Emporium of Luxury, Empire of Cool: Neo-Victorian Manga and the ‘Cool Japan’ Project

Speaker: Dr. Waiyee Loh, University of Warwick

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Abstract
Set in Britain during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901), contemporary Japanese girls’ manga such as Kuroshitsuji (Black Butler) and Lady Victorian suggest that the transmission of British culture to Japan in the 19th century has since given rise to a postcolonial desire for an “aristocratic” form of cultural capital, one that is associated with an idealised image of “Victorian Britain.” These manga, together with Japanese publisher Takarajimasha’s Harrods catalogue and the manga guidebook Emma Victorian Guide, collectively point to how the Japanese cultural industries today capitalise on this yearning for an aristocratic Englishness to generate revenue for themselves and the British heritage industry, thereby reaffirming and reconfiguring old relations of cultural colonisation in a new context. Yet, while doing so, these texts simultaneously position Japanese manga, anime, and other cultural commodities as a proudly popular alternative to the British high cultural empire.

About the Speaker
Waiyee Loh received her PhD in English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick in 2016. Her doctoral research was funded by a three-year Chancellor’s International Scholarship from Warwick, after which she held an Early Career Fellowship at Warwick’s Institute of Advanced Study. Her research has appeared in Textual Practice, Neo-Victorian Studies, Mechademia, and the Journal of Postcolonial Writing. She is currently working on her first book, Empire of Culture: Neo-Victorian Fiction and the Global Creative Economy. In April 2020, she will be taking up a new position as Assistant Professor of World Literature at Kanagawa University, Yokohama.