

Commentary on Uzawa Yoshiko's
"Hashimura Togo Went to War:
Yellowface, the Yellow Peril,
and Philosophy of "Poppaganda"

DINAH ROMA-SIANTURI

DE LA SALLE UNIVERSITY

Studies on the West's representation of Japan have brought to fore the concept of Japan's being a "racial anomaly," or in the words used by Professor Uzawa Yoshiko to describe the cartoon character Hashimura Togo, a "racial oxymoron." Yet interestingly much of what the West saw during its early encounters with Japan was not actually seen in a negative light. The people and culture, particularly, its aesthetic tradition, were written about in wonder and reverence as shown in the comprehensive study of John Ashmead's "The Idea of Japan, 1853-1895: Japan as Described by Travellers from the West."

Ashmead examined the extensive body of travel narratives on Japan before and years right after it opened its waterways to other parts of the world. By looking initially at the so-called "official documents" written by Western emissaries sent to Japan to establish diplomatic ties, Ashmead identified dominant images that had since been associated with Japan. He argued that these images (such as the discreet though ferocious samurai, the timid women and their delicate gestures, the ritualistic way of life) were reproduced in later travel narratives when the idea of Japan as a distant civilization lured even ordinary travelers.

The frequent use of the words "paradise," "singular country," "delightful country," "utopia," "arcadia," "fairy-land," and "lotus-land" in travel narratives produced during the period stressed a fascination for Japan, while the frequent description of Japan's cultural heritage as having an affinity with the Greeks positioned it as superior to other Asian regions.

Despite the veneer of amiability, the underlying "difference" between the West and Japan was nonetheless a source of ambivalence. Richard H. Minear in a study of the cross-cultural perceptions of American Japanists underlines the "supremacist worldview" through which the West beginning in the 1700s forged an understanding of the world. This worldview in its divine language of "manifest destiny" pushed the U. S. across the Pacific to fulfill its God-inspired mission of discovering new frontiers alongside its mission of uplifting the lives of its heathen brothers. Integral to this worldview were the growing sciences against which the "Orient" as its cultural, racial and geographical other was constructed

and measured. From this inhered a complex matrix of racialized representations.

Japan's "exceptional position"—being at par with Western nations (while) remaining essentially an outsider to it (Pham 163)—is argued, however, to have complicated the category of it being an Orient. Here, for instance, is the "broker between East and West" or a people who "think as Orientals but act as an Occidental people" (Pham 166). Rudyard Kipling immortalized this sentiment when he remarked that "The Japanese isn't a native, and he isn't a *sahib* either." Japan, in essence, confounded the West's geographical configurations.

Given the long evolution of the U. S. representations of Japan, Minear suggests for a closer study of the contexts that produced the condescending and stereotyped images of Japan relative to those that showed a more benign curiosity. Echoed in recent studies of Orientalism, this conceptual stance argues that the West's dominant representations during the era of high imperialism were a function of the level of threat perceived as disturbing the accepted power relations between the West and Orient.

Inquiring into the specificities of the relevant historical period thus may define the rifts that marked the U. S. -Japan relation and reveal the complex colonial stratagems with which the U. S. engaged other territories in the Pacific.

It is in this continuum of racial representations that I locate Wallace Irwin's creation—Hashimura Togo. Created in 1907, Hashimura Togo in no time became a journalistic sensation. The inquiry by the readers into his authentic identity was a crucial moment not only for the Scotch-Irish writer Wallace Irwin but for the American readers as well. With the release of Hashimura Togo's photograph mimicking President Theodore Roosevelt, an intriguing layering of political, cultural and racial identities emerged—packaged and embraced as an uncomplicated source of entertainment.

That Professor Uzawa must argue for Hashimura Togo's complexity and ambivalence is no doubt necessary. He points to Togo's origin as a tool of caricature squarely rooted in the American popular theatrical tradition of racial masquerade with the "blacks" and "yellow" as the objects of ridicule. Although the "yellow" race had likewise described the Chinese, Hashimura Togo's embodiment of the "Yellow Peril" in the early 1900s indicated a readiness in the American consciousness to visually articulate what had so far been an inchoate anxiety over Japan's transformation into Western modernity and a military success.

What I believe would make for a more productive study of Hashimura Togo's "complexity" is to situate it against the U. S. colonial project in its foreign territories at the time. By doing so, we can see the larger fabric within which the U. S. continuously justified its presence in the Asia Pacific.

At about the same time, the U. S. was occupying the Philippines islands. Having won in May 1, 1898 a spectacular naval triumph (known as the Battle of Manila Bay) over the aging empire that was Spain, the U. S. soon went down to the task of governing its "little brown brothers." Couched in the language of

"Benevolent Assimilation," the first few years of the occupation witnessed a violent war between the American soldiers and the disgruntled Filipino nationalist soldiers who felt deceived of their aspiration for independence. However, what the colonial government saw as its most urgent aim was to educate the Filipinos in areas of civil society, education and self-governance.

The Filipinos were distinctly portrayed as "savages" and "heathens" by the colonial officials while dismissing the people's fight for independence as a legitimate cause. In the meanwhile, the war atrocities committed by the American military in the islands promptly reached the American papers and fueled the congressional debates between the imperialists and the anti-imperialists over the Philippines' annexation.

But as the islands were "pacified," the representation of the Filipino, particularly, of the Filipino male, changed into that of an impetuous child in need of tutelage. Moreover, the need to teach them a "civilized" language was seen as an effective method to pacify the people. Thus from the lowlands to the wild uplands, the Filipinos were taught English. The long deprived people embraced the new language and with it forged a new albeit tentative identity.

The "white love" that was claimed to have been the impetus for the civilizing mission exemplified not a relation of equals but of the subdued and the conqueror. So while the American military, missionaries and teachers carried out their roles in teaching the English language and values contributing to the development of a politically willed subject, the Filipinos struggled past their own fractured English.

To be able to speak the fluently the colonial language afforded the Filipino subject an access into the privileges of the West. But as colonial historiography would prove, the period's dominant discourse categorized the Filipinos as mere mimics of the West with no chance of rising above its racial inadequacies.

My interest in looking for similarities between the Japan and Philippine experience did not produce any Hashimura Togo. On the one hand, what I found to have unified the images within the racial spectrum of the black, brown and yellow are tropes that meant to distance the Other. The images of heathen/savage, feminized, childlike and the unintelligible Orient were circulated and perpetuated in popular culture in varying degrees.

The element of "broken English," one that rendered Togo's world funny while it was pathetic, for instance, was a staple source of ridicule as evidenced in American newspaper cartoons depicting the Filipinos as the wards of the U. S. in the process of transformation.

In an earlier paper where a much detailed description of Hashimura Togo's background can be found, Professor Uzawa touched on the historical meaning of "schoolboy" as equivalent of "servant." Hashimura Togo's earlier career (together with the other Japanese male immigrants) was built on the efficient service to his white mistress.

The cult of domesticity was a significant factor as well in the lives of the colonial officials' wives in the Philippine islands. They found it necessary to

employ young boys called *muchachos* who were not only helpful inside the house but also in their mistresses' daily public life where they served as interpreters.

In the writings of American women who lived in the Philippines at the turn of the century, similar categories were used to describe the Filipino boy servant. They were "savages" who turned childlike and feminine in the presence of their maternal white mistresses.

Hashimura Togo, the schoolboy, inadvertently crossed the gender divide in his role in Irwin Wallace's racial masquerade. He was made to speak a particular kind of "broken English" at the schoolboy age of 35. His portraits were constructed to blur identities while his excesses were products of an imagination engaging fantasy and reality from the binary of "old/new" Japan—the aestheticized and militarized Japan.

In the paper, Prof. Uzawa asks if Hashimura Togo is a racist or parodist? However, the question I had in mind was: "Couldn't Hashimura Togo be a nostalgic embodiment for the "paradise" the West earlier found in Japan?" Here, I am reminded of what Pico Iyer, the famous travel writer, wrote in his book *Video Night in Kathmandu*: "nostalgia is the West's ultimate luxury."

Japan was the West's lotus-land. Its mystical quality rendered Japan more uncomplicated. It portrayed it as static, something of the past and, therefore, unthreatening. As Japan emerged from its seclusion and eventually shed off its traditional ways to the coercive lure of the Occident, the relation that ensued was one of uneasy mentorship. This period was often depicted as a whirlwind romance between the innocent, feminine East and the knowledgeable, conquering West.

As Japan eagerly learned of the West's ways, the ambivalence towards Japan's "mimicking" soon invited commentaries for the irrevocable loss of a beautiful elf-like Japan. As Japan pushed further its own political agenda, images by which the West objectified its sentiments towards it declined into convenient tropes that culturally and racially distanced what was once a well endeared geography.

Yet in all the differences and specificities that may be glimpsed from the racial discourse on the black, brown and yellow, it becomes apparent that the U. S. was deeply concerned with defining what it was and what it was not against those whose presence signified a threat. Color was a powerful tool on which to anchor everything that could be said of differences between races. Hashimura Togo would have successfully passed off as white except that one thing betrayed him. The voice behind him knew too well the stakes involved.

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