Structures of Colonialism in Itô Sei's 'Yûki no'

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In August 1937, Itô Sei (1905-1969) published a short story entitled Yûki no machi in the literary journal *Bungei*. This story attracted favorable critical attention, and proved to be the work that helped confirm Itô as a fully-fledged member of the *bundan*. A second short piece, 'Yûki no mura,' came out the following year in the journal *Bungakukai*, and both stories were combined into a single book under the title *Machi to mura* in 1939. The preface to this book opens with a rhetorical question:

> 人間についての物語は、なぜこんなにも悲しみや恥や嘆きばかり
> を目覚ませてゆくのだろう。私たちのもとめているのは、善いこ
> とや美しいことだ。しかし私たちの喋る声に応じて立ち上がって
> くるのは、きまって先ずそういう暗い顔をした鬼どもだ． (p.
> 798).[1]

Anyone who casts even a brief look through the book's pages will agree that its characters and incidents do indeed evoke a sense of sadness (悲しみ) and gloom (嘆き). However, in this paper I propose that one of the major demons that comes to the surface in Yûki no machi is the theme of colonialism. More generally, I hope to demonstrate that a close examination of this fictional story is a useful way of shedding

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[1] Page references for 'Machi to mura' refer to Shôwa bungaku zenshû, vol. 11, Tokyo: Shôgakukan, 1988, pp. 798-833.

light on the tensions and expectations related to colonialism that had become an integral characteristic of Japanese culture and society during the late 1930s.

But firstly, in order to locate Yûki no machi within its literary and historical context it is important to provide some sense of the author's position in the field of twentieth-century Japanese literature.

Writer, Text, Context

Anyone involved in the study of modern Japanese literature soon becomes familiar with Itô's name, which appears with great frequency in connection with so many major writers of the twentieth century. As a central player in the Japanese literary world, Itô is best known as the archetypal member of the *bundan*, as well as scholar and editor engaged with a wide range of *zadankai*, journals and other publications related to literary criticism. He was also a prolific writer of fictional works throughout his literary career. Itô reached his peak of popularity as writer of both critical and fictional literature during the 1950s. However, in order to get an understanding about why his literature depicted a colonial mentality in Yûki no machi, I think it is important to get some understanding of both where he grew up as a child and the literary trends he encountered when he was emerging as a young writer.

He spent the first twenty-odd years of his life growing up in Otaru, Hokkaido, but in 1928 he escaped what he felt to be its oppressively provincial atmosphere and moved to Tokyo. His ambition was to make an impression on the literary world. Like other aspiring writers, Itô threw himself enthusiastically into the literary and artistic currents that emerged after the 1923 Great Kantô earthquake. He was not very keen

on Proletarian writing, and in 1930 he even wrote several articles in which he criticised left-wing ideology. On the other hand, he was very excited by *transition*, a literary journal founded in 1927 that featured surrealist, expressionist and Dada art under the editorship of Paris-based Eugene Jolas (1894-1952). Since Itô was clearly interested in experimental kinds of writing, it is not surprizing that he was particularly drawn to the Japanese *Shinkankaku-ha* writer Yokomitsu Riichi (1898-1947), whose ground-breaking novel *Shanghai* (1928-1931) was being serialized just when Itô moved to the capital.[2]

In his enthusiasm for *Shanghai*, Itô was not really different to other young Japanese writers of the time. On the other hand, his literary development took a distinctive turn when he became deeply influenced by James Joyce (1882-1941) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), whose writings he first encountered during the autumn of 1929. Itô was clearly indebted to Joyce. For instance, he joined with two other writers to produce the first full translation into Japanese in 1934 of *Ulysses* (1922). At the same time, Freud's writings, which first became widely translated into Japanese in 1929, had an equally profound effect on him. This becomes evident when we read Itô's essay 'Bungaku ryôiki idô' (1930), in which he spoke about the role that psychology would play in future literature. Itô's enthusiasm for psychological interpretations can also be found in the fact that he was a founding member of the New Psychology School (*Shin Shinrigaku-ha*) of writing, which aspired to give shape to Freudian themes in literary form.[3]

Yûki no machi has been described not only as Itô's most successful example of a stream of consciousness writing style but also as the best representative of New

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[2] Kockum, p. 66.
[3] Kockum, p. 96.

Psychology fiction.[4] However, it took the author several years before he was able to write as skilfully as he does in this story. During the first part of the 1930s, Itô tried to incorporate the ideas of Joyce and Freud into several of his fictional pieces, but most literary critics did not really appreciate his literary efforts. For example, in a review of Itô's story 'Kanjô saibô no dannen' (1930), Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972) said that he thought Itô's use of Freudian psychoanalytical descriptions in that story were too clumsy. Instead, Kawabata believed that the modernist experimentations of the poet Hori Tatsuo (1904-1953) were far more successful as literature.[5]

The comments of Kawabata and other critics made Itô realize that he had not yet found his own literary voice. And so in 1931 he announced his intention to return to his native place in Hokkaido with the aim of becoming a more accomplished writer. His experiences in Hokkaido led him to write some stories in which he reflected on his own period of growing up. For instance, 'Umi no shôzô' (1931) describes a narrator who reflects on his complex relationships with women when he was a young man.[6] Itô also began to use literature as an opportunity to discuss his problematic relationship since childhood with his father, who died in Hokkaido in 1928. For example, 'Seibutsu-sai' ('The Feast of Living Creatures,' 1932) describes the death of a father and the son's sense of guilt that they never formed a more satisfactory relationship.[7] These writings indicate that Itô saw the period when he was growing up in Hokkaido as an important source of inspiration in order to develop deeper insights and more gravitas in his own literature.

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[4] See, for instance, Kockum, p. 159; Keene, Dawn to the West, p. 673
[5] Senuma Shigeki, *Itô Sei*. Tokyo: Tôjusha, 1955, pp. 73-74.
[6] Kockum, p. 135.
[7] *Itô Sei shû*. Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1970, pp. 651-658.

In Yûki no machi, the narrator still reveals the anxious tone that he displayed in his earlier stories, but the story does hint that the writer is beginning to develop a higher degree of confidence in his own voice. The story draws from the author's actual visits back to his native home, and this helps the literary representation of Otaru come alive very vividly. Indeed, Itô felt that this work marked an important stage in his literary development. He even singled out Yûki no machi as his favourite and most successful piece of fiction.

The story has quite a complicated plot, but in brief it depicts the experiences of a narrator called Utô who has returned to Otaru from Tokyo after an absence of about ten years. Several factors strongly hint that the story might be read as a *shishôsetsu* (I-novel), which assumed close parallels between the lives of narrator and author. [8] For instance, the names of author and narrator are virtually identical (Itô and Utô), they share the same native place to which they both return from Tokyo after a similar period of time away, and distinctions between author and narrator are blurred further because the story is narrated in the first person (*watakushi*) voice.

On the other hand, if we examine the text's overall style of writing, it becomes clear that it cannot be neatly pigeonholed as an I-novel. As the story opens, when Utô emerges from Otaru railway station, the reader first received the impression that this text will offer a very ordinary, everyday depiction of the streets and the buildings in a matter-of-fact descriptive style. However, this realistic mode proves to be deceptive, and the story soon adopts a far more experimental and fantastical tone. As the narrator walks through the town, he experiences a series of hellish and hallucinatory experiences in which he encounters several people from his past, many of them already

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[8] For a general introduction to the characteristics of I-novel writing, see Tomi Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, p. 2.

dead. Most of these people are young women whom Utô mistreated very badly when he was still living in Otaru as a younger man. But he also encounters the ghosts of Proletarian literature writer Kobayashi Takiji (1903-1933, Ôbayashi Takiji in the story), as well as Akutagawa Ryûnosuke (1892-1927, Chirigawa Ryûnosuke in the text), whose suicide had shocked an entire generation of writers a decade before. The ending of Itô's story cannot at all be described as positive; so many vengeful ghosts have chased after Utô that he has almost lost his mind. However, the very last sentence offers at least a glimmer of hope when he expresses a determination that, come what may, he will find the means to survive (生きなければならない.)

Like most stories that employ the fantastical mode of writing, it is not so easy to make sense of all the events in Yûki no machi. However, Rosemary Jackson has pointed out that even fantasy writing is rooted ultimately in specific historical conditions.[9] For example, one way to interpret the despairing tone found in Itô's story is to interpret it as a reflection of the traumatic political and social upheavals that Japanese writers had experienced during the previous decade. When Itô first arrived in Tokyo he was deeply impressed by modernist literary experiments, but in the late 1930s that moment had certainly passed. By 1937, when Itô was writing this story, Yokomitsu had already discarded his earlier innovative writing and was now writing in a far more conservative mode. In his novel *Ryoshû* (1937-46), which was based on his recent travels around Europe, Yokomitsu tried to escape a threatening world by concentrating on what it meant to be essentially Japanese. Meanwhile, the Proletarian literary movement had collapsed due to internal ideological disagreements within the movement as well as governmental crackdowns. 1933 was not only the year in which

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[9] Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 3.

Kobayashi Takiji was murdered by the authorities, but also when imprisoned communist leaders Sano Manabu (1892-1953) and Nabeyama Sadachika (1901-1979) renounced all ties with the Communist Party. As a consequence, large numbers of left-leaning writers came to recant their political convictions and write about their experiences in so-called *tenkô* literature.[10]

Okuno Takeo spells out how Yûki no machi might be linked to these major social and political changes. He identifies Itô with a generation of writers—including Takami Jun (1907-1965), Hori Tatsuo (1904-1953), Sakaguchi Ango (1906-1955), Dazai Osamu (1909-1948) and Ishikawa Jun (1899-1987)—who participated in an artistic revival (*bungei fukkô*) during the mid 1930s. This group was very aware that many Japanese writers and intellectuals had recently renounced their most fundamental beliefs. It could be argued that Itô was sensitive to the increasingly oppressive nature of the times, and was reflecting the disappointments of his generation in his writing. In this sense, the demons in 'Yûki no machi' may be equated with a sense of guilt, self-loathing and hypocrisy that many writers felt after having betrayed their own core identities.[11]

Like Okuno, in this paper I also try to identify links between Itô's story and its wider social and historical environment, specifically by suggesting that the demons within Itô's story can be related to the colonial attitudes of the late 1930s. However, let me acknowledge from the start that the structures of colonialism that I identify are almost never expressed directly in the text of Yûki no machi. In fact, there is only one

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[10] Lippitt, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism*, p. 204.
[11] Okuno, *Itô Sei*, pp. 118-120.

clear reference to the theme of colonialism in the whole story: the term used is colonial culture (*shokuminchi no bunka*).[12]

Furthermore, some critics have argued that Itô's story was actually unsuccessful precisely because it failed to take into account any wider social context. For example, when the story first came out, Communist literary critic Miyamoto Yuriko (1899-1951) complained that it painted a reality falsely based on a bourgeois subjective perspective and without links to the social reality of the world at large. And Itô compounded the matter by giving the impression that he was not interested in broader social matters. He rather waspishly rejected Miyamoto's criticism by saying that she had been poisoned by left-wing literature, and was therefore unable to appreciate the ideas of a new generation of more right-wing intellectuals in the late 1930s.[13]

However, I would suggest that the relationship between fictional works and the wider social context is more complicated than either Miyamoto or Itô appear willing to contemplate. Itô certainly did not articulate his understanding of the world through the eyes of a politician or a social scientist. He was a literary man with a real sensitivity to the power of words. As a result, he responded to his environment in a literary manner. He might be compared to a magician who uses words to cast his own spells and create his own distinctive atmosphere. The fact is that, in the Japan of 1937, colonialism was in the air. It should therefore come as no surprise that colonialism also found expression in the pages of Itô's Yûki no machi.

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[12] Yûki no machi, p. 829.
[13] Kockum, p. 168.

The Controlling Shape of Ideas

Structures of colonialism relate to uneven power relationships between a dominant centre and a distant weaker locality, and these are observable in a variety of forms in Yûki no machi. The most obvious example of such a structure can be identified between the culture of mainland Japan centered round Tokyo and the peripheral outpost of Hokkaido. From a wider perspective, another structure of colonialism can be found in the global configuration of power between Japan and its colonies on the Asian mainland that was entering an increasingly aggressive phase during the late 1930s, when Japan was about to embark upon full-scale invasion of the mainland. In the pages below, I will discuss how both these paradigms of colonial power are addressed in Yûki no machi. However, firstly it is worth considering a structure of colonialism that appears at the level of an individual's engagement with the world. In concrete terms, let us explore how Itô's intellectual frame of mind influenced the actual topography of Otaru as it appears in the story.

To a certain degree, Yûki no machi presents Otaru as a painstakingly detailed spatial network of streets and neighbourhoods, in a way that leaves the reader with an extremely strong impression of realism. The western-style Hokuyô hotel is described as being located 'on the left-hand corner of First Street at Inaho-chô, where it intersects with Number Two Fire Lane in front of the station' (p. 799). What is more, references are made to real-life places such as the Otaru Commercial Higher School that Itô attended as a student, and the Tsukimi Bridge near the waterfront, described as spanning 'the canal between the reclaimed land and Minami Hama-chô. It leads to the Number One Fire Lane in Ironai-chô on the other side of the canal' (p. 805). This degree of precision implies a faithful reproduction of the real town, an impression of

verisimilitude consolidated further by the fact that an actual map of Otaru was inserted into the first edition of the story.[14]

However, there is more going on in the text than this first impression would suggest. It cannot be denied that the concise layout of streets and districts, as well as mention of various architectural landmarks—hotels, banks, post offices, and so on— seem to present the text as a kind of visitor's guidebook to Otaru. Indeed, many of the structures named within the text—for example the Nippon Yûsen Shipping Line building down by the waterfront (p. 802)—correspond to actual buildings located in the real town. But while buildings have their own concrete reality and undeniable presence, they cannot be reduced merely to structures made up from brick or wood or plaster. Buildings always signify something more.

The nature of this additional dimension becomes clearer through a consideration of the ways in which architecture functions in the text. As Utô walks down the long avenue that stretches from the railway station to Otaru harbor, the town passing before his eyes is pieced together in terms of a series of prominent buildings. One of these landmarks is a 'three-story brick-built shipping company with a nineteenth-century Russian style metal column and gallery' (p. 802). Attention to this degree of detail brings to mind the primary definition of architecture, namely, 'the art or practice of designing and building structures.'

However, the narrator goes on to expand upon the significance of architecture in a way that brings to mind a more metaphorical (though no less significant) definition of architecture, that is, as 'a unifying or coherent form or structure.' In the text, the narrator reflects how 'all memories of the past are caught up' in the various

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[14] Kockum, p. 160.

architectural forms of the landscape (p. 799). To be sure, Utô is making the obvious point that physical sites dotted around his native town embody memories related to his own past. But he is also hinting at an interpretation that makes it possible to conceive of architectural forms not only as physical objects but also as structures of thought and feeling.[15]

This secondary meaning can be fleshed out in Yûki no machi through an examination of the way in which the various ideas that influenced Itô after he moved to Tokyo also went on to shape his literary representation of Otaru. Consider, for example, the western-style Hokuyô hotel that is depicted more in terms of a Freudian architecture of the unconscious than as a realistic mapping out of a physical structure. The hotel appears near the beginning of the story when Hisae, a former lover who now looks shockingly aged, appears from nowhere and waylays Utô. Ignoring his protestations, she drags him into this hotel where they used to meet ten years earlier. An almost anthropomorphic bond between narrator and building is implied through Utô's observation that some grim fate, which surely awaits them within the hotel, 'has tied a cord around us, and it is pulling Hisae and me deep into its dark corridors' (p. 800).

Once inside, a truly Freudian nightmare unfolds. Hisae pushes him along a dark corridor, lined with countless identical rooms, until they come to the room where they used to have their rendezvous. She points out a dirty white enamel basin and a bar of soap sharpened with a knife, and Utô is shocked to recall not only that this is the very place where he persuaded Hisae to abort her foetus, but even that he deserted her afterwards when she ended up contracting an infection and was forced to enter hospital.

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[15] The two definitions of architecture are taken from the Merriam-Webster dictionary.

The horrific nature of these sordid past events takes a disturbingly graphic form when the couple continue along the corridor towards the kitchen area, and they catch sight of two hairy-armed men preparing food amidst the rattling of cutlery, surrounded by 'deep red tomatoes mashed together in a large, white bucket' (p. 801). Of course these labyrinthian corridors have some correlation to the physical layout of the hotel, but only to a point; after all, it is hardly believable that the same bar of soap could have remained in the room for ten years. More important, however, is the way in which the corridors function as pathways that lead the narrator back into long-repressed memories.

Freud's influence can also be identified with the specific nature of the locations that the author chooses to depict in his story. For example, the text places Utô in a range of situations that effectively highlight the disreputable aspects of his past, but there is a distinctly scatological turn of events when he enters a filthy pubic toilet where 'white urine stains are splashed everywhere and water has collected in cracks in the concrete corridor' (p. 810). As he stands at the urinal, the tormented ghost of yet another woman from his past appears. She informs him that, even though dead, she feels compelled to return repeatedly to this toilet where she disposed of her aborted foetus. Not surprisingly, Utô flees in terror and disgust the moment he feels her hand reaching out to touch him. The introduction of such a sordid scene in the story articulates a New Psychology School viewpoint that values Freudian-inspired themes as a tool for analysing the darker side of the self through literature.

The other intellectual framework that had an impact on Itô's literary representation of Otaru relates to James Joyce, whose powerful influence cannot be overemphasised. Indeed, Michael Ainge has pointed out that, when Itô discovered Joyce while still a university student, he recognized a 'kindred spirit' since they had

both spurned their hometowns for literary careers in a cosmopolitan centre of modernist culture.[16] Moreover, 1936 was the year in which, having just re-read *Ulysses*, Itô produced a new detailed synopsis of the novel, and the following year (just as he was writing his story) he declared his continuing devotion to Joyce in an article entitled 'Yurishiizu yodan' ('Ulysses, A Digression'). In other words, Itô's loyalty to the Irish writer continued long after most other modernist-inspired writers in Japan had turned to more conservative literary forms.[17] The result is that, while Yûki no machi partly presents Otaru as a really existing town with its own history in the northern part of Japan, the text also depicts a locality that may be understood as having been modelled along the same lines as the Dublin portrayed in *Ulysses*.

One point where the ambiguous tensions between the real and imaginary representations of Otaru come to the fore can be found when Utô wanders into Yamada-chô. This district is described as specializing in second-hand clothes stores but in the past it served as the red-light area, and therefore contained many memories connected to Utô's disreputable younger days. In keeping with the fantastical thread that runs through the story, the garments arrayed in these shops are transformed into accusatory ghosts that rise up and fly after Utô, reminding him of his terrible past deeds: in the end, they engulf him in wave after wave until he feels himself drowning 'at the bottom of the sea.' (p. 820). Purely as an example of fantastical writing, the passage conveys a disturbing and surrealistic impression of claustrophobic intensity. However, the scene also has wider resonances. Kockum argues convincingly that the sense of inescapable horror in Itô's story has close parallels to the grotesque and hallucinatory Circe section of *Ulysses* where Stephen rushes out of Bella Cohen's

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[16] Michael Ainge, 'An Examination of Joycean Influences on Itoh Sei,' p. 330.
[17] Ibid., p. 341. Kockum, p. 158.

bordello, full of bitter remorse and self-recrimination.[18] In other words, the description of a real Japanese town exists side by side with a more fantastical portrayal unrelated to the specific reality of Otaru.

The fantastical aspect of Yûki no machi is influenced by the modernism that Itô borrows from Joyce's work. For instance, the text sometimes presents a stream-of-consciousness effect that can be found in Joyce's modernist work. Indeed, in Itô's text there is even a moment where a stream-of-consciousness writing style quite literally relates to the shape of flowing water, and the author explicitly spells out his literary indebtedness to Joyce. After fleeing from the toilet, Utô decides to walk along the Myôken River, where he notices triangular wavelets on its surface that gradually transform themselves into little speaking tongues. The mouths begin to taunt him, and even go so far as to liken him to Leopold Bloom, the fictional protagonist of *Ulysses*, as he 'strolled along the Liffey River.' A succession of faces rises to the surface and reminds Utô of his misdeeds. For instance, Yuriko, whom he treated badly for years before deserting her and going off to Tokyo, emerges fleetingly to lament that she ended up marrying a bully who beats her so terribly that she is now close to death (p. 811). Fragmentary characters such as Yuriko appear as part of the actual flow of the river, and in this sense the author is emphasising how aspects of Utô's personal history are woven into the very geography of Otaru. At the same time the fact that the Japanese author specifically makes reference to the landscape of Joyce's Dublin suggests that Utô's local experience of living in Otaru should also be understood as part of a more abstract, modernist structure of thought that goes beyond the specific Irish and Japanese sites.

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[18] Kockum, p. 161.

There are other ways to explore the relationship between Itô's interest in Freud and Joyce and his literary depiction of Otaru, but hopefully enough has been said already to throw up some pertinent questions centred round the colonial mentality that pervades the story. To begin with, if Itô's aim in Yûki no machi was to rediscover his roots in the specific locality where he grew up, why did he choose to articulate his personal history through the controlling lens of those western ways of seeing that he had only recently acquired following his move to Tokyo? And in any case, since this textual representation of the author's provincial hometown unfolds through a Tokyo-centred point of view, perhaps it would be more correct to argue that the text is not so much a case of western colonialism *per se* than of a Japanese metropolis-centred colonial attitude towards its peripheral regions?

The present paper touches only tangentially on these bigger issues as it seeks to sketch out structures of colonialism in Itô's Yûki no machi. But any attempt to take up even this narrower concern needs to consider the author's relationship with Otaru and Hokkaido in a wider context. In other words, it is necessary to identify the text in terms of a history of place that includes, but also extends beyond, the experience of a single writer.

The Bigger Picture

July 1937 was a pivotal moment in Japanese history. A clash between Japanese and Chinese troops at the Marco Polo Bridge near Peiping in North China escalated into a full-scale Japanese invasion of China and the tragedy of the second Sino-Japanese war (1937-1945). At the same time, this incident might be identified as simply one example in a long chain of events related to Japanese colonialism since the

beginning of Meiji. Japan's modern empire is usually dated from 1895 when Taiwan was ceded to Japan after the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-95). Other signs of empire building include the annexation of Korea in 1910, and the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, followed by the establishment of the puppet state Manshûkoku in 1932. However, it could be argued that Japan's empire began as early as 1869, when Japan formally incorporated the island of Hokkaido into the Japanese state. If this is true, then Itô's story of 1932 can be usefully examined not merely because the date of its publication coincides with the fateful incident that led to further colonialist expansion into China, but also because a closer look at Itô's literary representation of Otaru throws into sharper focus a wider history of Hokkaido that is fundamentally rooted in structures of colonialism.

During the early years of Meiji when the northern territory of Hokkaido had only recently been opened up for large-scale development, it was sometimes described as Japan's very own 'Wild West.' This phrase gained currency partly from certain shared experiences between the newly arrived mainland Japanese (*Wajin*) and the American settlers as they moved westward across the United States. For example, both groups believed they had discovered virgin territory that they could claim as their own, and both had very few scruples about stealing territory from the native inhabitants who were already there. But there are even clearer parallels that make the term appropriate. Kuroda Kiyotaka (1840-1900), the director of the Hokkaido Development Agency (*Kaitakushi*), invited the US commissioner of the Department of Agriculture Horace Capron (1804-1885) to Japan in order to become an advisor on Ainu affairs and the development of Hokkaido. Capron arrived in 1871, and he carried out surveys for farming, logging and mining locations that were modeled on similar surveys first

employed during the period of colonization against American native peoples after the opening of the transcontinental railroad in America.[19]

There is also another way of identifying the island of Hokkaido, known as Ezo until 1869, with a history of colonialism. During the late sixteenth century, the Matsumae warrior clan had crossed over into Ezo from Honshû and settled in the southern part of the Oshima peninsula, from which they pushed further inland as they gradually began to extend control. At the same time, the trade in seal pelts drew Russians into contact with the Kuril Islands to the north so that, by 1770, they had visited virtually every part of the island chain. In 1792-93, Catherine the Great (1729-1796) sent an expedition further southward into Ezo. Though the Matsumae clan treated their Russians visitors with appropriate courtesy, they informed them in no uncertain terms that by right westerners should not have entered the island, thus clarifying their understanding that Ezo already lay within the Japanese sphere of influence. This Russian advance pushed the Japanese Bakufu into spelling out their formal claim to Ezo in 1798, when it placed the southern half of the island under its own rule. In 1806 it went further by declaring the rest of the island as well as Sakhalin to be part of its own territory.[20] From a historical perspective, then, the northern island was generally assumed to be firmly under Japanese jurisdiction from the early nineteenth century, even if it was not formally renamed as Hokkaido until the beginning of Meiji.

Given the fact that Hokkaido, located at the edge of Japan's sphere of influence, was a territory that the Japanese and Russian powers had fought over in the past, it is

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[19] Komori Yôichi, 'Rule in the Name of Protection: the Vocabulary of Colonialism, pp. 60-75, in Mason, Reading Colonial Japan: Text, Context, and Critique: pp. 65-67.
[20] Jansen, Marius, ed. *History of Japan*. Vol. 5: The Nineteenth Century. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996: p. 95.

not surprising that Yûki no machi should depict a native space that still carried traces of a Russian presence. For instance, on a soulless piece of reclaimed land by the waterfront, Utô comes across a small temporary hut that neatly encapsulates a story of cultural and political struggle between Japan and Russia. Hisae introduces Utô to his former Russian friend Vladimir, who has now become Hisae's lover. Flags adorning the hut advertise the nature of the event taking place inside: 'Judo vs. Boxing: Grand International Match.' It turns out that this is a travelling show in which Vladimir's daily task is to perform as a Russian boxer, slugging it out against his Japanese judo opponent. The nationalistic and competitive nature of this ritualized performance is spelt out through another hyperbolic sign: 'Spirit of the Martial Arts East and West' (p. 802).

However, this is no portrayal of a battle between equals. On the contrary, Vladimir's role confirms that colonialism is always a story of unequal power and domination. After expressing his delight at meeting Utô after so many years, the Russian immediately launches into a complaint that the Japanese audience 'are never satisfied unless the Russian gets hammered by some flashy move from the Judo man' (pp. 802-803). In the broader context of the story, this is more than one individual's lament about daily personal humiliation. In fact, Vladimir symbolizes all those emasculated Russians who, from the Japanese perspective, had no legitimate claim to the land of Hokkaido. He may be likened, for instance, to the Russian visitors from the eighteenth century whose presence was tolerated but not welcomed; he is the defeated side during the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05; and he represents the many Russians refugees who fled the turmoil of the Russian Revolution to find themselves defenceless and adrift in Japan during the 1920s. In short, Vladimir's pathetic circumstances in Yûki no machi reduce the long struggle between two cultures into a

theatrical spectacle in which the foreign threat has now become a domesticated and harmless display of Japanese power.

But if Hokkaido proves to be a liminal space with an unstable identity, a similar degree of ambiguity can be related even to the native place in which Itô's grew up. Shioya now exists as a fully incorporated suburb of western Otaru, but originally it stood as an independent village on the seacoast facing Ishigari Bay. No railroad existed in the region in the early years of Meiji, so the village was founded by herring fishermen who gradually migrated northwards along the coast bringing with them the culture, language and traditions of the Matsumae clan. Shioya also became home to other immigrants, including Kansai farmers and merchants from the Niigata region. As a youngster, Itô experienced these demographic movements in terms of the village's social structure. The fishermen's children, with their Tôhoku accents, were known as the 'beach kids' (*hamakko*), while the farmers' children, or 'mountain kids' (*yamakko*), continued to use the Kansai dialect of their parents. [21]

At a time when immigration into Hokkaido from mainland Japan was leading to an enormous increase in the *Wajin* population—from 60,000 in 1850 to 1,800,000 by 1913[22]—the mixture of different identities and traditions of the sort found in Shioya cannot have been unusual. However, family circumstances meant that Itô experienced an especially difficult relationship with his native place. The fact that his mother came from local Matsumae stock ought to have placed him firmly in the camp of the 'beach kids,' but his father's itinerant background made this impossible. The father was a self-made man, originally from the Hiroshima region, who had escaped village life by enlisting in the army. After being posted to China during the Sino-Japanese war of

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[21] Hayakawa Masayuki, *Itô Sei iron*, pp. 1-5.
[22] Totman, Conrad. *A History of Japan*, p. 320.

1894-95, he moved to Taiwan, and from there to Hokkaido in 1901, at which point he left the army to become a schoolteacher.[23] The young Itô's interest in literature meant that he had a strong sensitivity to language, and the result was that seemingly trivial matters like people's accents mattered. Itô even suggested that he failed to develop a close relationship with his father (with his Hiroshima accent) because they lacked a common means of linguistic communication.[24] Itô tended to use standard Japanese (hyôjungo). In terms of relationship with his native place, Itô's lack of any clear linguistic affinity towards either the children of fishermen or of farmers symbolizes the way in which he felt an even more ambiguous connection to place compared to other settler families.

Itô's tenuous sense of belonging emerged once more when it came to his literary representation of Otaru, and it may be possible to trace its genealogy through the lens of a colonial mentality. If Shioya owed its existence to disparate groups of colonizing immigrants, Otaru likewise developed into the large town it was thanks to a variety of ideas and physical objects—that is, architectural structures in both senses—that had their origins elsewhere. For example, in Yûki no machi when Utô notices souvenir shops selling maps of 'the eight scenic views of Otaru' (*Otaru meisho hakkei*) (p. 799) near the railway station, the town seems to fit seamlessly into a mainland Japanese cultural lexicon of traditional landscapes. Throughout Japan, it was common practice to enumerate touristic sites in this way. However, it turns out that this list of Otaru's scenic sites was actually first put together during the 1880s, apparently by Saigô Tsugumichi (1840-1902) when he was head of the Hokkaido Development Project

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[23] Kockum, p. 3.
[24] Hayakawa Masayuki, *Itô Sei iron*, p. 2.

(Kaitaku chôkan).[25] In short, there was nothing traditional about Otaru's apparent markers of tradition.

Furthermore, colonial influences left their physical imprint on the shape of Otaru through the actual buildings dotted throughout the story. Satachi Shichijirô (1856-1922) designed the Nippon Yûsen Shipping Line building, and Sone Tatsuzô (1852-1937) created the Otaru branch of the Mitsui Bank. These leading architects had both studied at the Imperial College of Engineering (*Kôbu dai gakkô*) in Tokyo under the English architect, Josiah Conder (1852-1920), who designed the Rokumeikan pavilion in 1883. The Mitsui Bank stood out as a prime example of English Renaissance style, while all the landmark buildings in Otaru revealed a typical Meiji-period mixture of Renaissance, Baroque, brick and stone styles.[26] In other words, Japanese architectural standards which were being taught in Tokyo, and which were already drawn from European models, imprinted upon the provincial town of Otaru a clear sign that its urban landscape was under the control of central power and authority.

Another distinctive marker of colonial ties between mainland culture and Hokkaido was the railway. After abandoning his walk along the river, Utô enters the main shopping district of Hanazono-chô, where the commodification of modern life is on full display. He notices a variety of shops, including 'toyshops, post card stalls, billiard halls, bookshops, Janome Sushi shops, teashops and camera shops' that satisfy an equally diverse array of modern consumers; 'students, shop assistants, surveyors, farmers, mothers,' and the like (p. 813). The central role of the extensive railway system in facilitating the circulation of these goods becomes clear when the railway safety gate that crosses the main street goes down, and Utô watches a freight train

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[25] Hidaka Shôji, *Itô Sei ron*, p. 85.
[26] Hidaka Shôji, *Itô Sei ron*, p. 93.

rumble by. This turns out to be the Hakodate Main Line, a track that not only serves as the principle means of transportation linking Otaru to Sapporo, but also represents one small link in a nationwide transportation network tying the peripheral regions into an economic system with Tokyo at its centre.

In fact, the railway has a central role in fleshing out colonial structures of power from a variety of angles. For example, Utô gets to a point where the prospect of staying in Otaru a minute longer becomes unbearable, and he tries to buy his return ticket to Tokyo at a ticket booth. It soon becomes clear that the official in the booth, dressed as a representative of state authority in his smart uniform with its 'stand-up collar and decorated with gold buttons' (p. 816), has considerable control over the lives of others. This first becomes evident through his condescending treatment of Utô; he does not even bother to look Utô in the eye when talking to him. However, the official also has a more specific role as guardian of colonial power. If the rail network might be understood to be a system of economic and cultural capital emanating from the metropolitan centre to the provinces, then the official's refusal to sell Utô a ticket to Tokyo amounts to his prevention of an undesirable element (Utô) infiltrating the very heart of the empire. The official's reason for refusing Utô a ticket is that his name appears on a list of Ainu names.

Reference to race-based discrimination is not at all surprising since the categorization of people into racial hierarchies was a central aspect of colonialism in Japan as elsewhere. We might recall, for example, that the United States had already passed the National Origins Act in 1924 with the aim not only of limiting European immigration but also essentially excluding any further Japanese immigration. Itô's story reflects the mood of the time and draws on race-based discourses in a variety of guises. For instance, negative race-specific physical attributes are used to confirm

Vladimir's pathetic and alienated situation. He is depicted as voluble and clumsy, and as having 'thick (*atsubottai*) warm hands, and it felt a bit creepy touching his skin' (p. 803). At another point in the story Karl Marx's ghost appears in the sky over Otaru, and is defined in terms of physical attributes (hair, eyebrows, nose) that stereotypically identify him as a Jew. To compound matters, Marx is introduced as the author of 'The New Jewish Das Kapital' (*Shin Judaya shihon ron*) (p. 806). In effect, Itô's literary text reflects the culture and times he was living in. Lest we forget, his story was written only one year after Japan had signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with its closest ally, Nazi Germany, in 1936.

On the other hand, Itô should be credited with the fact that Yûki no machi does not unquestioningly support the crudest racialist ideologies current at the time. For example, as Utô waits his turn at the ticket booth, a rabid xenophobe standing in the queue proclaims the need to defend the 'pure Japanese spirit' against 'people with impure or mixed blood.' This man is particularly suspicious of Utô's crinkly hair, considered a distinguishing characteristic of the Ainu. On the other hand, while it is true that Itô criticizes the xenophobe by presenting him as a loud and blustering fool, the author is still trapped within the overall racial discourses of his age. This becomes clear when Utô casts doubt on the Japanese-ness of the xenophobe. Remarking on the man's 'earthy coloured face and hands like those of aborigines from the South Seas (*nanyô no dojin*)' (p. 816), Utô is ridiculing the man not so much for his racist attitudes but more because of hypocrisy. That is, the xenophobe himself is criticized as not being 'pure' Japanese. Moreover, Itô's failure to fundamentally criticize this colonial attitude is confirmed when an angry Utô walks away ticketless from the booth. He is mortified, not because he feels a sense of outrage against discrimination in general, but because he has been mistaken for an Ainu.

Of course, this was not the first time that a work of literature had displayed negative attitudes towards the Ainu. Indeed, a history of discrimination goes back to the first arrival of mainland Japanese on Ezo during the 15th century. From the *Wajin* perspective, the Ainu were generally considered childish and backward barbarians in need of protection from their more civilized neighbours. One *Wajin* legend even asserted that the Ainu were descended from dogs. It was this kind of extreme viewpoint that made it possible to demonize them and to exploit their labour without any sense of guilt.[27] Certainly, the Ainu population was devastated by harsh treatment at the hands of the *Wajin* and from the influx of diseases against which the Ainu had little resistance. It got to the point that, by the early 20th century, the Ainu were commonly described in Japanese texts as a 'dying race' (*metsubô naru jinshu*).[28]

On the other hand, it is possible to read Yûki no machi as a text in which the race-based ideologies directed at the Ainu might be related to the development of a colonialist mentality. Michele Mason has suggested that the colonization of Hokkaido from Meiji was an integral part of the construction of a modern nation state. Her argument is that Japan was only able to define itself as an advanced, civilized nation through the creation of binary relationships with apparently less developed colonial territories.[29] Certainly, a link between the Ainu and other colonized groups emerges in Yûki no machi where the xenophobe is depicted as an aboriginal (*dojin*) from the South Seas. In fact, this derogatory term, with its implication of backwardness and primitive, first appeared during Meiji in connection with the Ainu, in 1879 when a law relating to the legal position of the Ainu, renamed as the 'former natives' (*kyû-dojin*)

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[27] Richard Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*, pp. 40-44.
[28] Richard Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*, p.77.
[29] Mason, Reading Colonial Japan, Introduction, p. 6.

of Hokkaido, was being written.[30] The term appears again in Yûki no machi when Utô attends a lecture given by Chirigawa (Akutagawa) at the Inaho Elementary School. In a direct reference to Akutagawa's famous *Kappa* (1927), Chirigawa miraculously walks into a film being projected onto the stage. At this point, he turns into the mythical Kappa creature and 'climbs from branch to branch up a huge crape myrtle (*saru-suberi*) tree like a South Sea aboriginal (*nanyô no dojin*)' (p. 826). The Japanese name for the tree makes a less than subtle link between primitive peoples and monkeys (*saru*) in a way that echoes the traditional Wajin association of the Ainu with dogs. This passage also reveals a more general point that, by the time Itô had come to write this story, the word aboriginal (*dojin*) had become a generic term to describe colonized racial groups within the Japanese structure of power.

Itô, Otaru, the World

Between 1900 and 1940, the populations of Hakodate, Sapporo and Otaru were all roughly equal. Hakodate had a long history dating back to the Tokugawa period, but Otaru's rapid development from the Meiji period was remarkable. It began as a humble village in 1865, but by the time of Itô's birth, it was developing into an important commercial centre:

> Being the outport of Sapporo, Otaru's wholesale trading area included the
>
> northern and central portions of the Okhotsk Sea coast and inland portions
>
> connected to it by rail. Otaru supplied necessities of life for all these areas
>
> and their products were shipped out from Otaru. In addition, after Japan

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[30] Robert Tierney, Tropics of Savagery: The Culture of Japanese Empire, p. 8.

came into possession of South Sakhalin in 1905, most of South Sakhalin's

commercial rights fell into the hands of Otaru's merchants.[31]

Otaru's good fortune arose from two main industries, herring fishing and banking. The town was blossoming as a port for trade with Russia and the Asian mainland. On the financial side, the Bank of Tokyo chose Otaru as the location for its Hokkaido branch during Meiji, and this contributed to the city becoming well known as the Wall Street of Northern Japan until the economic crisis in 1927.

It is true that Otaru had lost much of its earlier promise by the time Itô came to write his story. However, it still bore memories of earlier glories and its links to the wider world and large. In Yûki no machi, there is a point where Itô spells out precisely a wider economic and historical framework of power and influence. In a rare moment of respite from his nightmarish experiences, Utô and an old friend escape to sit quietly for a moment in the Suitengû Shrine located on top of a hill within the city. He enjoys the surrounding view:

> He gazed down from the top of Suitengû Hill at latitude 43° 12′ N, longitude 141° 1′ E, beyond the roof of the residence of Mr. Dawes, the acting British consul, out to the coastline in the distance… To their left, above the streets on top of Ishiyama Hill between Inaho-cho and Temiya, they saw the flashing of a billboard advertising Ki Saké. The character for Ki must have been sixty feet tall. It loomed large in the night sky above Otaru (p. 819).

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[31] Hatano, Masataka, and Makoto Yamada. *The Development of Hokkaido's Urban System* [bulletin]. 17: 23-34 (Hokkaido University Collection of Scholarly and Academic Papers : HUSCAP), 1980.

The fascinating detail, by which Otaru is identified through its world map reference, offers evidence that the town is perceived as a significant landmark within a global frame of reference that extends far beyond the narrow confines of Japan. It has significance, in other words, in terms of its place in the world. The nature of that place is highlighted through the mention of the British consulate, an indication of the ubiquitous presence of British Imperial power at the time. By association, Japan's own powerful impulse towards empire building is being spelt out. Moreover, the motives for colonial expansion also emerge through the billboard's seductive flickering. The sign speaks of battles over commodities, people and raw resources that were being played out on a far broader scale on the Asian mainland. Yûki no machi presents a town inhabited by ghosts; not only the irrepressible characters and incidents related to an individual's past life, but also the disturbing spectre of Japan's engagement with the wider world in the late 1930s.

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