Hashimura Togo Went to War: Yellowface, the Yellow Peril, and Philosophy of "Poppaganda"

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Introduction

In the first half of the twentieth century, Hashimura Togo was undoubtedly one of the most, if not the most, nationally popular Japanese columnists in the United States. At the height of his popularity in the 1910s and early 1920s, the Paramount Picture released the film Hashimura Togo (1917), starring Japanese Hollywood star Sessue Hayakawa, and major publishing houses produced four books between 1909 and 1923, anthologizing the best of his works serialized in various magazines and syndicated newspapers, such as Collier’s, Good Housekeeping, The American Magazine, Sunset, Life, and The New York Times.

This Togo, however, was not Japanese; he was not even human since he was a pseudo-Japanese persona created by the white humorist Wallace Irwin (1875-1959), then a staff writer of the New York weekly Collier’s. Togo first appeared in this weekly newspaper in Nov. 1907, and it only took six months before Irwin revealed to the public his pseudo-Japanese identity. In the editorial bulletin of May 1908, the editor, on behalf of the author, cheerfully confesses that Togo is Irwin in yellowface, showing the two photographs captioned respectively: “Mr. Wallace Irwin as ‘Hashimura Togo’” and “The same photograph of Mr. Wallace Irwin before he was Japanned.” This too early, all-too-easy disclosure, and the subsequent enormous popularity that Togo nonetheless achieved, suggest that the Togo column was squarely rooted in the American popular tradition of racial masquerade. Blackface and yellowface minstrelsy and other forms of popular culture prepared the ground for readers of the Togo column to enjoy it unproblematically as an entertainment.

Asian American scholars consider the Hashimura Togo Irwin created to be just another racist Anglo-American caricature of Asians (Kim, Chin et al). To use the term coined by Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, it was “racist love,” if not “racist hate,” that motivated Irwin’s racial impersonation (65). However, as I have discussed elsewhere, Togo is a far more complex and ambivalent figure than he has been previously understood to be. Although named after Admiral Heihachiro Togo, the military hero of the Russo-Japanese War, Hashimura Togo
is, in essence, a physically weak pacifist; his regular war cry of “Harakiri!” sounds more suicidal than intimidating. Togo’s fractured English, which is at once so confused and confusing, provides him with a destructive weapon to criticize social hierarchies; this verbal weapon is more powerful than the \textit{jujitsu} in which he does not excel. In Togo English, a mistress is honorable, but so is a fly; a vacuum cleaner is “intellectual,“ but so is the “Japanese duster,“ meaning himself. Language thus fails to demarcate various taxonomies in the world of Togo. We see his complexity clearly reflected in three different, even contradictory responses from contemporary Japanese Issei readers of the Togo columns: It is an ominous sign of anti-Japanese feelings, or American absurdities critically dissected from the view point of the cultural Other, or the first social acknowledgment to recognize real Japanese student-laborers by white society who bypasses the elite members of Japanese community in America (Uzawa, “Will White Man and Yellow Man Ever Mix?” 209–15).

Togo is an oxymoronic persona whose conflicting visions of the world of racial warfare is still a half-closed book for us. The following is an attempt to read this funny yet insightful book of the literary warrior of race wars.

\section{I. Dressed up in New Clothes: Togo and the Yellow Peril}

By the time the literary column “Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy” was launched in \textit{Collier’s} in 1907, readers were well acquainted with American traditions of theatrical racial masquerades. In blackface minstrelsy, which started as early as in the late 1820s, white actors blackened their faces with burnt cork, imitated and caricatured black folks’ songs, jokes, and dances, and created such racist stock characters as Jim Crow, Jim Dandy, and Zip Coon. Likewise, yellowface minstrelsy caricatured Chinese and Japanese immigrants as the “Oriental”; the most “exotic” (hence, alien) racial otherness was exemplified by “John Chinaman” (Toll, “Social Commentary” 93; Lee, 34–43; Moon 36–38). These theatrical racial masquerades incorporated such various elements as music, dancing, drama, comedy sketches, and news; this grew into a vital part of white American “common man’s culture” (Toll, \textit{Blacking Up} 3) in the course of the nineteenth century. The minstrel shows reaffirmed traditional values while portraying major social issues of the day in a comic vein. Therefore, Togo’s epistolary column, which also engaged in the double discourse of social critique liberally sprinkled with humor, must have looked, to a number of its contemporary readers, like an “old hat” with new feathers.

Unquestionably, the staple of Hashimura Togo’s humorous social writings is his artificial “Japanned” English. His letters abound with honorifics, unconventional and often oxymoronic phraseology, and personification of the inanimate objects, as well as numerous careless errors in grammar and spelling. Togo’s vernacular accents produce laughter not just at the expense of himself (or his being Japanese as the racial Other). They produce laughter because they
create an ironical gap between what they say and what they mean to convey, thus subverting whatever categorical assumptions we have. It was Mark Twain who first appreciated the literary merit of yellowface narrative in the Togo columns and found in him an ideal literary fool to produce deadpan irony. Twain notes in his unpublished autobiography: “Observe what Irwin has done with his delightful Japanese schoolboy. That schoolboy’s English is manufactured, yet how forceful it is, how hard it hits, how straight to its mark it goes. And all so innocently unconscious—apparently—of the havoc it is distributing under the gentle protection of the broken speech.”

Being a cultural and racial alien, Togo wreaks havoc on all fronts without his actually knowing it. From the outset, this trait of Togo’s narrative has stood out. The following passage is a typical example of this from Togo’s first Collier’s letter in Nov. 1907, entitled “Our Noble Allies.” Here Togo talks about how he has fallen victim to violence in a race riot, ending up in a hospital bed. To “Esteemed Excellency the Editor of what is much widely read Collier Weekly,” Togo begins his letter. Halfway through it, he makes the following comments on what he calls racial “mixing”:

Some frequent Professors are asking the question now: Will White Man and Yellow Man ever mix? I answer Yes because I have knowledge of the affair. They mix once in San Francisco, they mix once in Vancouver. But such mixing is not good-healthy for the human race because it make broken glass, pistol-shot, outcry, militia and many other disagreeable noises. Japanese gentleman mix races with jiu jitsu, Irish gentleman with gas-pipe. Those are both good ways to know. (Irwin, “Our Noble Allies” 19; rpt. in Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy 4)

Equating a race riot to a racial mix is apparently a naive misinterpretation of “mixture.” And yet this seemingly absurd misinterpretation parodies the underlying premise of segregation along the color line, the idea repeated in the anti-assimilation and anti-miscegenation arguments frequently heard in the surge of anti-Oriental movements in the 1900s. Within these social contexts, the expected answer to the question “Will White Man and Yellow Man ever mix?” is definitely “no.” Togo, however, answers “yes,” ignoring such social contexts and revealing his cultural illiteracy. His seemingly foolish comments insinuate that a race riot for anti-assimilation creed is itself a contradiction in terms. Implicitly, but nonetheless clearly, Togo presents his (il)logics: It is if he is saying, “If you are against assimilation, please stay behind the color line and do not dare cross it to “know” people. If you are for assimilation, yes, let us mix. Either way, do not get mixed up in your own arguments.” Togo indeed has a dry sense of humor.

Partly because of this wise-fool’s English, suspicion of racial passing lingered over Togo from the outset. To those who had some knowledge of Japanese language, Hashimura Togo’s name (composed of two surnames written in Japanese in the portrait mentioned below) alone was sufficient to doubt his alleged racial identity. In response to a flood of letters inquiring about Togo’s
racial status, Irwin in yellowface makeup, posed for a portrait of himself as Hashimura Togo with the help of James Hare, the war photo-journalist famous for his coverage of the Russo-Japanese War. The portrait of “Hashimura Togo” appeared at the head of the fourth installment of his letters in *Collier’s*, provocatively entitled “The Yellow Peril.” (See Fig. 1—“Hashimura Togo” photographed by James Hare.)

The photo failed to extinguish the fire of suspicion. That is understandable, given that the photo in question seems keen on denying rather than proving its racial/photographical authenticity. There is ample evidence that the photo-portrait frustrates its own designs. First, Togo cheapens President Theodore Roosevelt by posing in exactly the same manner as President poses in his life-size portrait hung in the background. Second, Irwin looks very suspicious because he looks askance as if to say, “I am slant-eyed, therefore I am Japanese.” Third, the photo is framed on all sides with the names of Hashimura Togo in different forms: clockwise from the top, Hashimura Togo as the name of the columnist, Hashimura Togo in Japanese, another Hashimura Togo as the name of the photographic subject, and his initials H. T. This multiplication of Togos reinforces the sense that he embodies the yellow peril. Fourth, the photographer’s name is also Japanized as “J. Haro” as if to emphasize that the photographer is in on the conspiracy. Because of these small accumulated aberrations, the Togo of the portrait dressed in white man’s clothes, accentuates the falseness of this yellowface portraiture.

In the text of “The Yellow Peril,” Togo makes a further attempt to make himself a white man using yellow peril discourse. He states:

I have given some brain-study to this Yellow peril to make sure it is a bad blessing for these Uniteds State. It is. But should we Americans of all-colour enjoy fear of such? Answer is, No! Coreans, Chinese, & Hindus is Yellow peril. [...] Many negro persons of Southern States is also Yellow Peril, but these can not enjoy exclusion, because there is no place to exclude them to. But Japanese gentleman, please, must not be written down for this list. Derby hat, American pant, Tuxedo overcoat, have rendered him completely white of complexion and able to vote for President when asked to know how. Please do not include him in Yellow Peril, because he will not be there. He is doing things by each day that makes folks white. Let Japanese help to do pushout to all-coloured Yellow Perils coming to this country together with others patriots of star-stripe banner Yankee-doodle dandy, banzai (“The Yellow Peril,” 24; rpt. in *Letters*, 21–22).

It is beyond dispute that Togo is using racist arguments here. He includes Korean, Chinese, Hindu immigrants, and even African Americans from the southern states in his list of the yellow peril subjects and then excepts himself, the “Japanese gentleman,” from the list. Is Togo a racist, or a parodist? Donald Kirihara, in favor of the latter view, finds in Togo’s “yellow peril” argument an “ample opportunity to satirize not only popular attitudes toward immigrants but also the self-interested nature of xenophobia” (89). These seemingly opposing
views are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Togo employs two definitions of “race” in his arguments: biological and cultural. Using the biological concept of race, he claims that there is a biological, hence, unbridgeable difference between whites and non-whites, and aligns non-whites to the yellow peril. On the other hand, emphasizing cultural ethnicity, he classifies the Japanese gentleman, namely Togo himself, as a white American, because he has learned how to wear “Derby hat, American pant, Tuxedo overcoat,” in other words, what Marjorie Garber would count as the “vested interests” of white America. The argument that one can be white by wearing white man’s clothes, which Irwin attempts to perform in his fake portrait of Togo, might have applied without difficulty to the ethnic white immigrants to America in the early twentieth century. But here in the case of Togo, the same argument can only produce ridicule.

Why does Togo insist on his being a white American? The easiest answer might be that this is how Irwin confesses in his deadpan style that he is Togo: Togo is his yellowface persona. Or as we have seen, Togo’s insistency on his being a white man at once expresses and parodies racism in the United States. And as I demonstrate in the following section, we may find still yet another reason for Togo’s self-proclaimed whiteness by putting Togo’s yellow peril argument within contemporary trans-pacific literary social contexts.

II. Someone like Togo: Taguchi Ukichi and Oxymoronic Meiji Japan

Two months before Togo first appeared in Collier’s, the pioneering Japanologist William Elliot Griffis published The Japanese Nation in Evolution: Steps in the Progress of a Great People (1907). In this book he emphasized that the primary racial stock of the Japanese was the prehistoric Aryan race Ainu. Griffis writes:

The Yamato man intermarried with the Ainu, and to-day the white man’s blood is in the Japanese, for the better working of his own brain, the improvement of his own potencies, and the beautifying of his own physiognomy. The Aryan features in the Japanese body and mind are plainly discernible, and in thousands of typical instances they are striking. (26)

According to Griffis, it is white blood that counts. The idea that the Japanese were a white race was striking enough to make for excellent advertising. A promotional pamphlet of this era carried the catch phrase “The White Blood in the Japanese,” declaring that this was the secret of Japan’s success as a new military power (Henning 160). It is worth noting that the frontispiece of Griffis’s book was a photo-portrait of “Admiral H. Togo” in the formal military attire with military medals and decorations. Whether or not Wallace Irwin had this particular Griffis book in mind while writing Togo’s letter on the Yellow Peril has still to be confirmed. But it may seem odder if Griffis’s book did not give the
parodist Irwin some impetus to start his Hashimura Togo columns.

For white Americans who had faith in white supremacy, the Meiji Japan that had assimilated Western civilization and became the first non-white heathen nation to defeat a powerful European nation, Russia, could have been a serious racial/intellectual threat. A recognition of Meiji Japan’s clout could have forced Americans to revise their white supremacist beliefs. Instead, it drove white Americans to reinforce their commitment to white supremacy, to anti-Japanese agitations exploiting yellow peril discourse, and to the new race theory as we have seen in Griffis’s book. Griffis was not the only advocate of this singular racial theory. Three of his contemporaries, Arthur May Knapp (a Unitarian missionary, who was sent to Japan in 1887), George Keenan (a journalist, war-correspondent of the Russo-Japanese War, and Roosevelt’s confidant), and David Starr Jordan (a leading eugenicist, ichthyologist, the first president of Stanford Leland College, later Stanford University) also supported the theory during some periods of their careers (Henning 137–64; Chang 18–19). Montaville Flowers, on the contrary, unsparingly ridiculed it in his anti-Japanese book *Japanese Conquest of American Opinion* (1917) (Flowers 214–16).

On the other side of the Pacific, Taguchi Ukichi (1855–1905), a Japanese historian, economist, and statesman, used similar arguments in his series of treatises against the yellow peril discourse: *Haokaron [Refuting Yellow Peril Discourse]* in 1904, and “Nihon jinshu no kenkyu” [A Study on the Japanese Race] in 1905. Taguchi, employing historical-comparative linguistics, asserted that not all Japanese but the blue blood of Japanese aristocracy whom he called the “tenson jinshu” [god-descended race] were white. According to him, because the Japanese blue blood were white race and shared a common racial origin with modern-day Hungarians, they could not, by definition, be classified as a yellow peril people (“Nihon jinshu” 513). This is the gist of what Taguchi called his “refutation” of yellow peril discourse.

Apparently Taguchi’s argument had limitations. He could have argued that not just the white race, but also the yellow race could excel in Western civilization. Or he could have questioned the racism inherent in the white over the yellow scheme, but he, instead, kept the very scheme he was supposed to refute and let the Japanese blue blood cross the color line to join the white race. Taguchi declares: “Scholars around the world, relying on the writings of uneducated travelers, have made negative comments and called the Japanese a yellow race. But we need not acknowledge that the Japanese are yellow. Today the Japanese race have advanced in technology, and do not need to fear to be sneered at from the rest of the world” (“Nihon jinshu” 514, my translation). For Taguchi, to be called “yellow” was a “negative comment” equal to be “sneered at from the rest of the world.” However, Taguchi’s “refutation” did not convince the Japanese public.

For Taguchi, the ultimate agenda in order to eradicate the stigmatization of the yellow peril was to beautify Japanese physiognomy. The last chapter of his
For the betterment of Japanese society, Taguchi here suggests two possible solutions: to wear fine clothes because it is always fine clothes that make the man or woman; and to stay young as long as possible by promoting his or her self-reliance and physical exercise. Taguchi maintains: “The Yellow Peril is solely the problem of the Japanese physiognomy. With fine clothes and fine physiques, we can refute the idea that the Japanese are yellow” (500).

The similarities between Taguchi’s and Hashimura Togo’s arguments are apparent. Both keep the framework of yellow peril discourse intact while making the Japanese cross the color line to join the whites. And both insist on wearing fine Western/American clothes to make the Japanese white. We do not know if Irwin knew Taguchi’s treatises on the yellow peril, but through Griffis and others, the idea that the Japanese were white was gaining some ground on both sides of the Pacific.

The “whitening” of the Japanese in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War tells us how Japan, the first non-white heathen nation to become a modern military power, was a racial oxymoron for contemporary Americans. Paradoxically, Hashimura Togo was no Japanese; and yet the Japanese were the Hashimura Togos for a number of white American readers in the 1900s.

**III. The Three Faces of Ralph Barton’s Togo**

Buckteeth, slanted eyes, and (coke-bottle) glasses have been the three major characteristics of caricatures of Japanese faces to this day. Mr. Yunioshi played by the comedian Mickey Rooney in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* (1961) is the most notorious example of this. Rooney’s Yunioshi, who is very different from the original Yunioshi in Truman Capote’s novel of the same title, provokes laughter by this caricatured face, his funny accent, and his ineffective lechery emphasized by his repeatedly failed attempts to seduce Miss Holly Golightly. The character named “Jo Jitsu” in TV cartoon series *Dick Tracy*, and three Japanese figures portrayed in Roger Shimomura’s “Not Pearl Harbor!” painting (2003), are direct descendants of this type of racist caricature.

In his career spanning over thirty years, Togo underwent various transformations. One of the most noticeable changes was facial. A number of illustrators actually “invented” their own Togo faces in the very absence of textual descriptions: pure ornamental padding (by Arthur J. Dove in 1907), a dandy-looking gorilla (by Rollin Kirby in 1908–9); an “Uncle Togo” in blackface (by James Montgomery Flagg in 1909–1910), an aesthetic fool (Hayakawa in the 1917 film “Hashimura Togo,” and the Togo portrayed by Rea Irvin in the 1910s), and a gentle-looking, intellectual Asian man (by Tony Sarg in 1934). In this way, Togo’s visual images multiplied over time. The stereotypical Japanese face of caricature composed of buckteeth, slanted eyes, and (coke-
bottle) glasses evolved as Togo’s image evolved, culminating in the face of short and squat Togo in *More Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy* (1923). The illustrator of the book was the New York artist Ralph Barton, who was famous for his caricatures of social celebrities (See Fig. 2–Hashimura Togo by Ralph Barton). It was an honor rather than an insult for Togo to be caricatured by Barton’s pen in 1923. The Togo that Barton drew was not necessarily a disgrace, for all “celebrities,” regardless of race, gender, and class, were made short and squat and had exaggerated facial features in Barton’s works. Whether or not Barton had any racist intentions when he decorated Togo’s face with the three stereotypical traits, therefore, is rather hard to judge.

Over time, Barton’s Togo face, however, exerted an undeniable influence over American representations of Japanese facial images in racial representations in the first half of the twentieth century. It even crossed the Pacific to Japan to transform itself into the face of “’Merican Jap,” an inverted Hashimura Togo, as he was portrayed by the Japanese author and illustrator Tani Joji in 1927 (See Fig. 3–Togo as a ’Merican Jap illustrated by Tani Joji). In Tani’s illustration we see a set of cultural icons from 1920s America juxtaposed. The juxtaposition of the Bible, an icon of everything religious and law-abiding, against the bottle of “HOME BREW” which suggests the illegal, provides a tone of cynicism. So too is the Tani version of “Hashimura Togo” singing the patriotic song “My Country, ’Tis of Thee.” The face of Togo in this illustration caricatures Togo’s face as created by Barton. In place of the funny round face of Barton’s Togo, we find here an angular face, a menacing gaze, and a sense of piercing cynicism. This ’Merican Jap Togo with a sardonic smile is a racial caricature of a racial caricature.

It is also of interest to note that Tani’s ’Merican Jap stories originated as a parody of Wallace Irwin’s Togo letters. Take, for instance, the first ’Merican Jap story entitled, suggestively enough, “Young Togo,” which was published in the popular literary magazine *Shinseinen* in Jan. 1925. This title presupposes the existence of an “Old Togo,” intimating a literary heritage. Plotwise, the story of “Young Togo” runs counter to the first Togo letter entitled “Our Noble Allies” in which, as we have seen, Togo falls victim to racial violence, ending up in a hospital bed. Young Togo, in contrast, is a professional boxer who sends his adversary, a white middle-class racist man, to hospital with his legendary “killing uppercut” (*Tekisasu* 4). “I barely touched him” is Young Togo’s concluding remark, which operates on more than just one level. On one level, “him” obviously refers to Young Togo’s opponent in the story, who has been so violently “touched” as to be hospitalized; but on another level, “him” might mean Wallace Irwin, the author of the “Old Togo” stories. If the Old Togo is a physically weak pacifist, the Young Togo is a physically strong fighter. With a strong Young Togo on his side, it is as if Tani Joji humorously confesses, “I barely touched Irwin.” Based on Irwin’s stories, Tani creates a new ’Merican Jap Togo, one who is just as imaginary as Hashimura Togo, but somehow tells a less
humorous, yet tougher story of racial representation.

The days of real hardship began for Hashimura Togo in the late 1930s. The image of the comical social columnist that enchanted millions of Americans now underwent a dehumanization process, transforming itself into the “face of the enemy.” John W. Dower has calls a propaganda war waged by shooting the bullets of racist stereotypes a “war without mercy.” Without dehumanizing the enemy as the Other, one can never kill the enemy, nor justify the war itself. Both Japan and the United States strategically employed various racist images to win the war without mercy. Japan cried out “kichiku beiei” [American and British devils] using fantastic devil images; America mobilized a variety of images such as yellow monkey, herds of venomous insects and vicious animals, and imaginary monsters. Both claimed that their enemies were potential rapists, thus whipping up war sentiment by prompting sexual/racial fears and anger against each other.

Among the many illustrators operating during World War II, Theodor Seuss Geisel, alias Dr. Seuss deserves special attention. The author known for his witty and popular children’s picture books published his political cartoons in the New York weekly *PM*. “Hitler,” “Mussolini,” and “Japan” were the three of the most frequent targets in his cartoons. Dr. Seuss’s “Japan” features not just slanted eyes, thick spectacles, and buckteeth or long front teeth, but a “piggish” nose and even a brush mustache like Hitler’s (Minear 118). The names of “Togo” and “Hashimura” occasionally appear in his works. The caption embedded in the cartoon dated 20 June 1941, for example, reads: “In other words, gentlemen, Togo won’t hit Joe and Joe won’t hit Togo... unless they take a poke at each other when I start socking Joe” (166). Apparently this is an allusion to the Tripartite Pact signed by Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan in Sep. 1940. The three figures depicted are Hitler, Mussolini, and “Japan” named “Togo,” whose resemblance to Hashimura Togo is quite discernible. In another cartoon from 7 Dec. 1942 entitled “Married Exactly One Year Today,” Dr. Seuss portrays the husband Hitler, his ugly wife Japan, and their monstrous baby “Hashimura Frankenstein” in the cradle besides them. Richard H. Minear, the historian and editor of *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel* (1999) wonders why Dr. Seuss’s “cartoons of Japan have more bite than his cartoons of Hitler?” and suggests that “This ‘Japan’ is not a portrait of a specific Japanese leader. It is not the emperor; it is not General Tojo Hideki, the wartime prime minister; it is not Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori” (119). We wonder if it is not the absence of a model, but rather the presence of still another form of absence, namely the yellowface persona of Hashimura Togo, that sharpens the bite of Dr. Seuss’s “Japan.”

### IV. Not at Face Value: the “Poppaganda” War

Barton’s drawings of Hashimura Togo evolved into one of the regular faces of the anti-Axis propaganda during World War II. This placed Irwin in a serious
dilemma and forced him to search for another direction in order to employ Togo in his anti-propaganda writings. A couple of manuscripts residing among the Wallace Irwin papers at the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley suggest that Irwin was earnest in this endeavor. He came up with the following two devices.

First, Irwin planned to send Togo as a Japanese soldier to China. “Hashimura Togo on the Field of Glory” and its sequel “Letters of a Japanese Refugee,” tell a story of Togo, enlisted by the Japanese army, going to China to become involved in the Nanking Massacre. Unable to cope with the massacre and the burying of bodies, he returns to the United States and retreats to the backyard of an Irish Bar. The story is in the form of a letter from Togo; however this story is far from glorious or humorous. On the battlefield, Togo wonders when his trousers, caked with mud and blood, will ever dry. He keeps asking himself “what are we shooting for?” He hears propaganda echoing around him. It is not war, but a diplomatic call, says one soldier. “Because China try to konker Japan,” says another. “I are a Nazi Japanese. We are burning down China because she are not Nordic” (“Hashimura Togo on the Field of Glory” 3), says one private in overtly racist tone. You fight because “glory awaits you” (4), one Captain dictates just before his head is blown off. No one believes those words of propaganda. Togo who cannot find any reason to keep on fighting, becomes MIA, and returns to the United States. No sophistries, no racial theory, or no promised glory can make Togo a good soldier, because he, who has befriended with his Chinese neighbors, Hon. Bonk and his four year-old daughter Nellie, cannot fight in propaganda “war without mercy.”

The Togo in these two letters is a Japanese soldier who returns home, but he is not a faceless inscrutable foe, nor a psychopath thirsting for blood, nor a plunderer. This is not the Togo with whom readers were familiar, for he is not simply a comic figure, but rather a human being in doubt, searching for reason in an unreasonable world. “Why should I fight? Is there a reason for this war?” Togo himself does not give the answer to these questions, but from his letters, it is clear that the answer is no. One cannot any longer find the optimistic Togo who called a race riot a racial “mix.” Togo’s humanity is conserved through Irwin’s ploy of letting Togo the sad clown experience this inferno that is war.

Next, Irwin attempted to write a series of puppet plays entitled “Charley McTogo and his Uncle Adolf” (later changed to “Dialogue with a Dummy”). This is a series of comedy scripts featuring the ventriloquist Hitler and the Japanese puppet McTogo (later Tapioka) who call themselves “The Axis Boys.” They fight among themselves and tear each other’s silly utterings into pieces. In this script, both protagonists are vernacular speakers; Hitler speaks with an alleged “German” accent, and McTogo with a Togo accent. But somehow, Hitler’s accent sounds heavier, and his sophistries are more bizarre than McTogo’s. Obviously Hitler’s strange ideas, such as “backward prophecy” (an euphemism for a ‘prevarication’) and his confusing/confused theory of
propaganda as “the art of turning vot ain’t into vot is,” or as “der science of inside out” (“Seeing Things” 1) are easy prey for ridicule.

In fact, Irwin himself was an experienced propagandist. During the World War I, Irwin was, together with his elder brother and journalist Will Irwin, a member of the Committee on Public Information, whose mission was to participate actively in wartime propaganda. The CPI was instigated in 1917 by President Woodrow Wilson, and headed by the journalist George Creel. Wallace Irwin’s role was to create propaganda to whip up fighting spirit in order to sustain the war efforts. Far from telling the truth, he worked on twisting information so that the enemy’s gain looked as small as possible, and allies’ gain as big as possible. He was eventually nicknamed “Adjective Irwin of the Committee on Public Misinformation” (Irwin, “I Look at Me” 247). This experience must have made him extremely suspicious of propaganda since “Doubt the words of propaganda” was the attitude that Irwin infused in his Togo writings.

The first time Hashimura Togo faces “propaganda” (in Togo English, it is spelled “poppaganda”) is in the Sunset Magazine serial of 1921, where Togo goes back to the West. Henry Clay Soda, the chairman of the “Hon. Japanese Thinking Society” and also Togo’s rival in love, explains what “poppaganda” is in front of the audience: “Poppaganda is the art of making great noise with a Maxim silencer on it. It is the art of advertising while nobody is looking. It is the art of praising yourself behind people’s back. Can you filter that wisdom?” (“Poppaganda,” 24). This, rather than being an explication of the concept, appears to be a non-explication typical of the Togo column, with ties to Uncle Adolf’s theory of propaganda. In a time rife with racial stereotyping, Togo’s laughter enlightens us through his healthy doubt of propaganda that bridges the existent and the nonexistent, and through this, Togo provides us with a glowing example of “I take nothing at face value” philosophy. In order to live as a paradoxical yellowface figure who intimates “I am not me,” Togo held onto this philosophy of popping the bubble of propaganda through “poppaganda” during the hard times of World War II.

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Notes

1 Unpublished autobiography dictated on December 22, 1908, The Mark Twain Papers & Project, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Mark Twain’s previously unpublished words are copyright 2008 by Richard A. Watson and Chase Manhattan Bank as Trustees of the Mark Twain Foundation, which reserves all reproduction or dramatization rights in every medium. Quotation is made with the permission of the University of California Press and Robert H. Hirst, General Editor of the Mark Twain Project.
• Fig. 1—“Hashimura Togo” photographed by James Hare, from “The Yellow Peril,” Collier’s 30 Nov. 1907, 24.
• Fig. 2—Hashimura Togo by Ralph Barton, from More Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy, 1923.
• Fig. 3—Togo as a 'Merican Jap illustrated by Tani Joji, from Shinseinen, 8 July 1927, 2.