature, and they integrate that knowledge into their works set in the context of the period.

In order to address how Japanese neo-Victorian narratives draw upon Victorian cultural tropes and to place Japan within a complex historical frame, I will discuss the earlier mentioned works of Yamada (1922–2001), Shimada (1948–), and Togo (1951–) and their collective re-

envisioning of Japanese neo-Victorian fictional and biofictional figures. Yamada has led the boom in mass-market detective fiction in Japan since the middle of the twentieth century. His Victorian pastiches and also his series of detective novels set in Meiji Japan have been widely read. Shimada is one of the most prominent and bestselling mystery writers in Japan and has written more than a hundred detective novels. His works have become popular across Asia, particularly in Taiwan, and his debut novel, *The Tokyo Zodiac Murders* (1981), was translated into English and published in Europe and the United States in 2015. Togo is also a well-known mystery novelist in Japan and has written a number of short and long detective stories. A comparative study of these authors' pastiches of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes series effectively help define an Asian neo-Victorian approach.

1. The Meiji Era in Neo-Victorian Fiction

What does the Victorian period mean in Japanese literature? Regarding the use of the context of the era in neo-Victorian fiction, Elizabeth Ho points out that “the Victorian’ [...] has become a powerful shorthand for empire in the contemporary global imagination”, identifying “the Victorian” as a symbol of the “the ‘era of colonialism’” (Ho 2012: 5) in the context of the British Empire. Like Ho and Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger, I use the term ‘neo-Victorian’ to demonstrate “its association with the historical spectre of the British Empire” and simultaneously “its ghostly presence in present-day neo-imperial relations” (Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger 2015: 10). My argument about Japanese neo-Victorian fictions, however, moves away from this perspective, arguing that engagement with the British Empire and other Western countries in this period, particularly from the late nineteenth century on, also stimulated imperialist expansion in Japan. Therefore, we need to situate the Victorian period in terms of the history of Japan, instead of within the context of the history of the British Empire if we are to understand such works. The memory of the Meiji era similarly evokes Japan's imperial involvement with Asia, which continues to have ramifications in the present.

When reading Japanese neo-Victorian fictions, the Victorian era should not be identified as the whole of Queen Victoria's reign of sixty-three years and seven months. Rather, we should narrow the range to begin around 1868, the beginning of the reign of the Meiji emperor. This year can

be considered symbolically as representing the twilight of feudalism and the dawn of modernisation in Japan.⁵ A social and political revolution in 1868, called the Meiji Restoration, gave the country the opportunity to modernise and to adopt the ideas and social systems of the West. This period evokes nostalgia for the Japanese legacy of the success of industrialisation, technological development, and the modernisation of culture, including literature. It also brought dramatic changes to Japan's place in the world. Struggling for equality with Western countries, Japan entered an international system, where imperialism dominated, and simultaneously pursued its own imperial project in Asia.

Six years before the start of the Meiji era, the First Japanese Embassy to Europe, consisting of thirty-six men, took a tour of Europe to study Western civilisation and negotiate the aftermath of the opening of Japan to foreign visitors and influences. They arrived in London on 30 April, 1862, accompanied by Rutherford Alcock, the first British diplomatic representative to Japan. As historians have noted, contact with the West prompted anxieties about Japanese backwardness:

Presented with the evidence of Perry's 'Black Ships' that Japan had fallen behind during its two-century absence from the stage of world history, many young men resolved to meet the challenge posed by the technological superiority of Western civilization by investigating Western civilization at its source. (Hirakawa and Wakabayashi 1989: 448)

Seven of the Japanese embassy members appeared at the opening ceremony of the second London International Exhibition, the day immediately following their arrival in London. The exhibits to which they paid the most attention showed machinery of all kinds and Armstrong guns. Following this tour of the exposition, the party visited the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich to further observe the Armstrong guns. On 26 May, they visited Newcastle upon Tyne to learn about aspects of modern industry, including the Armstrong factories. The battlefields of the Anglo-Satsuma War in 1863, not long after the exposition, and the Shimonoseki Campaign (the war in Choshu) in 1863 and 1864⁶ brought home to the Japanese their weak position in comparison to the overwhelming military power of Britain and other Western countries equipped with Armstrong guns. Despite their

defeats, the wars established a close relationship between the Satsuma and Choshu samurai and Britain, particularly with W. G. Armstrong & Company. The first embassy's encounter with the Armstrong guns in Victorian London played a significant role in Japan's victory in its later imperial wars, because Armstrong eventually supplied the nation with guns and battleships. Once equipped with these Western imports, Japan committed itself to two significant imperial wars, the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895) and the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905): the wars to obtain Korea and economic and political benefits over Korea (Heald 2010: 208).

Comparing Japan with other Asian countries, we may say that the modernisation of Japan started optimistically with emulation of the modern West. Selcuk Esenbel notes that⁷

[a]t the turn of the century, Asian societies shared the temper of the times with Europe, but Meiji Japan alone forged its modernity from an adaptation of the very same matrix as that of the modern West in terms of constructing a new state, economy and society that dramatizes the contrast between progress versus decadence as themes in the making of modern Japan. (Esenbel 2015: 254).

As Meiji Japan eagerly and avidly viewed modernisation as an 'adaptation' of Western modernity, the representation of the Meiji period in neo-Victorian fiction is not just a locus for presenting "the hatred of the 'era of colonialism'" (Ho 2012: 5), even if it is treated ambivalently, but rather provides an optimistic setting to change one isolated country into a modern nation. It can be argued, therefore, that in Japanese neo-Victorian novels the Victorian-Meiji period is a site that evokes nostalgia, or sentimental feelings linked to the 'good old days' of Meiji optimism, the consolidation of Japanese nationhood and modernisation under the political transition from feudalistic rule to industrialisation and globalisation. Ironically, however, the acceptance, even celebration of the Victorian era in Japanese culture thus also cements the perception of a relationship between a superior modern West and a belated 'antiquated' Japan.

The neo-Victorian horror story by Naohiko Kitahara (1962–), 'The Hanging Girl',⁸ for instance, helps illustrate Japanese neo-Victorianism's dual temporal strategy. The story correlates with the conventional definition

of neo-Victorian fiction, proposed by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, as “*self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery, and (re)vision concerning the Victorian*” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4, original emphasis). A contemporary Japanese girl, traveling alone around Loch Ness, is buried alive under a tree by a strange local whisky-maker, who believes in a legend from the Victorian era. In the 1880s, a beautiful girl, grieving over a betrayal by her lover, hanged herself and was buried under a tree by her father. The legend says that a whisky aged in a barrel made from the tree of a hanged girl will develop a marvellous taste. The whisky-maker, trying to create a tree that will yield such a miraculous barrel, kills the “beautiful Oriental girl”, whom “everyone can soon identify” as Japanese from “her appearance” (Kitahara 2010: 323, 291). The Scotsman views the girl as a stereotypical Oriental subject to add exotic flavour to his whisky. The story cannibalises Victorian culture and reduces a Victorian legend to a story contaminated by the British erotic and supernatural taste for Japan as an Oriental Other.

However, the Japanese short story complicates the foundational colonial discourse, because the Japanese girl accepts Victorian culture willingly and innocently. Her life has been unconsciously dominated by British culture: after graduating from the Department of English Literature of a university in Tokyo, she succeeded in “study[ing] in the English School of London to be a translator” since her “parents were happy to pay for all of [her] educational costs including tuition and living expenses”, covered by her father’s income from working at “a leading international trading company” (Kitahara 2010: 289). During her trip, she innocently enjoys her tour of Loch Ness, and, while in a pub, is encouraged to drink “amazingly wonderful whisky” (Kitahara 2010: 309). Without doubting the man’s kindness, she drinks “it up to the last drop” as if she “was haunted by it” (Kitahara 2010: 310). While in an alcoholic trance, she is tied with cords to be hanged. The fascinating whisky, aged in a barrel of hanged girls, is a symbol for the enduring admiration of Victorian culture, which Japan, pursuing the path of modernisation as the Oriental Other of the British Empire, has, since the Meiji era, accepted, adapted, or ‘drunk up’.

‘A Hanging Girl’ dramatises the horrific implications of an uncritical, nostalgic and sentimental return to the nineteenth century. Such naive optimism and nostalgia occludes the trauma of imperialism, which I argue draws attention to another historical period obliquely recalled in Japanese

neo-Victorian narratives. What should be emphasised is that the main period that inflicted the trauma of imperialism on Japan is not the Victorian period but rather the period of the Pacific War, following the country's expansion in the twentieth century that resulted in a much larger, Japanese occupied region in Asia. By building a bridge between the present (i.e., the aftermath of the traumatic war) and the nineteenth-century past, writers can obscure both Japan's problematic rise to empire and the trauma of inflicting injury upon Asian countries, including the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In a sense, both these traumatic periods disappear in Japanese neo-Victorian works, displaced and concealed by the optimistic and nostalgic intimacy of the Victorian period. Japanese neo-Victorian strategies thus resonate with what Ho describes as "*improper* postcolonialisms defined by a present still haunted and seduced by colonial structures or privilege" (Ho 2012: 11; original italics). The trace of trauma in Japanese neo-Victorian narratives cannot avoid partly evoking "the survival of colonialism" (Ho 2012: 10) and its attendant later imperialist excesses.

The examples of Japanese neo-Victorian fiction I discuss below demonstrate how a return to Victorian Britain can also anchor a connection to the trauma of the Pacific War, even if the fictions do not address this event directly but only as a barely discernible trace. The Japanese re-imagination of Victorian Britain in contemporary neo-Victorian fiction can be seen in the two main figures depicted in Japanese neo-Victorian fiction, Soseki Natsume and Kumagusu Minakata. Natsume and Minakata were among those young men who learned new traits from the West and simultaneously experienced anxiety about the West, resulting in a sense of inferiority with regard to English gentlemen. In their neo-Victorian fictions, Futaro Yamada, Soji Shimada and Ryu Togo rewrite and reinterpret alternative versions of the experiences of Natsume and Minakata, describing their lives vividly through reference to their letters and diaries. Staying in Victorian London, they lived in vulgar lodgings under poor conditions, felt depressed by the clammy fog and walked the night streets under the dull glow of gaslight. The unfavourable contrast between Japan as an inferior country and 'modern' but dismal Victorian London, which they experienced, led them to ponder Japan's position in the world and their identity as Japanese. The records of their experiences made them symbols of Japan's successful modernisation of culture and literature (Natsume) and natural science (Minakata). Japanese neo-Victorian narratives form a complicated

convergence of the perspectives of Meiji Japan and Victorian Britain, all seen through the lens of modern Japan.

2. Marginalisation and Recognition of Japanese Imperialism

Yamada's short story 'A Yellow Lodger', one of the earliest Japanese Sherlock Holmes pastiches, was published in 1953, when most regions of Japan, including Tokyo, remained devastated from the bombing during the war. In this short story, the "yellow lodger" is the distinguished Japanese modern writer Natsume. The author was inspired by the fact that Natsume stayed in London from 1901 to 1902 as a student of English language and literature, and the streets where he walked were the same as those used for the setting of Conan Doyle's stories. The title 'A Yellow Lodger' relates to the famous fact that Natsume changed lodgings four times during his two-year stay in London, partly because he could not afford to pay the rent and partly because he was displeased with his landlords. Furthermore, in 'Soseki's Letters from London', Natsume wrote that he was highly self-conscious about his *yellow* face when he was surrounded by white English people: "While I was still in Japan, I was not conscious of the colour of our skin, but since I have been here I have fretted at finding myself so yellow" (Natsume 2002: 151).⁹

The neo-Victorian story based on these biographical facts is presented as an unknown and recently discovered piece written by Holmes's sidekick, Watson. At the beginning of the story, a Shakespeare scholar living in a flat along Baker Street, Dr. Craig, asks Holmes to find a missing wealthy man who lives next to him and engages in trade with Asia. Visiting Craig, Holmes meets a Japanese man, Natsume, listening to his mentor's passionate lecture. Soon thereafter, the body of a mystery man who had just moved next door to Natsume's lodging is discovered in the pond behind the rooms. The criminal pins the murder on the "yellow" Japanese (Yamada 2010: 345 and *passim*), and causes Holmes to misread the facts of the case. Although he is aware that Natsume has been framed for the crime, the Oriental aspects that permeate the case dull Holmes's incisiveness. It thus falls to Natsume, rather than the private detective, to disclose the identity of the real murderer and solve the case.

There are several possible interpretations of the roles of Holmes and Natsume in this detective story. It would be easy to read Holmes as a metaphor for British imperial might while Natsume is cast as representative

of an undeveloped Meiji Japan. The image of Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes has been disseminated throughout Japan since 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' was first translated and published in a magazine called *The Japanese* in 1894.¹⁰ Anna Marie Jones has argued that there are two significant points to understanding the popularity of the image of Holmes in Japan: on the one hand, British culture was "fashionable and controversial" in the Meiji era (Jones 2015: 20-21), while on the other hand, the detective figure provided the Meiji people with rational and scientific ways of thinking and viewing British things. Holmes was an emblematic scientific, rational and modernised figure of the Western world for Meiji Japan, which urged itself to modernise.

In her reading of Carey's *Jack Maggs*, Jennifer Gribble argues that "Carey's challenge to Dickens's way of seeing is signalled in a title which privileges the convict" (Gribble 2008: 183). Just as Maggs, a convict exiled to New South Wales, is given the privilege of changing the Englishman's "way of seeing", one can say that in 'A Yellow Lodger', Natsume, a *yellow* Japanese man, who has suffered from feelings of inferiority and depression in London, is subversively "privilege[d]" to challenge Holmes to solve the case. For instance, there is a striking intertextual allusion to the Holmes series that inspired Yamada's 'The Yellow Lodger', namely to 'The Yellow Face' (1893), which demonstrates Holmes's weaknesses when his supposedly scientific and rational investigation fails due to its "dependence and reliance upon racial knowledge" of Africans (Huh 2015: 13). Jinny Huh goes on to claim that Conan Doyle attempts to "assuage fear and anxiety" based on "the chaos of modernity" and "the rise of racial indeterminacy" (Huh 2015: 13). Therefore, it is unsurprising that Yamada's Natsume intervenes in Holmes's superior representation of the West. While Natsume reveals the mystery of the case of the yellow lodger, Holmes tastes "defeat" and admits as much: "Watson, I was defeated. I have every reason to believe his [Natsume's] solution" (Yamada 2010: 375). This defeat can be considered symbolic, because its postcolonial re-imagination depicts an Oriental Japanese overturning the hierarchy between Britain and Japan and moreover doing so, by 'mastering' the West's purported superior logic and ratiocination.

Another interpretation is to see the representation of Japan in Yamada's Japanese neo-Victorian short story within the context of the history of Japan after the Meiji period. Although Natsume was marginalised

in London, he participated in the same marginalisation of colonial others in the history of Japan and Asian countries. Natsume's travelogue *Man Kan Tokorodokoro (Travels in Manchurian and Korea, 1910)* has frequently provoked controversial arguments because, despite his position as a representative of imperial Japan, he made discriminatory remarks against the Chinese and Koreans. In Yamada's neo-Victorian text, when seeing Natsume for the first time in Dr. Craig's house, Holmes mistakenly believes him to be a Chinese and apologises:

I am sorry that I've mistook you for a Chinese man. I have hardly seen a man from Japan. But you will enter into an offensive and defensive alliance with the British Empire soon! I read in the newspaper that the first prince of the Empire of Japan was born and named Hirohito. Congratulations! (Yamada 2010: 338)

The end of the Victorian period, 1901, coincides with the birth of the Japanese emperor, Hirohito, who was, during the Pacific War, the sovereign of Japan as well as a national symbol of the divine. Holmes warns ironically that, after its alliance with the British Empire, Japan will exert its colonial power over other Asian countries. In the work, Natsume paradoxically embodies both the status of the marginalised Other and of the privileged representative of Japanese imperialist ambitions.

3. Nostalgia for the Victorian-Meiji Era

These contradictory ways of seeing the Japanese of the Victorian era are common to another Japanese neo-Victorian text, Shimada's *Soseki and a Case of Mummies in London*. Like 'A Yellow Lodger', imitations of Natsume's essays of his London life intersect with a literary pastiche of the Sherlock Holmes series in the guise of Watson's narration. Recorded and widely-known facts from Natsume's life and Conan Doyle's novels are twisted and tangled in Shimada's novel. According to Christian Gutleben, one of the characteristics of neo-Victorian fiction is to create "an ontological confusion, inasmuch as the bulk of [...] pseudo-historical discourse is utterly sham" (Gutleben 2001: 26). The fictionalised process of discovering the sources of the Meiji men's diary the Victorian manuscript results in layers of fictionality and the deferral of authorship. In Shimada's novel,

Natsume's and Watson's fictionalised voices undermine the authenticity of written records and books. In the preface to *Soseki and a Case of Mummies in London*, the narrator reveals how the recently discovered "invaluable historical sources" of Watson and Natsume have been published together in the book, emphasising how much they interest "the scholars of Natsume and Holmes and also avid fans of the history of Britain and the West":

You may remember that an unpublished manuscript, which is thought to be have been written by Mr. Watson, was discovered in the shed behind the house of Mr. Python in London on 1st April 1984. [...] I have the great honour to publish this marvellous manuscript, which I gratefully gained from my acquaintance in a certain noble family, combining it with an unpublished manuscript of 'London Notes' by Mr. Natsume Soseki, which had long been gathering dust in the National Diet Library in Tokyo. (Shimada 1994: 6)

The novel exposes Watson's hidden manuscripts but cannot authenticate their origins. Shimada's deployment of neo-Victorian tropes to retell Natsume's last days in London fulfils a double function: he decentres Watson as the authentic English writer and fictionalises the process of recovering Natsume's colonial record through an act of postcolonial re-imagination.

Furthermore, the author fulfils this postcolonial agenda by imaginatively filling in the blanks of Natsume's life in London. Natsume suffered from severe depression as a consequence of his poverty and isolation in the Victorian metropolis and had to return to Japan in the middle of his studies.¹¹ He had a habit of keeping diaries, but his last days in London are unknown, because he did not write any entries after 13 November 1901. His friend, Teisuke Fujishiro, intended to accompany him to Japan on 7 November 1902, but Natsume failed to take the same ship as planned. After Fujishiro saw him before departing London, there is a mysterious blank in the diary for a month, until Natsume finally left for Japan on 5 December. The blank is filled in by Shimada's re-imagining of a period during which Natsume supports a victim involved in a case pursued by Holmes.

Shimada playfully designed *Soseki and a Case of Mummies* in part as essays written by Natsume based on his life in London. For instance, ‘A Lodge’ describes his second lodging at 85 Priory Road in London, where Shimada’s Natsume hears a strange sound and asks Holmes to find its cause. Shimada also tropes on Natsume’s consciousness of himself as an Oriental Other by capitalising on the original nineteenth-century essays written during his stay in the capital. Similar to the way in which Natsume describes himself in his diaries, Shimada’s Natsume sees himself as a “yellow” man and “an odd dwarf” (Shimada 1994: 11, 12). Natsume’s fictional essays retell events of Sherlock Holmes’s cases, often contradicting, by writing back against, the conventional authority of Watson’s narration.

In the part of literary pastiche of the Sherlock Holmes series, Shimada has Watson narrate ‘The Adventure of the Mummy at Priory Road’, which is explained to have occurred in 1901 after a Conan Doyle’s Holmes case, ‘The Problem of Thor Bridge’ (Shimada 1994: 38). In a scene where a criminal runs away and is caught, Watson judges that the felon could be apprehended due to Holmes’s accurate judgement and his deft instructions issued to people around them (see Shimada 1994: 179-181). However, in Natsume’s version, it is Natsume who is the first to observe the presence of the criminal and instructs Watson and Holmes to catch him (see Shimada 1994: 193-194). The difference between these descriptions of the slapstick chase highlights a postcolonial move that overturns the power dynamics between Britain and the Orient.

Another crucial decentring occurs when Holmes and Natsume find a slip of paper, which both of them assume to be a vital hint to solve the case. On the slip, stuffed into the mouth of the mummified victim, are written four letters, the shapes of which are wrongly distinguished as characters in the Japanese Hiragana alphabet. Eventually, it is revealed that the characters are mere fragments of the mummified man’s letter to his sister, which he ate while starving in his cold lodgings. In Watson’s narration, the meaning of the numbers and figures on the slip remains uncertain, but in Natsume’s diary, he notes down his discovery that they are fragments of the victim’s suicide note: parts or traces of sentences nostalgically expressing “the nineteenth century will be soon gone” (Shimada 1994: 257). Natsume’s analysis of the slip defeats Holmes’s scientific investigation. In this respect, Natsume becomes an agent of subversion, overturning the Western model of the quest for scientific order and reason in detective fiction and reducing it

to impotence, because the genre lacks genuine knowledge of the Asian Other. Consequently, Shimada, as does Yamada, presents Natsume as a contradictory and double character: he experiences inferiority as the marginalised Other, but is imbued with subversive agency, out-sleuthing and trumping the ‘master’ sleuth.

Shimada’s and Yamada’s ‘Natsumes’ are inspired by the real-life writer’s attempt to find his identity as a Japanese man and modern novelist in developed and modernised London. The cultural collision with English culture bewildered him and brought a sense of inferiority and depression, which in turn provided further motivation for exploring how to establish himself as an individual in modern society. This major theme of Natsume’s works was at the root of his stay in London as an overseas student. Shortly after he returned to Japan, he wrote *Bungaku Ron (A Theory of Literature, 1907)*. This long essay about literature contains the following famous lines: “The two years I lived in London were the unhappiest two years of my life. Among the English gentleman, I was like a lone shaggy dog mixed with a pack of wolves; I endured a wretched existence” (Natsume 2009: 48).¹² His uneasiness regarding the ‘animalised’ English gentlemen of London, represented as cunning “wolves”, was followed by his recognition of the importance of the Japanese point of view, which was repeated and emphasised in his famous lecture, ‘Watashi no Kojin Shugi (My Individualism)’ (1914).¹³ Natsume attempted to leave behind the old-fashioned identity that flourished under the feudal Bakufu government and create a modern one. In the process, he realised that the Japanese not only considered their identities to be inferior, Oriental, and Other to the West, but felt that they had to assert their independence from the rest of the world. In ‘My Individualism’, therefore, he contended: “As an independent Japanese man, I was not a servant of England. As a part of the Japanese nation, I had to think of myself in my own way because we had the common moral sense over the world, which was a sense of honesty” (Natsume 1995: 594). The forefather of Japanese modern fiction in the Meiji period thus attempted to define his identity as Japanese by viewing himself in relation to Victorian England. The roots of Japanese neo-Victorian fiction thus reveal both Japanese insularity and the global context of the Meiji era.

4. Implications for Imperialism

The contradictory representation of leading Japanese men in the Meiji era is also a feature of Togo's neo-Victorian detective novel *The Adventures of Kumagusu*, which blends the context of Victorian London with the life of Kumagusu Minakata. A Japanese biologist, naturalist and folklorist, Minakata was born in 1867 and was one of the young Japanese men who studied abroad at the end of the nineteenth century. He left Japan in 1886 after dropping out of university in Tokyo, studied at universities in the United States for a year, then wandered around the American continent collecting natural samples of fungi and rare plants from 1887 to 1892. After leaving America, he arrived in England on 21 September 1892, and stayed until 1900. Like Natsume, he was a Japanese student and researcher who contributed some fifty articles about Asian ecology to *Nature*, with the first being published in 1893. However, partly because he did not publish his collected research in book form during his lifetime, he was not widely known, although contemporary intellectuals in both Europe and Japan knew of him. In the 1980s and 1990s, studies of Minakata began to flourish, and a number of collections of his diaries and letters, some of which had been neglected until then, were published.¹⁴

Togo's neo-Victorian detective novel cannot be said to be a sophisticated example of the genre, because the plot is neither intricate nor elaborate, but the author's knowledge of natural history and his research on Minakata allows him to cite the scientific background related to the mysteries.¹⁵ Like Yamada's and Shimada's 'Natsumes', Togo's Minakata function as an agent of subversion. In front of the gentlemen scholars in the British Library, he speaks in Standard English, and when working with "a lawyer and a big shot" on a case, he likewise converses with a local detective in Standard English "so frequently that [the detective] is surprised", while the detective himself speaks in a "heavy" Cornwall accent (Togo 2013: 246-247). Minakata deliberately masquerades as an English gentleman in such situations to show his dignity. By imitating a Victorian gentleman and investigating mysterious incidents in a scientific way, he assimilates into the Victorian world and privileged Western society.

Another aspect of Togo's depiction of Minakata's language use illuminates an important implication of Japanese neo-Victorianism. Like the neo-Victorian fiction on Natsume that relies on recently published letters and diaries and other secondary sources, Togo succeeded in creating vivid

depictions of Minakata's eccentric characteristics and his early life in London. His novel can be said to be an example of neo-Victorian "biofiction", which "depends on a supplementary or compensatory effect, substituting fictional life for a lacuna in knowledge rather than reworking and adding to a wealth of known detail" (Kohlke 2013: 8). In the real-life Minakata's diary entry from 17 August 1893, he noted "a query about the grouping of stars into constellations":¹⁶

He composed a reply in English entitled 'The Constellations of the Far East', in which he described the traditional Chinese method of grouping stars into 'inns', 'palaces' and 'seats.' He tells us that he only had half a dictionary at his disposal, the A to Q half, lent by his landlady, the R to Z half being missing. (Blacker 1982: 237)

In Togo's novel, this humorous episode provides an example of Minakata's linguistic play. Togo has Minakata switch languages depending on the person to whom he talks. In the imagined conversation, in order to write the article, Minakata violently abuses his landlady in his regional dialect of Japanese as he urges her to give him an English dictionary, one which has the section from R to Z missing (see Togo 2013: 104). Togo reinterprets the biographical episode in a postcolonial way to depict Minakata's frustration caused by living in London as both an inferior to the English person, who has only "half a dictionary", and as an intellectual and scholar, emphasising his endeavour to observe natural phenomena from both Asian and Western points of view. His resistance towards cultural assimilation into English society is a marker of his inferiority; by using Japanese and English he is both embracing and distancing himself from Victorian/English culture.

While the concerns of Japanese neo-Victorianism can be seen in Togo's fictionalisation of Minakata's linguistic play, throughout his life, the real-life scholar tried to reveal historical similarities between Asia and Europe through folklore and a knowledge of medicinal plants. One of his papers, for instance, 'The Mandrake' was on a poisonous plant with esoteric associations. The article "demonstrates that there exists in China a plant Shang-lu, [...] around which congregate a cluster of beliefs uncannily similar to those attributed in Europe to the mysterious plant mandrake" (Blacker 1982: 238). He attempted to demonstrate historical commonalities

between Asia and Europe, which had been overshadowed by the political power balance. By using the fact that Minakata wrote the article about the mandrake and the expansion of its legend across China and Europe, Togo weaves his forged story into the webs of biographical fact: Minakata's authoring of the article for *Nature* in 1893, Sun Yat-sen's imprisonment in London in 1896, and the meeting between Sun and Minakata in 1897. In an episode, 'A Chinese Mechanical Doll', Togo's Minakata befriends Sun, father of the Republic of China, and helps him escape the London office of the Chinese government, where Sun has been confined. In another episode, the poison of the mandrake is used in the murders of young Chinese men, which Sun detects and asks Minakata to solve. At the end of the case, Sun presents Minakata with a symbol of China, "a doll figure of the mandrake", which alludes to his theory on the similarities between China and the West. Togo's introduction of Chinese plotlines and characters, as well as Minakata's endeavour to position Japan and China as parallel to the West, suggest the larger imperial and historical contexts of Japanese neo-Victorian fiction.

Although Minakata forms a bridge between Asia and the West, the novel demarcates the line between China and Japan, which was enforced before the Pacific War. The first episode of *The Adventures of Kumagusu* is a case of serial murder by poisoning, in which the victims are employees of W.G. Armstrong & Company, who had provided Japan with Armstrong guns and battleships during the Meiji period and early twentieth century. The background to this episode is the first Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), fought over control of Korea. The Meiji era saw success in trade because the country advanced its military level after centuries of isolation.¹⁷ Minakata stayed in London during the years that the Meiji government forged ahead with its plan to trade with Britain for Armstrong guns. Against the background of the war between the Qing dynasty and the rising Empire of Japan, Togo's Minakata solves the mystery of the murders using his knowledge of pharmacology. In fact, all of the victims, involved in the arms trade, are killed by poisonous centipedes, secretly introduced by a scientist who is also an assassin for the Qing intelligence service to stop further sales of arms to Japan.

After solving the assassination plot, Minakata fears that the Qing assassin, who has won a reputation as a botanist in Britain, as has Minakata himself, is about to be killed for his failure by the Qing minister in Britain.

A Japanese naval officer, dispatched to the Armstrong company from the government, says to him angrily, “Why are you showing mercy to him? The man is the enemy of our empire” (Togo 2013: 50). In the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, of course, such vocal hostility towards the Qing Empire would have promoted Japanese nationalism at a time when the Empire of Japan began its colonisation and domination of China, Korea and other Asian countries, which would continue until the end of the Pacific War. In this sense, Minakata’s sympathy for the Chinese botanist and assassin positions him implicitly as a critic of absolutism and a defender of its infringements of individual rights.

Japanese neo-Victorian fictions document the beginning of Japanese imperialism over Asia in the coming twentieth century and Japan’s cultural, political and economic encounters with foreign countries including Victorian England. On the one hand, Japanese neo-Victorian fiction recaptures the multiple imperial histories of the Victorian / Meiji period. On the other hand, it rewrites the lives and textual productions of literary men, making them aware of and curious about Japan’s position within the larger global context. As these fictional writers struggle to redefine Japan within an imperial framework, the return to Victorian society and culture allows Japanese contemporary writers to develop a global awareness of Japanese identity in the present.

5. Conclusion: Rethinking Japan in the Re-Imagined Meiji

The Victorian period continues to be a fertile site for the Japanese imagination in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In particular, the classic style of the detective novel mastered by Conan Doyle still influences Japanese mystery writers. Shimada comments on the trend of detective novels (called mystery novels in Japanese) in Japan from the 1980s as follows: “In the US and the UK, this genre appears to have declined but in Japan it continues to flourish” (Inagaki 2015: para. 10). Japanese neo-Victorian detective novels look back at the past from a new perspective, unearthing the marginalised status of Japan in the West and its complicated desire to mimic British culture and imperial ideologies. Instead of directly criticising Japan’s imperial involvement in the colonisation of Asian countries, Japanese neo-Victorian fiction nostalgically revels in the notion of progress through Natsume’s and Minakata’s challenges of Holmes’s modernised scientific method of detection. However, when reading these

works within the context of the strained relations between Japan and other Asian countries (China in particular), they reveal allusions to the origins of Japanese imperialism, the trauma of colonialism on Asia in the twentieth century, and the country's defeat in the Pacific War. Working with neo-Victorianism, Japanese authors such as Shimada, Yamada and Togo reflect how contemporary Japan tends to avert its eyes from its own imperialism and tangled relationships with Britain and other Asian countries.

The Meiji literary men in London became voices of resistance against Western domination, privileged Englishness, and the Orientalist depiction of Asians as primitive. Natsume and Minakata both experienced identity crises occasioned by their conflicts with Victorian scholars and sought a sense of cultural selfhood as Japanese men. Their struggles inspired contemporary Japanese novelists to adopt strategies of neo-Victorianism to address the Japanese nation in the broader world and to express how looking back to the Victorian period in the context of Meiji Japan is also looking forward to present-day Japan in a global context.

Notes

1. The period of national isolation of Japan dramatically came to an end in 1853 when Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States Navy sailed into Tokyo harbour and forced Japan to end its isolation policy and enter into trade with the United States.
2. For a discussion of steampunk in Japan, see Elizabeth Ho's *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire* (2012). Ho identifies the use of steampunk in Japan as "an ideal vehicle for Japan to explore its origins as a 'modern' nation" and as "Japan's role as a colonizer within Asia" (Ho 2012: 162).
3. The 2013 text of *The Adventures of Kumagusu* is a revised version of that published in 2008. In this paper, I use the 2013 text.
4. All volumes are pastiches of the original Sherlock Holmes stories. In the first volume, the setting is changed to twenty-first century London; in the second, the narrators of each story are marginalised characters such as Mrs Hudson, Inspector Lestrade, and a boy of the Baker Street Irregulars. The last volume is the author's attempt at retelling stories that are indicated but not narrated in the canonical text of Conan Doyle.
5. For further information on the history of the transition from the Edo to the Meiji periods along with Japanese modernisation, see Andrew Gordon's *A*

Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present (2003) and Chapter 8 of *A Companion to Japanese History* (2007), edited by William M. Tsutsui.

6. For further information of the wars in Satsuma and Choshu before the Meiji Restoration, see Cobbing 1998.
7. Jansen also states that “[t]he early Meiji decades were a time of great optimism” in his intelligent study of Japan in *The Making of Modern Japan* (Jansen 2002: 460).
8. All citations from works published in Japanese are translated into English by the author of this paper unless otherwise noted. The titles of these fictions are also translated into English in the text. For the titles of these books in Japanese, see the bibliography.
9. Natsume published two letters from London in the journal *Hototogisu* (4:8) in 1901. His letters are translated into English in *Spring Miscellany and London Essays* (2002), translated by Sammy L. Tsunematsu.
10. The translation of ‘The Man with The Twisted Lip’ was published in the sixth to ninth volumes of the *Nihonjin (the Japanese)*, titled *Kojikidoraku (A Beggar and Pleasure)*, from January to February in 1894.
11. The Meiji government sent Natsume abroad to study English in 1900.
12. *Bungaku Ron* was translated into English by Michael K. Bourdaghs, Atsuko Ueda and Joseph A. Murphy in *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings* (2009).
13. ‘Watashi no Kojin Shugi’ (‘My Individualism’) is the title of Natsume’s lecture presented in 1914. The lecture is reprinted in the sixteenth volume of *Soseki Zenshu* (Iwanami Shoten, 1995). The citation is translated into English by the author of this paper. As for his recognition of the importance of Japanese point of view, see the introduction of *Theory of Literature and Other Critical Writings*, in which the editors review how the idea of the Japanese point of view is a crucial one for Natsume and critics in Japan (Bourdaghs, Ueda and Murphy 2009: 31).
14. See *Minakata Kumagusu Nikki (Diaries of Minakata Kumagusu)*, edited by Kozo Hasegawa, 4 vols. (Yasaka Shobo, 1987); *Minakata Kumagusu Shokanshu (The Collections of Letters of Minakata Kumagusu)*, edited by The Institute of Kinan Bunkazai Kenkyu Kai (Kinan Bunkazai Kenkyu, 1981). There are more collections of letters published in the 1980s and 1990s available in Japan. As for the studies of Minakata in other countries, Carmen Blacker introduced the achievement of Minakata in her essay ‘Minakata Kumagusu: A Neglected Japanese Genius’ (1982).

15. Ryu Togo was once a research assistant at the Museology Department in Kokugakuin University in Tokyo.
16. The biographical facts are based on the biographies of Minakata as well as his diaries and letters, to which Blacker devoted her insightful study. We can refer to the same accounts in these primary and secondary sources published in Japanese before her article. However, in this article, I am citing biographical facts included in Blacker's article.
17. For further information of the engagement and trade of W. G. Armstrong & Company with Japan, see Heald 2010: 205-208.

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