

# Japanese Dandies in Victorian Britain: Rewriting Masculinity in Japanese Girls' Comics

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## Abstract:

The dandy's appearance in the Japanese neo-Victorian girls' manga *Kuroshitsuji* (*Black Butler*) can be read as an ideal of what I am calling 'creative masculinity'. This contemporary iteration of late nineteenth-century dandy masculinity points to the rise of new gender roles in post-bubble Japan, as well as to the historical migration of ideas about gender from Britain to Japan. In reading *Kuroshitsuji* in relation to this history of Anglo-Japanese interactions, this article departs from the existing view of Japanese girls' media as a closed world of escapism. Instead, neo-Victorian girls' manga are 'worldly' in the sense that they offer ways of understanding Japan's participation in the global creative economy by relating it to the global history of informal British imperialism in the long nineteenth century.

**Keywords:** *Black Butler*, Britain, dandy, fashion, imperialism, Japan, *Kuroshitsuji*, manga, masculinity, salaryman.

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The dandy cuts a curious figure in the Japanese neo-Victorian *shōjo* manga (girls' comics) *Kuroshitsuji* or *Black Butler* in the English translation (2007-present), crossing time and space to articulate an ideal of what I term 'creative masculinity', which speaks to changing gender norms in post-bubble Japan as well as to the historical migration of ideas about gender from Britain to Japan in the nineteenth century. While dandies in Britain in the nineteenth century collected Japanese decorative objects to demonstrate their cultural sophistication, men in Japan were simultaneously displaying their Westernised tastes by transforming themselves into dandies. *Haikara* (high-collar), as these Japanese dandies came to be known, learnt how to cultivate the dress sense (and more broadly, the lifestyle) of their Western counterparts by reading etiquette books, many of which, Jason Karlin notes, appear to be translated from British sources (Karlin 2002: 44-45). Although many of these Japanese etiquette books did not name their source texts, they were likely translated from British rather than other European sources at

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least partly because Britain, as Brent Shannon observes in his history of British men's consumer culture, had overtaken France as the leader of men's fashion in Europe by the mid-nineteenth century (Shannon 2006: 1-2). In 'The Painter of Modern Life' (1863), Charles Baudelaire lamented that "[d]andies are becoming rarer and rarer in our country [France], whereas amongst our neighbours in England the social system and the constitution" – i.e., the nature of the people – "will for a long time yet allow", and did indeed allow, "a place for the descendants of Sheridan, Brummel and Byron" (Baudelaire 1986: 29). The transmission of this British variant of dandy masculinity to Japan in the second half of the nineteenth century sparked off a hostile opposition between the *haikara* and the macho samurai-inspired masculinity promoted by ultra-nationalist groups. Today, this same antagonism, which shaped Japan's imperialist project in the 1930s and 1940s and Japan's post-war economic miracle, has become relevant once more.

The dandy was vilified in both British middle-class discourse and Japanese right-wing nationalist discourse in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The manga series *Kuroshitsuji* recuperates this much-maligned figure to celebrate the power and freedom of present-day Japanese male consumers to fashion their individual selves by consuming fashion creatively. This consumption-based dandy masculinity is diametrically opposed to the figure of the post-war salaryman and the nationalist and imperial masculinities that constituted the salaryman's historical precedents. By championing the dandy over the salaryman, the manga participates in the emergence of alternative masculinities that emphasise creativity, individualism, and consumption after the bubble economy collapsed in Japan in 1990. Paradoxically, this new incarnation of dandy masculinity is now re-inscribed as Japanese and circulates transnationally as a marker of the new and the modern, in much the same way as the Western figure of the dandy did a century earlier.

This article draws on the critical practice of "worlding" (Spivak 1985: 235) developed in Postcolonial Studies and more recently in World Literature and Victorian Studies. It extends this practice to the study of cross-geographical and cross-temporal forms of masculinity in *shōjo* manga, a genre of comics that readers and critics alike often regard as a "closed world" of escapist fantasies made for and by young Japanese women (Takahashi 2008: 114-136).<sup>1</sup> In *Colonial Masculinity: The "Manly*

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*Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Mrinalini Sinha proposes studying nineteenth-century British masculinity not only with reference to conditions within Britain, but also in relation to the history of British imperialism in India (Sinha 1995: 2-8). Material conditions in metropole and colony, Sinha argues, make up a unified “imperial social formation”, which provides a “global social analytic” appropriate to the study of British masculinity in the nineteenth century (Sinha 1995: 2). Following Sinha, my study of Japanese masculinity expands the frame of reference from the nation to the imperial social formation. British and more broadly Western conceptions of what was appropriate behaviour for gentlemen travelled to Japan in the nineteenth century and were both internalised and rejected by the Japanese as ideal forms of masculinity. This article reads *Kuroshitsuji* in relation to this global history of competing masculinities that began with cross-cultural contact in the nineteenth century, thereby revealing that the new dandy masculinity that Japan now exports as a product of its ‘creative economy’ is in fact a reiteration of this history. Far from being a ‘closed world’, *shōjo* manga like *Kuroshitsuji* are ‘worldly’ in that they offer ways of understanding Japan’s participation in the global creative economy by relating it to the global history of the nineteenth century.

In ‘worlding’ *Kuroshitsuji*, this article also participates in a growing subfield of neo-Victorian studies that examines post-1901 representations of the Victorian period from postcolonial and global perspectives. Set in Britain in the late 1880s and early 1890s, *Kuroshitsuji* revolves around the adventures of Count Ciel Phantomhive and his butler Sebastian, who is actually the Devil in disguise. The manga series trades in the many stereotypes that make up the image of ‘Victorian Britain’, its pages filled with top hats, porcelain tea services, butlers and housemaids, afternoon tea, the Crystal Palace, workhouses, Jack the Ripper, and Queen Victoria herself. In *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of Empire*, Elizabeth Ho argues that the Victorian “has become a powerful shorthand for empire in the contemporary global imagination”, so much so that “the return to the Victorian in the present offers a highly visible, highly aestheticised code for confronting empire again and anew” (Ho 2012: 5). Like the neo-Victorian texts that Ho discusses, *Kuroshitsuji* uses the trope of the Victorian as a means to engage with the history of the British Empire and Japanese responses to it. Empire in the case of *Kuroshitsuji*, however, refers to a

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highly informal and indirect process of cultural influence, rather than to the ruling of territories or even to the enforcement of free trade via unequal treaties (which in fact came to an end in Japan relatively quickly with Britain agreeing to revise its trade treaty with Japan in the 1890s).<sup>2</sup> In focusing on the cultural dimension of empire, this article contributes to Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietzrak-Franger's call for a "global" neo-Victorian studies (Primorac and Pietzrak-Franger 2015: 1), pushing beyond the boundaries of Britain, the formal British Empire, and the English language to examine how historical relations of cultural transmission impact on global cultural commodity production and export today.

### 1. The Dandy and the Creative Consumption of Commodities

Like all forms of historical fiction, neo-Victorian fiction draws connections between the past that is being depicted and the present context of the text's production. Through its emphasis on fashion and grooming, *Kuroshitsuji* appropriates the figure of the Victorian dandy to participate in the emergence of new masculinities in contemporary Japan, but also to situate these present-day concerns in a genealogy of Japanese masculinities stretching back to the nineteenth century.

Count Ciel Phantomhive, the aristocratic protagonist of *Kuroshitsuji*, often appears dressed in highly elaborate outfits that recall the late Victorian dandy epitomised by Oscar Wilde. Wilde often created his distinctive outfits by borrowing design elements from women's clothing, such as flowers, stockings, and velveteen fabrics. Talia Schaffer argues that "to modern readers", these design elements may evoke "unmistakeably female conventions", but they are also taken from "male-associated signifying systems" of dress, including male aristocratic fashion from earlier historical periods (Schaffer 2000: 45). Like Wilde, Ciel blurs the boundaries between male and female dress when his outfits reference European aristocratic dress from before the nineteenth century, when male dress was often made of the same materials and incorporated the same design elements as female dress. There is no radical difference between Ciel's usual appearance as a boy,<sup>3</sup> and his appearance when cross-dressing as a girl.<sup>4</sup> Both male and female costumes are adorned with ribbons, bows, ruffles, lace trimmings, and rose motifs.

Dandyism in Britain in the nineteenth century represented the emergence of a "new kind of aristocracy" (Baudelaire, qtd. in Adams 1995:

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23), which, unlike the feudal aristocracy that had begun to decline with industrialisation, was based on cultural distinction rather than economic wealth or family lineage (see Adams 1995: 23). Writing about the dandy in France in the 1860s, Baudelaire argues that, to the dandy, “toilet and material elegance” are “symbols of his aristocratic superiority of mind”, which pursues the ideals of beauty and “personal originality” in revolt against mass democracy and standardisation (Baudelaire 1986: 26-29). Dandies, in other words, engage in a “cult of the self” (Baudelaire 1986: 27), in which they distinguish themselves from others by cultivating their appearances and consuming fashion in creative ways. Wilde, for example, signalled his close association with women by drawing inspiration from women’s fashion, while simultaneously setting himself apart from women by demonstrating that he knew how to appreciate women’s fashion as an art form, whereas women only knew how to appreciate fashion as a matter of changing fads in clothing styles (see Schaffer 2000: 40, 42). By claiming that he understood women’s fashion better than women did, Wilde constructed the identity and profession of the male connoisseur or “art expert” for himself and his fellow male aesthetes (Schaffer 2000: 42).

While Ciel and the other male characters in *Kuroshitsuji* are not followers of Wilde concerned with the philosophy and creation of art, they do engage in a similar practice of self-creation through the creative consumption of fashion. Grelle Sutcliff, a transvestite *shinigami* (the Japanese version of the Grim Reaper), and his colleagues, William T. Spears and Ronald Knox, all wear the same uniform of black suit, white shirt, necktie, and spectacles, but they disrupt this sartorial conformity by introducing subtle elements of individuality into their appearances, using clothing, accessories, and other commodities. For example, William wears a black necktie whereas Grelle wears a striped ribbon tied in a bow around his neck. All three characters carry “death scythes” (*desu saizu*) which are modelled on household consumer goods, and which have been “customised to suit [their] individual personalities” (*atashi yō ni kasutamaizu shita no*) (Toboso 2007 (vol. 2): 173).<sup>5</sup> Grelle uses a chainsaw that matches the zigzagged shape of his teeth, William uses an extendable rod with a pair of pliers attached at the end, and Ronald’s ‘death scythe’ looks like a lawnmower. Like the dandy in Britain in the nineteenth century, the male characters in the manga create a distinctive sense of self by ‘customising’ fashion.

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In recuperating the nineteenth-century figure of the dandy, *Kuroshitsuji* celebrates the newfound power of the Japanese male consumer, since the 1990s, to construct his “personal originality” (Baudelaire 1986: 27) out of consuming fashion. Sebastian, the ‘black butler’ of the manga’s title, embodies both the nineteenth-century dandy and the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Japanese *binan* (beautiful man) who, like his British precursor, engages in intensive personal grooming and fashion as legitimate male pursuits. Up until the 1990s, mainstream Japanese society generally associated such investment in one’s physical appearance with the young female figures of the Office Lady, the *gyaru*, and the *shōjo* schoolgirl (see Kinsella 2014; Bardsley and Hirakawa 2005; Jolivet 1997; and Tokuhiko 2010). *Kuroshitsuji* implies that such vanity, far from being confined to women, is now an ideal attribute that Japanese men should possess if they wish to be attractive to women. Grelle, speaking from the position of a male transvestite who wants to become a heterosexual woman, proclaims that he “likes a man [such as Sebastian] who pays attention to his appearance” (*midashinami ni ki o tsukau otoko tte suki yo*) (Toboso 2007 (vol. 3): 82).

*Kuroshitsuji* connects this image-conscious masculinity typified by Sebastian to the power that he wields against his opponents in the manga’s fight scenes. In the ‘Jack the Ripper’ episode, Sebastian defeats Grelle by using his swallow-tail coat as an unlikely weapon (Toboso 2007 (vol. 3): 86-89). He uses the thick cloth of his coat to jam Grelle’s chainsaw, thereby triumphing over his opponent by cleverly using an article of clothing for a purpose for which it was not designed. In showing how Sebastian wins the battle through his inventive use of an item of clothing, the text implies that this ability to consume fashion in unusual ways for one’s own purposes is a kind of power, albeit one confined within the logic of consumer capitalism. The text also implies that this power, formerly open only to Japanese women, is now available to Japanese men. While there exists an element of bathos in the resolution of the battle, on the whole, the text celebrates Sebastian’s innovative resourcefulness.

Existing scholarly studies of *shōjo* manga conventionally argue that androgynous male characters speak to the implied heterosexual female reader, both as an image of her ideal boyfriend and as an idealised image of herself. As Matsui Midori argues, the androgynous male character in *shōjo* manga is the female reader’s “displaced sel[f]”,<sup>6</sup> who represents the power

and freedom that contemporary Japanese society denies to the female reader (Matsui 1993: 178).<sup>7</sup> While this applies to *Kuroshitsuji*, it must be remembered that *Kuroshitsuji*, despite being a *shōjo* manga, is serialised in *G Fantasy*, a manga magazine that is targeted at both male and female audiences. My reading of *Kuroshitsuji* suggests that Sebastian and the other *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) and *binan* (beautiful man) characters in the manga embody an ideal of masculinity that addresses male readers as much as female readers. These characters encourage Japanese male readers to see themselves as consumers, who (if I may provide a different spin on Matsui's thesis) now have the power and freedom, formerly limited to young Japanese women, to construct new forms of selfhood through the creative consumption of fashion (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: ‘Yellow Couple in Shibuya’ in Said Karlsson and Lola Rose, *Tokyo Faces*, <http://www.tokyofaces.com/2011/12/07/japanese-fashion-yellow-couple-in-shibuya>.  
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Young Japanese men join Japanese women in creating a highly individual personality by consuming fashion in creative ways.

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## 2. The Salaryman and Selfless Devotion to Productive Work

The photograph above (Fig. 1), which was featured in a December 2011 post on a Japanese street fashion blog called *Tokyo Faces*, shows a young Japanese man breaking from the conventions of mainstream male dress by wearing a bright yellow beret, black and yellow striped sunglasses, and a Coco Chanel-style tweed jacket paired incongruously with rolled-up trousers and red sneakers. In championing the power and freedom of Japanese male consumers to adopt such unconventional styles of dress, *Kuroshitsuji* participates in wider discourses and popular cultural practices that have emerged in post-bubble Japan. These discourses and practices call into question the hegemony of the post-World War Two salaryman (*sarariman*) model of masculinity and its demands on men to devote themselves to work and production rather than indulge in the pleasures of consumption.

It is important to note here that the post-war model of salaryman masculinity is not a monolithic entity that remained unchanged until it came under fire with the bursting of the bubble and the subsequent economic recession in the 1990s (see Hidaka 2010). Nonetheless, in general, from 1945 to the collapse of the bubble economy in 1990, the typical salaryman was a male white-collar employee, who dedicated his life to working for his organisation in return for a relatively generous income and job benefits, which enabled him to fulfil his role as the sole breadwinner in a heterosexual marriage and family (Dasgupta 2000: 119; Roberson and Suzuki 2003b: 7-8; Hidaka 2010: 3). In other words, the salaryman archetype is primarily associated with production in the public domain of paid work, whereas his female counterpart, the *senkyō shufu* (full-time housewife), is associated with care-giving and consuming household goods in the home. Together, the salaryman, the *senkyō shufu*, and their children make up the archetypal middle-class family, which up until the 1990s was “idealised as the bedrock of national prosperity in post-war years” (White qtd. in Dasgupta 2014: 255). In reality, salarymen obviously engage in commodity consumption, for example, during karaoke and drinking sessions after work. Likewise, housewives often take up temporary and part-time jobs to supplement the family income, but the popular imagination of the archetypal Japanese middle-class family often downplays these realities. *Kuroshitsuji*'s celebration of the young Japanese man as consumer discards this sex-based demarcation of production and consumption, thereby paving

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the way for a rather cynical form of gender equality founded on commodity consumption. It also rejects the basic assumption in salaryman masculinity that men should devote themselves selflessly to productive labour instead of pursuing individual self-satisfaction in consuming commodities. The *shinigami* characters in the manga, discussed previously, parody the salaryman archetype when they personalise the familiar salaryman attire of black suit, white shirt, and necktie by tweaking details and adding accessories.

The manga characters' dandyism brings to mind how the dandy in nineteenth-century Britain eschewed the middle-class male role of producer through his conspicuous consumption of clothing and accessories. Beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the French Revolution, the decline of the aristocracy, and emergent notions of 'separate spheres' for the sexes encouraged the British middle class to define manhood as practical, business-minded, and uninterested in fashion. This led to what J. C. Flugel calls the "Great Masculine Renunciation" in male dress (Flugel qtd. in Breward 1999: 24-25; also see Shannon 2006: 22). British middle-class men gradually began to abandon ornamentation, to wear dark colours only, and to dress in the same "uniform" of sombre frockcoat, plain shirt, and unadorned hat (see Breward 1999: 24-25; Shannon 2006: 23-24). This shift away from the aristocratic male dress of the eighteenth century contributed to constructing what Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall call the "utilitarian male body" that was devoted to work rather than pleasure or physical beauty (Davidoff and Hall qtd. in Shannon 2006: 25). In the words of Flugel, in the early nineteenth century, "[m]an abandoned his claim to be considered beautiful. He henceforth aimed at being only useful" (Flugel qtd. in Shannon 2006: 25).<sup>8</sup> The figure of the dandy in Britain, epitomised by Beau Brummell in the early nineteenth century, and Wilde and Max Beerbohm in the late nineteenth century, rejected this championing of work and utility by donning clothes and accessories that were obviously impractical and extravagant (see Shannon 2006: 131-132). Likewise, in *Kuroshitsuji*, the *shinigami*'s customisation of their workwear, Sebastian's cultivation of his appearance, and Ciel's sartorial referencing of pre-nineteenth-century European male aristocratic dress all reject salaryman masculinity's emphasis on economic production. As models for reader identification, these characters encourage Japanese male readers of the manga to imagine themselves engaging, not in

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productive work, but in the very different ‘work’ of making themselves beautiful rather than useful.

In encouraging its male readers to perform what Laura Miller calls “beauty work” (Miller 2003: 385), *Kuroshitsuji* registers and participates in the ongoing decline of the salaryman ideal in Japan. As the economic recession deepened in the 1990s, corporations retrenched large numbers of middle-aged salarymen in middle management. They also stopped hiring young men as salarymen, choosing instead to employ them as ‘freeters’ (*furiitaa*) to do temporary and part-time work (see Dasgupta 2014: 260-261). As a result of corporate bankruptcies and restructuring, many Japanese men could not hold onto their salaryman status or even become salarymen in the first place. When the employment system that had given rise to salaryman masculinity was thus destabilised, public opinion in Japan began to question, on an unprecedented scale, whether Japanese men should be aspiring to salaryman masculinity at all (see Roberson and Suzuki 2003b: 9-10; Dasgupta 2014: 260).

New models of masculinity such as the *otaku* (male geek) and the *sōshokukei danshi* (‘herbivorous’ man who dislikes competing for sexual partners and corporate success) have arisen out of this questioning of the salaryman ideal. In her discussion of the book, television drama, and film adaptation of *Densha otoko* (*Train Man*), Susan Napier reads the fleeting appearance of a salaryman, who is quickly overshadowed by the *otaku* protagonist, as a symbol of the salaryman’s loss of status in post-bubble Japan (Napier 2011: 164). For Napier, the salaryman ideal has been replaced by a variety of male archetypes, including the *otaku*, the “creative ‘cooking man’”, the aggressive young entrepreneur, and the androgynous *bishōnen* (beautiful boy) (Napier 2011: 165). *Kuroshitsuji*’s celebration of the dandy masculinity of the *bishōnen* and the *binan* (beautiful man) is shaped by this wider challenging of salaryman masculinity and the emergence of alternative masculinities for young Japanese men since the 1990s.<sup>9</sup>

As with the dandy, these new masculinities are mostly based on consumption rather than production, and they emphasise creativity and individualism rather than conformity and selfless service to the company or nation. Miller notes that more young Japanese men since the 1990s have begun to engage in the aforementioned “beauty work”, investing time, money, and effort in their appearance in order to attract Japanese women, who now shun the salaryman archetype as belonging to “an older generation

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of *oyaji* ('old men') de-eroticised by a corporate culture that emphasised [what Brian McVeigh calls] a 'productivity ideology of standardisation, order, control, rationality, and impersonality'" (Miller 2003: 38). While growing male interest in "beauty work" has been motivated by this shift in Japanese women's perceptions of what is desirable in Japanese men, the emphasis on creativity and individualism in particular seems to stem from three global developments in the late 1990s and early 2000s: the global circulation of ideas about the creative economy and the creative class; the successes of the cultural industries in advanced capitalist economies (including Japan); and the growing desire of national and local governments worldwide to build on or emulate those successes. In his highly influential 2002 book, *The Rise of the Creative Class and How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community, and Everyday Life*, Richard Florida celebrates what he calls the "creative class", a class of individuals who use their creativity to produce "meaningful new forms" that have economic value (Florida 2002: 68). Florida's conception of the creative worker has fed into a new corporate ideal for Japanese men, which Romit Dasgupta describes as stressing creativity, individuality, and entrepreneurial daring (Dasgupta 2003: 130; Dasgupta 2014: 263).

The emphasis on creativity and individualism also extends to new masculinities that have arisen outside the corporate world, and which are available to the male 'freeters' (*furiitaa*) that Japanese corporations have been hiring in place of salarymen as low-wage flexible labour. As Sarah Brouillette argues, discourses on the creative economy such as that celebrated by Florida often represent creative workers as individualistic artists, who find self-expression in their work and therefore *want* to be flexible and to manage their own time (Brouillette 2014: 4). While this supposed freedom of the creative worker might sound like a positive development, Brouillette warns that it actually dovetails with neoliberal government policies that aim to create flexible labour markets where workers are low-paid and have no job security (Brouillette 2014: 4). In Japan's case, the number of part-time, temporary, and contract workers had risen to one-third of the workforce by the mid-2000s as a result of the 1990s economic recession, corporate restructuring, and the full legalisation of temporary staffing under the Obuchi and Koizumi administrations (Coe, Johns, and Ward 2011: 1092-1093). Not all male 'freeters' in Japan work in the creative or cultural industries, but for those who do, creating a

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distinctive sartorial style can often become part of their work.<sup>10</sup> For example, the advertising campaigns of fashion brand Milkboy – which Monden Masafumi discusses in his study of the Japanese “‘neo-Edwardian’ dandy style” (Monden 2015: 60-67) – feature celebrities alongside ‘freeters’, such as student and amateur model Musashi Rhodes and the brand’s own shop assistant Yota Tsurimoto, all dressed up in Milkboy’s latest designs (Monden 2015: 65-67; see also Monden 2012). Although Sebastian in *Kuroshitsuji* is a butler in regular employment, his servant status distances him from Grelle and the other parody-salarymen characters. It reminds the reader that the dandy masculinity Sebastian embodies is not only a new model of corporate masculinity that is displacing the salaryman ideal, but also a new form of masculinity for men who work in the service sector, often in non-regular employment.

*Kuroshitsuji*’s aristocratic *bishōnen* Ciel and his equally beautiful servant Sebastian thus register the rise of dandy masculinities across the social spectrum in Japan in the 1990s and 2000s. In shifting focus from economically productive work to the consumption-mediated labour of self-fashioning, *Kuroshitsuji* champions the supposed freedom of both the male corporate employee and the male ‘freeter’ to construct their individual selves by consuming fashion creatively. This fantasy of individual agency in turn helps to obscure and perpetuate the realities of short-term contracts, diminishing job benefits, and increasing job insecurity with the decline of salaryman masculinity in post-bubble Japan.

### 3. Competing Masculinities in Meiji and Wartime Japan

Monden notes that the Japanese “‘neo-Edwardian’ dandy style” that has emerged in the recent rebellion against salaryman masculinity harkens back not only to dandyism in Britain, but also to the introduction of European male dress to Japan in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Monden 2015: 30-35). Indeed, the dandy masculinities of the 1990s and 2000s that *Kuroshitsuji* registers are actually part of a longer history in Japan. *Kuroshitsuji* engages not only with current conditions, but also with historical struggles over defining appropriate male behaviour that date back to the Meiji period (1868-1912). The manga’s celebration of dandy masculinity is informed by Meiji Japan’s importation of British ideas and writings about gentlemen’s attire, as well as by Japanese responses to these ideas and writings from the second half of the nineteenth century to the end

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of the Asia-Pacific War in 1945. Under the banner of ‘civilisation and enlightenment’ (*bunmei kaika*), Japanese ‘gentlemen’ (*shinshi*) in the Meiji period adopted Western dress and other Western aristocratic social practices such as dinner parties and ballroom dancing. They were consequently attacked by right-wing nationalists who sought to gain political legitimacy via their own definition of a supposedly ‘authentic’ Japanese masculinity. *Kuroshitsuji* aligns itself with this maligned figure of the Westernised Japanese dandy against the salaryman and his links to the anti-Western, nationalist, and imperial masculinities of the late Meiji and wartime periods. The manga thereby perpetuates the dialectic of emulating the West and asserting Japanese-ness that has characterised Japan’s relations with the West since it was forcibly opened to Western trade in the 1850s. Yet the manga also modifies this dialectic when it re-contextualises the nineteenth-century Japanese emulation of the British dandy as the newfound agency of the contemporary Japanese male consumer.

As the term *kigyō senshi* (corporate warrior) suggests, the post-war figure of the salaryman is linked to the martial masculinity that the militarist state promoted to support Japan’s imperialist wars in Manchuria, China, and Southeast Asia in the 1930s and early 1940s. Hidaka Tomoko’s interviews with salarymen born before the end of the Asia-Pacific War reveal that the interviewees’ self-perception as salarymen has been deeply influenced by wartime nationalist propaganda on *yamato damashii*, “the Japanese spirit in which one fulfils one’s obligations and serves the nation and Emperor, sacrificing oneself without fear of death” (Hidaka 2010: 6). These interviewees, Hidaka argues, see themselves as having transformed the mission of the soldier into the mission of the salaryman, who sacrifices himself for the nation by working hard to rebuild the Japanese economy (Hidaka 2010: 7).

This wartime soldier model of masculinity was in turn shaped by earlier forms of nationalist and imperial masculinities, which advocated similar values of self-abnegation, subordination to the collective, and dedication to productive work. Morris Low argues that from the late nineteenth century onwards, the Japanese state and mass media drew on what they perceived as the traditional samurai ethics of *bushidō* to construct a model of ‘authentic’ Japanese masculinity that would promote loyalty to the Emperor and the nation-state (Low 2003: 83). In the 1900s, Nitobe Inazō championed *bushidō* as the foundation for a Japanese imperial

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masculinity when he claimed that *bushidō* was the “motor force of our country” and the source of Japan’s military success in colonial wars abroad (Nitobe 1900: 156, also see 161). This late Meiji discourse on *bushidō* intensified as Japanese imperial ambitions expanded in the 1920s and early 1930s, finding expression in the writings of public intellectuals such as Yasuoka Masahiro. Yasuoka asserted that cultivating the samurai spirit would enable young Japanese men to resist being corrupted by the comforts of urban living and the expanding consumer culture. *Bushidō*, according to Yasuoka, would teach young Japanese men to ‘forget the self’ (*botsuga*) in their absolute loyalty to the *kokutai* (national polity) (see Brown 2013: 109, 115-117). Yasuoka thereby transformed the samurai code of *bushidō* into an embodiment of moral character opposed to the pleasures of consuming commodities, and one which would support the *kokutai*’s empire-building and related military adventures (see Brown 2013: 111).

This discourse on the invented tradition of *bushidō* from Nitobe to Yasuoka, and then to the wartime soldier and the post-war salaryman, is thus linked to the late Meiji *bankara* model of nativist masculinity. In privileging the dandy over the salaryman, *Kuroshitsuji* implicitly negates this long tradition of nationalist and imperial Japanese masculinities. In reaction to the economic recession and general malaise that set in following Japan’s victory in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905), disillusioned young Japanese men cast off the earlier ideal of ‘civilisation and enlightenment’ (*bunmei kaika*) and advocated a return to “barbarism” as an essential aspect of Japanese national identity (Karlin 2002: 68-70). These *bankara* men (*ban* means ‘barbaric’) blamed what they saw as the contemporary Japanese fascination with material things on Western culture. They were therefore both anti-consumption and anti-Western (Karlin 2002: 68). They performed their rejection of consumption and Westernisation by adopting an unadorned and rugged appearance that was meant to express a supposedly authentic Japanese sincerity (*makoto*) (Karlin 2002: 68). They also called for the subordination of individual desires to national interests and championed the idea of fighting Western imperialism in Asia (Karlin 2002: 74-76). In extolling sincerity of action over speech, romantic notions of imperialist adventure and self-sacrifice, and the simplicity of rustic tastes, *bankara* men in the late Meiji period associated themselves with the figure of the master-less samurai (*rōnin*), who roams the earth defending the weak against the powerful (Karlin 2002: 70).<sup>11</sup> In this way, the *bankara*

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subculture constructed a form of masculinity that aligned itself with the invented tradition of *bushidō* to legitimate its values of anti-consumption, anti-Westernisation, and selfless devotion to the work of nation- and empire-building.

*Kuroshitsuji*'s idealisation of the dandy – whom Thomas Carlyle mocked for being “a Clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office, and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes” (Carlyle 1836: 248) – challenges this self-denying commitment to work and nation that has been transmuted from the *bankara* to the soldier and the salaryman. *Kuroshitsuji* aligns itself not only with the figure of the dandy in nineteenth-century Britain, but also with the dandy in Meiji Japan, whom the *bankara* castigated for his imitation of Western ways. The manga thus participates in the antagonism between Westernised and anti-Western masculinities in Japan that has been going on at least since the ‘civilisation and enlightenment’ (*bunmei kaika*) movement in the 1870s, if not earlier. According to Karlin, during the Meiji period, the state and nativist patriots articulated two competing ways of serving the Japanese nation, and correspondingly defined two competing forms of masculinity (Karlin 2002: 42-44). This competition was most explicitly manifested in the late Meiji period in the opposition between the *haikara* and the *bankara* and the styles of dress with which these two figures were associated.

*Haikara* (high-collar), as the name indicates, were men who wore high-collared shirts and other Western-style clothes and accoutrements. *Haikara* had evolved from *shinshi* (gentlemen), state officials of the early Meiji period who adopted Western dress to demonstrate to the Western imperial powers that Japan was civilised, in order to convince them to revise the unequal treaties that they had signed with Japan (Karlin 2002: 44). For the early Meiji *shinshi*, wearing Western-style clothes was a form of loyalty to the Japanese nation. However, in the 1880s the popular press began to satirise the *shinshi* and then the *haikara* for imitating Western customs and disavowing their native Japanese culture (Karlin 2002: 46-47). The press also criticised the *haikara* for indulging in fashion, which the late Meiji public increasingly perceived as a frivolous pursuit associated with women and effeminacy (Karlin 2002: 63-64, 67). The *bankara* challenged the political legitimacy of the *haikara* by adopting, as discussed earlier, a deliberately anti-fashionable style of dress to perform their loyalty to Japan and their opposition to the West and its materialistic culture of consumption.

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*Kuroshitsuji*'s challenging of the salaryman archetype and celebration of dandy masculinity take the side of the *haikara* in the continuing opposition between *haikara* and *bankara* in a post-bubble context.<sup>12</sup> Interest in *bushidō* has revived in Japan in recent years, resulting in a boom in writing about *bushidō* and Japanese national identity and national power (Mason 2011: 69). This “*bushidō* boom”, Michele Mason explains, is part of wider right-wing nationalist efforts to downplay Japanese aggression in the Asia-Pacific War and promote the remilitarisation of Japan (Mason 2011: 69, also see 86). In other words, this *bushido* revival is a contemporary reiteration of the *bankara*. Like his precursors, cultural commentator Hyōdō Nisohachi contends in his 2004 book *Shin bushidō* (*New Bushidō*) that Japan should become a military superpower once more by returning to the ‘traditional’ ethos of the samurai (Mason 2011: 83, 85-86).

In contrast to these recent reincarnations of the *bankara*, the dandyism of the male characters in *Kuroshitsuji* recuperates the *haikara*. The startling juxtaposition of Japanese-speaking characters and the Victorian British setting of the manga prompts the reader to think about how the *shinshi* and *haikara* in Meiji Japan had, in fact, learnt to cultivate the ways of the dandy by referring to etiquette books that seem to have been translated and compiled from nineteenth-century British sources (Karlin 2002: 44-45). Sebastian functions as a living and breathing Victorian etiquette book in the manga, as his wide-ranging responsibilities as Ciel's butler include teaching his young master the social dancing skills that, in Sebastian's words, “are expected of an upper-class gentleman” (*jōryū kaikyū no shinshi tomo nareba, dansu wa dekite tōzen no koto*) (Toboso 2007 (vol. 1): 59). In Meiji Japan, these translated etiquette books encouraged their male readers to adopt the dandy's ethos of cultivating external appearances. For example, *Kinsei Ōbei reishiki*, an 1887 translation of an unnamed British text, takes issue with a certain “Dr Watts”, who states that “the most sincere and beautiful moral character is not manifested in beautiful clothes, but in kind deeds and one's personality” (Yokoyama 1887: 74).<sup>13</sup> Initially agreeing with Watts, the narrator then argues that clothing and morality work in tandem, and that ugly and dirty clothes therefore reflect the wearer's vicious character (Yokoyama 1887: 74). *Eibei reiki* (1878), which explicitly addresses male readers who desire to become “refined and elegant gentlemen” (*kanga naru shinshi*) (Yano 1878: 17), similarly emphasises the

importance of dressing well. A man's clothes must be sparkling clean and well-made, the guidebook proclaims, or he will lose his "dignity as a gentleman" (*shinshi no igi*) (Yano 1878: 19). Likewise, *Seiyō reishiki* (1887) foregrounds the art of social display when it tells the reader that, "even if [he] is not wearing a watch to enhance [his] appearance, [he] should still wear it so that others can see it" (Tsuda 1887: 26).

These etiquette guidebooks provided their Japanese readers with detailed instructions on what to wear and when to wear it. *Taisei reihō* (1878), for instance, explains that "formal wear" (*seifuku*) usually consists of a black coat, a black silk necktie or bowtie, a waistcoat made of black silk or Portuguese raxa wool, black trousers, white leather gloves, and light-coloured leather shoes (Takahashi 1878: 56).<sup>14</sup> Some of these guidebooks even encouraged their Japanese readers to follow fashion trends in Europe. *Seiyō reishiki* informs the reader that, although a few years ago "black tie" (*ko reifuku*) meant that men could wear a waistcoat and collar of any colour with their black jacket and trousers, most men "nowadays" (*tōkon*) wear black waistcoats and white collars (Tsuda 1887: 24). The guidebook adds that, in most European countries "nowadays", only clergymen wear black clothing outside of formal occasions (Tsuda 1887: 25). As most men now don blue or brown clothes for everyday wear, wearing "old-fashioned black clothes", the guidebook explains, will make the wearer look like a "gentleman who has come down in the world" (*rakuhaku shinshi*) (Tsuda 1887: 25). By emphasising what men in Europe wear "nowadays", *Seiyō reishiki* interpellates its intended Japanese male reader not only as a 'gentleman' who wants to dress correctly, but also as a dandy who wants to keep up with the latest fashions. By reading such etiquette books and following their fashion advice, the *shinshi* and the *haikara* transformed themselves into Japanese versions of the dandy in nineteenth-century Britain. Through its fantastical representation of Japanese dandies in Victorian Britain, *Kuroshitsuji* looks back on this history to privilege the British dandy's Japanese counterpart, the *shinshi* and the *haikara*, over the samurai-inspired masculinity of the *bankara*. By doing so, *Kuroshitsuji* also provides a historicist framework for reading fashion-oriented forms of masculinity in the wider *shōjo* manga genre.

In championing the dandy, however, *Kuroshitsuji* removes traces of the Westernised/anti-Western opposition that marked the struggle between *haikara* and *bankara* for political legitimacy in the late Meiji period. The

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manga therefore perpetuates the pattern of imitating the West and asserting a ‘native’ Japanese-ness, while changing that pattern into a competition between production-oriented salaryman masculinity and consumption-oriented dandy masculinity, both of which are now coded as Japanese. In the post-bubble context, it appears that popular media such as *Kuroshitsuji* no longer see the Japanese dandy’s act of constructing his self through fashion as a specifically Westernised form of behaviour. Instead, the Japanese popular imagination now sees this practice of creative consumption as giving rise to distinctively Japanese fashion styles, ranging from the neo-Edwardian dandy and the Lolita to the Gothic looks of the Visual Kei subculture. These Japanese styles now circulate to international audiences as trend-setting markers of modernity via English-language street fashion websites such as *Tokyo Faces*, *TokyoFashion.com*, and *Style Arena*. Whereas the Japanese etiquette books of the 1870s and 1880s warned their readers against wearing outlandish clothes (see Yano 1878: 22), these new Japanese dandy styles deliberately revel in the bizarre. They thereby turn away from the “simplicity, understatement, and the reduction of dress to a few carefully selected essentials” characteristic of Beerbohm’s school of dandies (Shannon 2006: 130), in favour of the flamboyant sartorial aesthetic exemplified by Wilde and re-imagined in *Kuroshitsuji*’s neo-Victorian portrait of the dandy.

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### **Notes**

1. There is a large amount of scholarship that examines how *shōjo* manga and *shōjo* culture provide Japanese female readers with escapist fantasies of romantic love between equals. See, for example, the chapter ‘Flowers and Dreams’ in Schodt 1983; the first two chapters on romance manga and Boys’

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- Love manga in Fujimoto 1998; the discussion of *Berusaiyu no bara* (*The Rose of Versailles*) in Shamooin 2012 and McLelland 2000.
2. Britain and Japan signed a revised treaty in 1894, which came into effect in 1899. All of the other Western imperial powers followed suit, thus marking the end of the treaty port system in Japan after a relatively short period of forty-one years (Hoare 1994: xiii)
  3. See Ciel dressed as a boy: <https://mangarock.com/manga/mrs-serie-145052/chapter/mrs-chapter-145054>, p. 25.
  4. See Ciel dressed as a girl: <https://mangarock.com/manga/mrs-serie-145052/chapter/mrs-chapter-145059>, p. 7.
  5. Grelle explains that his ‘death scythe’ looks different from other *shinigami*’s because he customised it. See: <https://mangarock.com/manga/mrs-serie-145052/chapter/mrs-chapter-145061>, p. 28.
  6. This article follows the Japanese convention of placing family names before given names.
  7. Other scholars have made similar arguments about female reader identification in *shōjo* manga, and especially Boys’ Love manga, a subgenre of *shōjo* manga featuring male homosexual or homoerotic relationships (see McLelland 2000; Fujimoto 1998; Vincent 2007; and Ōgi 2001).
  8. In reality, the Great Masculine Renunciation was not absolute and British middle-class men in the nineteenth century did consume fashion, albeit rather inconspicuously (see Breward 1999 and Shannon 2006).
  9. There is a large amount of research on how new consumption-based masculinities have emerged in the wake of the bursting of the bubble economy to challenge salaryman masculinity (see Chen 2012; Monden 2012; and Bardsley 2011).
  10. In reality, the Great Masculine Renunciation was not absolute and British middle-class men in the nineteenth century did consume fashion, albeit rather inconspicuously (see Breward 1999 and Shannon 2006).
  11. See Standish 2000 for a detailed discussion of how Japanese wartime propaganda films similarly draw upon reinvented samurai values of sincerity (*makoto*) and loyalty to the *kokutai*.
  12. Mikanagi Yumiko similarly stages the historical transformation of dominant masculinity in Japan since the nineteenth century as an alternation between “hard” (*kōha*) and “soft” (*nanpa*) masculinities, and between masculinities that emphasise culture and knowledge (*bun*) and those that emphasise martial skills (*bu*) (Mikanagi 2011: 31-34).

13. Although the source text is unnamed, *Kinsei Ōbei reishiki* appears to be translated from a British text as the narrator uses “we” (*ware*) and “our” (*waga*) when referring to the British.
14. The translator of *Taisei reihō* claims that the book is translated and compiled from two books published in Britain, *Manners of Modern Society, being a Book of Etiquette*, and *The Handbook of Etiquette, being a Complete Guide to the Usages of Polite Society* (Takahashi 1878: 1). The British Library holds records for these two books, thus corroborating the translator’s source attributions. *Manners of Modern Society* was written by Eliza Cheadle and published in London by Cassell, Petter, and Galpin in 1872. *The Handbook of Etiquette* was published by the same company in 1860.

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