

“Will White Man and Yellow Man Ever Mix?”:
Wallace Irwin, Hashimura Togo,
and the Japanese Immigrant in America

*Yoshiko UZAWA**

I

In November 1907, “Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy,” a literary column featuring an imaginary Japanese named Hashimura Togo, was launched in the New York weekly *Collier’s*. Togo was the pseudonym of a Scotch-Irish writer, Wallace Irwin (1875–1959), then a staff writer of this weekly. The author and the editor first kept the fact that Irwin was Togo to themselves. However, it did not take a month before a number of letters inquiring about Togo’s racial identity flooded *Collier’s* editorial staff room. The author and the editor, with the help of James Hare, a war photojournalist famous for his coverage of the Russo-Japanese War, took a portrait-photograph of “Hashimura Togo” (Fig.1). Given yellowface make-up, Irwin posed before the camera in exactly the same way as President Theodore Roosevelt posed in his life-size portrait hung as the backdrop. This photo appeared as Togo’s in the fourth installment of “Letters,” provocatively titled “The Yellow Peril.”¹ The photo somehow satisfied most sceptical readers at least for a couple more months, until *Collier’s* in its editorial bulletin of May 1908 finally took readers

Copyright © 2006 Yoshiko Uzawa. All rights reserved. This work may be used, with this notice included, for noncommercial purposes. No copies of this work may be distributed, electronically or otherwise, in whole or in part, without permission from the author.

*Professor, Keio University

Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy

By HASHIMURA TOGO

On the back of this picture Mr. Togo has written: "I great admirer your honorable emperor." H. T.



Hashimura Togo
PHOTOGRAPH BY J. HARE

ハ
シ
ム
ラ

東
郷

IV—*The Yellow Peril*

Fig. 1 "Hashimura Togo" photographed by James Hare *Collier's*, Nov. 30th, 1907, 24.

into full confidence. The text, accompanied with two photos, respectively captioned "Mr. Wallace Irwin, as 'Hashimura Togo'" and "The same photograph of Mr. Wallace Irwin before he was Japanned," creates an overall impression that the author, the publisher, and the reader took this racial impersonation as an entertainment. A letter from an anonymous reader quoted in the article states: "My congratulations to you and to Togo, who, I imagine, is, at least, only a near-Jap. No real Oriental could, I fancy, get quite that real aspect of his own people."²

Irwin's Hashimura Togo column could have come to an early demise without a letter of support from Mark Twain. The father of American literature sent an encouraging letter to *Collier's* and highly praised Togo: "That boy is the dearest & sweetest & frankest & wisest & funniest & delightfulest & loveablest creation that has been added to our literature

for some time. I think he is a permanency & I hope so too.”³ Twain’s prediction came true before long, and *The Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy* was published in 1909 by the thriving literary publisher Doubleday & Page Company. *The American Magazine* called *The Letters* “the comic sensation of the decade,” while New York *Globe* named it “the greatest joke in America.” Twain’s words provided the most powerful endorsement, and eventually awarded Togo the lifelong title of “Mark Twain’s pet.”⁴

Wallace Irwin was a prolific writer during his lifetime, although almost unknown today. He published more than forty works, four of which featured Togo. Irwin created this imaginary persona partly from his own experience of being a poor, self-supporting student. Togo achieved such enormous popularity in the early 20th century that Irwin could not surpass him in his creations. The Togo columns appeared for over a quarter of a century in various magazines and syndicates such as *Collier’s*, *Good Housekeeping*, *The American Magazine*, *Sunset*, *Life*, and *The New York Times*. The first Togo book was followed in succession by *Mr. Togo: Maid of All Work* in 1913, *Hashimura Togo: Domestic Scientist* in 1914, and *More Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy* in 1923. Togo became a propagandist for Herbert Hoover’s national campaign for the starving children of Europe in 1921, having already become a national celebrity in the early 1920s. For millions of Americans Togo became a representative of the Japanese, and his popularity reached its peak around World War I, bottoming out around World War II.

Hashimura Togo has thus far intrigued scholars as an early example of racial stereotypes created by Anglo-American authors. As Elaine H. Kim and other critics have observed, Togo, a comical servant who speaks with a funny accent, is one among many “caricatures of Asians,” fabricated “Orientals” which have been the stock-in-trade in American popular culture for generations. Togo owed his honorific speech to “Chinese” English. This pseudo-Chinese accent had long been employed in minstrel shows and other popular cultural media, placing emphasis on Oriental otherness phonetically as well as visually. The Oriental’s contrast to the “white” had also been encoded in the Oriental’s body images. A buck-toothed, slant-eyed, pigtailed man wearing puffy-legged pants, eager to eat the uneatable with pleasure and ready to receive whatever physical violence with ease, was a typical “Chinese” caricature in the 19th century. Based on this supposed Chinese, the Oriental body image was constructed as non-American and non-human.⁵ Togo’s features and

physique were also derived in part from this Oriental image, especially those created by the New York caricaturist Ralph Barton in 1923.

Irwin created his comical Japanese schoolboy in this Orientalist tradition. And as Kim has justly observed, Orientalism promoted racism by creating a racial other in caricatures of Asians, by deliberately distorting real Asian existence and experience, and by depriving Asians and Asian Americans of their chance to express themselves and be accepted in the American media.⁶ There is no doubt about this.

The present paper, however, proposes to reveal multi-layered social existences within this Oriental persona. Hashimura Togo was for Wallace Irwin what Mark Twain was for Samuel Langhorne Clemens: a literary pseudonym, commercial trademark, the writer's mask to protect himself, and a medium by which to express himself, in one. Irwin created Togo not only as his racial other but as his authorial self, coming from the same class, sharing the same critical spirit. In the minstrel tradition, wearing the mask of a literary fool, Irwin could make astute social comments from the viewpoint of the social underclass, putting the easy premises of middle-class society into question. Togo's hilariously broken English, which has been thus far taken only as a sign of racism by critics, functioned as a means to at once remove the smug mask of American middle-class values while casting light on the confusion beneath.

Moreover, Togo did not appear in the absence of real Japanese. His was a time when America had mixed feelings toward Japan, Japanese people, and things Japanese. Through its victories over China and Russia, Japan became a new military power in Asia and the Pacific over which America also held its own imperialistic designs. Partly as a consequence, a tide of xenophobia ran increasingly high, especially on the West Coast. The Asiatic Exclusion League was formed in San Francisco in 1905, the San Francisco school controversy occurred in 1906, and the Vancouver Riot in September 1907 stimulated the anti-Japanese movements growing rampant on a large scale down the West Coast. The early 1900s thus marked the beginning of violent racial antagonism toward Japanese immigrants, which was a natural continuation of the anti-Chinese sentiment that began several decades earlier. It was in this context that Hashimura Togo made his appearance. No matter how imaginary Togo was, the Japanese in America did not and could not simply receive him passively. Instead, they worried about, rejoiced in, exploited, and groped for various possibilities, which Togo's appearance

opened up for them. In 1917, he became an exotic, sexual hero in the Paramount movie “Hashimura Togo.” Sessue Hayakawa played the title role, giving birth to another Togo that Irwin never dreamt of creating. The contrast between Togo in print and Togo on screen enables us to find in him a multifaceted view of class, gender, and race issues in the early 20th century American popular culture.

II

Hashimura Togo’s “Japanned” English is the staple of his humorous writings. He is addicted to honorifics, invents unconventional phraseology, and makes many seemingly careless mistakes in grammar and spelling. A good example is his first letter in *Collier’s*, entitled “Our Noble Allies.” When involved in a race riot, Togo confronts the violent mob with *jujitsu*, but as weak as he is, he is injured. From his hospital bed in San Francisco, he sends his first letter to New York: “To Esteemed Excellency the Editor of what is much widely read Collier Weekly,” he begins. “Dear Sir—I am a Japanese Schoolboy age 35 years & I come to this Free Country . . . to return to Japan. . . . I am confined in hospital enjoying much pain from brick-bat wound sent to me by an American patriot.”⁷

The most ironical misunderstanding occurs when Togo answers “Yes” to the question about 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.⁸

The above passage suggests more than one type of racial-mixing. First, to the sceptical reader, this is equivalent to a tongue-in-cheek confession of Togo as a yellowface persona. The word “affair” insinuates homosexuality or homosociality between two men of different races. Second, this passage reflects the anti-assimilation and anti-miscegenation arguments, frequently heard in the surge of anti-Japanese feeling in the 1900s. In both contexts, “no” was the expected answer: the white race and the yellow race will never, and should never mix. Togo however ignores

such social contexts of the question, and answers in the affirmative, revealing his cultural illiteracy. His justification provides another interpretation. Hence, third, the race riot is a racial “mix.” This seemingly naive misinterpretation of “mixture” parodies the underlying premise of segregation, that people can and should be separated along the color line, which is basic to the anti-assimilation and anti-miscegenation arguments. Fourth, Togo is alluding to the history of the Irish in America, who have actually crossed the color line from the colored to the ethnic white in the course of the 19th century. In the early days, as Noel Ignatiev notes, they called the Irish “niggers turned inside out,” and the black “smoked Irish.”⁹ Accordingly, the Irish and the black were given similar features and physiques in their caricatures. For the Irish, Togo deserves a “brick-bat wound” precisely because he is right about the Irish being ex-colored men.

Thus, Togo’s serious social commentary is sugarcoated with his seemingly foolish slapstick of English. No matter how far-fetched his acrobatic English sounds, how unreal his comical nature makes him look, his concern is down-to-earth. He keeps in touch with his contemporary America, not the far away fairyland. Pseudo-Japanese columnist that he is, Irwin’s Togo does not seem to feel camaraderie with either American Japonism in art and craft which was in vogue from the 1870s, or Japonism in print and on stage, popular in the 1900s, both of which cultivated romantic feelings for the “good old Japan.” The Togo column had at least at the beginning the raw power of the laughter of the social underclass, powerful enough to blow away such quaint aestheticism based on exoticism.

The Japanese schoolboy Togo is a curious mixture *par excellence*. He is a man of 35 years expected to do work that is traditionally gendered female. In spite of his name, which is the name of the military hero Admiral Togo, he is a physically weak pacifist. Unable to escape the appellation of Japanese schoolboy, he is more often than not out of work. His name itself is a curious mixture. Both Hashimura and Togo are Japanese proper names. Yet Hashimura is a surname, as is Togo; therefore the combination of the two makes a strange name for Japanese. In the signature printed in each letter, the name is in Japanese in the order from the top to the bottom (Fig.1). Hashimura is in *katakana* (one of the Japanese phonograms) and Togo is in *kanji* (ideogram). From the use of “Mr. Togo,” Togo must be the last name. Thus the signature is in the order of the first name first and the surname last, quite contrary to the way in which Japanese names are normally written.

During three decades of Togo’s appearance in various magazines and newspapers, the original emphasis on his mixed character more or less changed. The longest and possibly the best serialization appeared in *Good Housekeeping* in 1912. Anthologizing the best stories from this serialization, the book *Mr. Togo: Maid of all Works* was published. As is apparent from the title, the gender-class inversion was more in focus, and his “Mr. maid-hood” was in the foreground.

Togo’s letters are written in the first person; therefore, all the protagonists, regardless of their social status, no matter whether it is coded by class, gender, race, or age differences, speak in “Togo English.” This essentially non-discriminatory use of discriminatory English seems to be more operative than ever to produce comical effects in *Good Housekeeping*. Togo speaking with a curious accent sounds funny as a matter of course. And yet, middle class prudent ladies—the epitome of white middle class American civilization—speaking with a Togo accent also makes a humorous, if not funnier, impression.

To put this in perspective, Togo’s English induces laughter because it subverts categories to disturb grammatical as well as social order. Three of the characteristic features of his English—excessive use of honorifics, abuse of personifications, and gender inversion—are a useful means of subverting categorical assumptions. In Togo English, a mistress is “honorable,” as is a fly. A master is “he,” and so is a vacuum cleaner, which Togo the servant “girl” strives to master. In this subversive English, absurdity of social hierarchy is laid bare; no authority is spared from attack. Togo, for instance, looks up the word “vacuum” in a “Webster” dictionary only to find the definition useless to understand a vacuum cleaner. “How could Mr. Danl Webster speak such untruth by his Dictionary?” Togo wonders. Just as the politician Daniel Webster is mixed with the lexicographer Noah Webster because they are both Websters, so vacuum cleaner is mixed with ostriches because they are both voracious: “This intellectual Vacuum machinery resemble ostriches in what they eat. He delight to sip up tacks, needles, buttons and other hard groceries.”¹⁰

Togo is not timid. He knows how to talk back to the supposed authorities. To Mrs. K.W. Pumphrey, for example, who has ordered Togo to catch flies, he retorts back with his criticism of “wasp”:

“How much flies we caught this a.m., Togo?” she ask it.

“Six,” I say it. “Five house and one butter.”

“Unloosen Hon. Butterfly,” she dement. “We should not punish nature’s lovely insex because of sins of others.”

So I grabb that lovely insex and attemp remove him from his sticky toes. But when I done so he turn meanly and bit me on thumb with hot end of his poison tail.

“That butterfly are a wasp!” I lecture amid Japanese word curse.

“Wasps does little harm,” she say sweetishly.

“What little they does can be noticed immediately,” I snarrel.¹¹

Or, to Mrs. Washington Fillups who says no to everything her husband does, Togo speaks on behalf of his suffering master: “Husbands should not be furniture for the home—Home should be furniture for the Husband. I speak this because I saw it.”¹² To Mrs. Cicero Earnest who advocates a strict vegetarian diet in her family, Togo sympathizes with her husband who appears to him “very vegetable.”¹³ Togo always has his say about his mistresses’ high-handedness.

Togo in this series is constantly at odds with white middle-class housewives. He loses his job of domestic servant time after time, forever in search of a new employer. A clever device to keep the stories going, his incessantly moving from one place to another gives us an ample chance to view the most hidden secrets of the white middle-class households: the confusing reality under the veneer of the cult of domesticity. Mistresses of their respectable homes are busy with their obsessions, such as the cult of cleanliness, the scientific management of baby rearing, modern cooking, social calling, vegetarian diets, and so on. Togo puts these obsessions into question. In spite of his efforts to understand, as Kim has observed, Togo’s English is as faulty as his interpretation. The reader knows that all his efforts to understand American middle-class life and language will be in vain.¹⁴ At the same time, however, we also wonder whether it is worthwhile to understand an obsessive cult like Mrs. Bellus’s, for whom a vacuum cleaner is next to godliness, or like Mrs. Pumphrey’s, for whom the germ theory of the fly is her bible. In his essay entitled “Are you one of those perfect housekeepers?” Irwin contends that “There is a certain arrogance about perfect housekeepers, only comparable to the arrogance of those who speak foreign languages you don’t understand.”¹⁵ This is exactly what is in the foreground in the Togo column in *Good Housekeeping*. By juxtaposing a Japanese Mr. Maid-of-all-Work with tyrannical white female housewives obsessed with various cults in the 1910s, Irwin succeeds in presenting his double-edged social commentary.

In the early 20th century, the situation surrounding middle-class women was confusing, not just to Togo. As argued by Lois W. Banner

and David M. Katzman, many middle-class women were suddenly forced to be managers of households in a modern society, having to cope with ever changing contemporary trends. These women had more free time but a less rigid standard of conduct to rely on. They had more information on new thoughts and technological advancements advocated by early feminists and domestic scientists, but little experience and less confidence. In the whirlwind of middle-class households, it was often the servant who bore the brunt of these changes and the entailing confusion. This resulted in a significant shortage of female domestic workers, and produced a great number of writings on the so-called servant problem.¹⁶ The problem was not so much the servant's unwillingness to work as the mistress's whimsical maltreatment of her servants. The Togo column in *Good Housekeeping* also functioned as an exposé of the servant problem from a servant's point of view. Togo's confused/confusing existence, like secret ink, reveals and caricatures the confused/confusing state of his employers. By adding a backstage view to the problem, he is a “servant problem [sic]” (a mixing of bomb and problem) *par excellence*.

III

The term “Japanese schoolboy” was invented in the 1880s, but Japanese students who supported themselves by working as domestic workers in middle-class families were as old as the history of the Japanese immigrant in the United States.¹⁷ For example, Joe Nijima, the founder of Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan, started his self-supporting student life in Boston working as a domestic servant as early as the 1860s.¹⁸ “Schoolboy” in America was introduced to Meiji Japan through a number of *tobei* (crossing-to-America) guidebooks and ex-schoolboys' autobiographical writings. These *tobei* publications repeatedly stated that the job of a “schoolboy” was a convenient way for the poor student to support himself, and that America was a “paradise for poor students.”¹⁹ *Tobei* publications thus encouraged readers who craved an opportunity to cross the Pacific Ocean.

However, it is one thing to read about a “Japanese schoolboy” and another to actually be one. The Japanese schoolboy as an occupation was a categorical anomaly. Crossing the Pacific Ocean was not the only crossing that first generation Japanese immigrants (*issei*) had to go through. As Hashimura Togo says, “I am a Japanese Schoolboy

employed as a servant girl.” Schoolboys were expected to do the job of a maid, a job normally done by working class women and colored women in America. How this crossing of the gender-class boundaries humiliated the Meiji Japanese man’s sense of manliness is demonstrated in the confession of a real Japanese schoolboy anonymously published in the weekly *Independent*.

What would the boys in Japan say if they found me out? I am thus employed in the kitchen receiving the orders from the maid-servant whom I have once looked down and thought never to be equal while I was dining at my uncle’s house. . . . There is no personal liberty while your manhood is completely ignored.²⁰

Apparently, the above example’s misery arises from his own consciousness that he has crossed the gender-class boundaries. He has fallen below his social status, and has become something that his friends back in Japan would never even think of becoming: a *jocyu* or *gejo* (servant girl), a job only the lowly woman would have undertaken in Japan. Yoshio Markino, a Japanese painter who made his career in London, likewise recalls his tragic first day as a schoolboy in San Francisco. He got the job to earn the wage of a dollar and a half per week, and when the first day of heavy duty was almost over, he was too exhausted to remember that his hired name was “Charlie,” not Yoshio. Failing to answer his mistress’s calling him “Charlie,” he was bitterly scolded for his inattention. A minute later, he saw himself in a white coat and apron in the mirror, and was anguished: “the tears so freely flowed out from my eyes, and I buried my face with both arms.”²¹ Kyuin Okina, a journalist and writer, also spent his first days in the United States as a houseworker. In his autobiography he chronicles his mixed feelings about his position: “This is the most despised work of servant girl [*jocyu boko*] in Japan.” Feeling shame and grief, Okina can only justify his lowly work by appealing to the incantation “*rodo wa shinsei* (it is sacred to work)” and differentiating his job from hers: “This job of housework is as lowly as that of Japanese servant girls, and yet, I am not as ignorant as they are, and I am not what they are.”²²

The phrase “*rodo wa shinsei*” that Okina repeats to himself was widely believed among Japanese immigrants to be an American doctrine rooted in Protestantism. This was, in fact, one of the most frequently cited ideas in *tobei* guidebooks and writings of ex-schoolboys. The historian Teruko Kumei points out, however, that this phrase was possibly not an

American but a Japanese invention. According to Kumei, Japanese immigrants, pressed to justify the lowly job of “schoolboys” in some way, seized on the work ethic of American Protestantism and made up the phrase. With this allegedly American doctrine, Japanese houseboys could “justify their servile position of a servant girl and could still believe in their bright futures in America,” inviting “unsatisfied youth of Meiji Japan to come over to the United States.”²³

Although invented to justify the servile jobs, the idea of *rodo wa shinsei* could in fact foster servility among the poor Japanese immigrants. It was so difficult for self-supporting schoolboys to complete higher education that they were inclined to find in this idea an easy excuse to give up. As Keieisei, an ex-schoolboy at Stanford University in the early 1900s, argued in his memoir in 1911: “Nothing is more lamentable than to let oneself be deceived by the mere words of ‘*rodo wa shinsei*’ and to waste one’s precious time.”²⁴

The Japanese leading politician Yukio Ozaki voiced his gender-class prejudice in 1888 that schoolboys had developed “maid-servant servility,” and he even called these schoolboys a “blot on Japan’s national image.”²⁵ He feared that these lowly domestic man-maids would represent Japanese in the future, and that these socially castrated Japanese immigrants might be excluded in the way Chinese immigrants had been excluded.

The Japanese community leaders in America shared this prejudice and anxiety. They stigmatized domestic laborers including schoolboys, despite the fact that the majority of the Japanese community were actually engaged in some kind of domestic labor. Shozo Mizutani, a leading member of the Japanese community in New York, stated in his book on the Japanese community history that domestic labor was “a job rooted in slavery,” and therefore absolutely “not an ideal job” for Japanese to do.²⁶ Given that in 1921, the year Mizutani published his history, three-fourths of the community members were domestic laborers, the historian Mitziko Sawada points out that the community leaders’ stigmatization of domestic labor was “confusing.” The Japanese community could have lifted the stigma and eased the wounded pride of Japanese domestic laborers; or, they could have created new employment opportunities and provided assistance for Japanese immigrants to make career changes or seek promotion. However, they kept on stigmatizing domestic labor as “slave work” or “*jocyu boko*.” As Sawada maintains, the stereotype of Asian men as “unmanly” played on both American and Japanese

patriarchal perceptions, and could not help but put “the Japanese domestic worker in New York in a state of perpetual subordination and inferiority.”²⁷

Although in such a state of “perpetual subordination and inferiority,” the schoolboy’s life was not entirely tragic. Novice schoolboys made a number of funny mistakes in their first encounters with American life. Yone Noguchi in his autobiography recounts a number of comical mistakes of his fellow schoolboys, beside his own experience of rushing “into my Madam’s toilet room without knocking.”²⁸ The American middle-class household was a complex mystery to novice schoolboys. They needed to learn everything from A to Z, but their poor English ability, and no small cultural differences, made them poor students. A schoolboy named “Frank” in Henry Kiyama’s *The Four Immigrants Manga* wakes up at four o’clock in the morning and takes apart the cooking stove in order to clean it. Another schoolboy named Henry (probably Kiyama himself) offers to scrub the back of his mistress bathing in the bathtub, only to find himself accused as crazy for his efforts to act like a servant girl in Japan. A bilingual situation helped produce comic relief. Keieisei notes that some clever Japanese schoolboys gave themselves false names such as *taiko* (minister) and *danna* (master). Every time their masters called their names, they were referred to as “masters” without their real masters knowing it.²⁹

The anxiety of Japanese politicians and Japanese community leaders in America—that Japanese men might be represented by unmanly Japanese schoolboys—did not prove to be groundless. In 1907, Hashimura Togo made his appearance, adding fuel to the flames of anxiety. The mistakes (both intentional and unintentional) that real novice Japanese schoolboys made are not unlike (at least some of) Hashimura Togo’s. Like Markino, Noguchi, and Keieisei quoted above, a number of ex-schoolboys have left their writings, which usually contain at least one passage about funny mistakes they made. Although he is an imaginary persona, Togo seems to share something with the real Japanese domestic laborers. This is because for Togo and for the real Japanese schoolboys, humor and laughter could provide powerful weapons to survive in, and to fight against, the oppressive hierarchies to which they were subordinated.

What was Hashimura Togo’s reception among the Japanese community members? The Japanese Consul in Chicago, Kazuo Matsumura, sent a letter (dated May 29, 1909) to Foreign Minister Jutarō Komura in

which he called Irwin’s Togo column in *Collier’s* a “gimmick [gibun].” Matsumura mistakenly assumed that Wallace Irwin was a “Will Irwin” who wrote a treatise sympathetic to anti-Japanese sentiment on the West Coast, entitled “Why the Pacific Slope Hates the Japanese” in *New York Pearson’s Magazine*. Matsumura feared that Hashimura Togo might be a premonition of a rising tide of anti-Japanese sentiment on the East Coast.³⁰

A letter from a Toku Oe reveals entirely different feelings toward Togo. The letter, sent from Sacramento to Irwin via *Collier’s*, is typed and beautifully autographed in Japanese with a pen in the way the Japanese name should be written, the first name last and the last name first:

Dear Sir, I am a young Japanese school-boy in this town, and one of many enthusiastic admirers and thousands readers of the *Collier’s Weekly*. Allow me to say that Hon. Hashimura Togo was the best friend of mine, and think he is the funniest and the frankest general in the humor world, as well as Admiral Togo the Nelson of Far East is the most fierceful [sic] and the strongest sea-fighter.³¹

The author of the letter continues that he has failed to find Togo in San Francisco, and heard the rumor that Togo was not a true “Samurai,” but either a “Nipponed Yankee” or a “Yankeed Nipponese.” I wonder if it was another fake letter written in imitation of Togo’s English, because “Hon.” and “Samurai” sound too Orientalistic. But the way the writer tries not to humiliate Admiral Togo seems to be in accord with patriotic feelings that Japanese *issei* all shared. It is also very likely that the real writer was either Oe’s white master, who asked Oe to sign the letter, or Oe himself, who asked his master to check and correct his English. There is no way to prove this letter’s authenticity, but no way to disprove it either. So let us assume that it was from a Japanese schoolboy who signed the letter, and imagine what this schoolboy’s sympathy could possibly mean.

Before Hashimura Togo, “Japanese schoolboy” had been, socially, the least valued existence even among his own countrymen in the United States. Notwithstanding this, *Collier’s*, one of the major white American weeklies, ran the column of a “Japanese schoolboy.” It is difficult to imagine that schoolboys would waste this chance of social acknowledgment given from white society over the heads of arrogant elite members of the Japanese community in America. Astute immigrants exploited this

chance to survive in this doubly discriminatory society. An example can be found in Irwin's valet named Jiro, whom Irwin hired in 1915 when he was a widower. Irwin jokingly called him "zero," but not without reason. Jiro was extremely careless and Irwin fired him many times. But every time he was fired, Jiro came back the next morning as if nothing happened, and talked about how he felt honored to be able to work for the creator of Hashimura Togo. This small trick worked, and Jiro kept his job till the day he went back to Japan.³²

Kiyoshi K. Kawakami, an *issei* journalist, gave yet another interpretation of Togo in his review of *The Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy* in *The New York Times Saturday Review of Books*. This one-time socialist came to the United States in 1901, received his master's degree in political science from the University of Iowa, and since 1906 had been a regular contributor to this major American newspaper's book review pages. When he wrote a review article on Irwin's Togo book, he was already a conspicuous figure in American journalism.

In his review "Japanned-English, English-Japanned," Kawakami invites us to a walk on the streets of the port city Yokohama to search for the "masterpieces in pidgin English." At every turn we take, "genuine" unique phrases welcome us. We see "The ribbons, the laces, the veils, the feelings" inscribed on the signboard over a dry goods store. A store specializing in women's dresses calls itself "A Dealer in Draper, Milliner and Ladies Outfatter." On a barbershop's window, we find "Head Cutter." Kawakami suggests that the comparison of these genuine masterpieces of Japanned English with Togo's would reveal their essential dissimilarities. "Assisted by an eminent author, poor Togo lost the characteristic naiveté and charming simplicity of his own style, and his letters are burdened with words and phrases that he never dreamed of using."³³

Thus, Kawakami emphasizes the difference between the real and the fake. Togo's English is a dangerous mixture of pleasure, pain, humor, and racism. Togo easily allows his "noble allies" to vent their anger against him. For no matter how hard he is struck or how many times he is kicked, he would say, "I enjoy my pain, thank you." Knowing that to be confused with Togo was a risky business for a real Japanese schoolboy, Kawakami attempts to dissuade the reader from carelessly mixing the two.

Though Togo's English is entertaining, its author Wallace Irwin seems to have "another purpose," which Kawakami defines as "an attempt to

bring home to the Americans their follies and foibles and extravagances through the pen of an imaginary Japanese schoolboy who is extremely humorous, cheerful, and jolly.” What Togo portrays is “their [Americans’]” follies, not Japanese, yet here Kawakami sounds ambivalent. Should one interpret Irwin’s attempts at social commentary “through the pen of an imaginary Japanese schoolboy who is extremely humorous, cheerful, and jolly” as a part of “their follies and foibles and extravagances”?³⁴ Kawakami significantly leaves this as an open question.

IV

When the Paramount movie “Hashimura Togo” was released in August 1917, the Togo column in *Good Housekeeping* was at the height of its popularity. The serialization of the column in this family magazine was breaking its own record for the longest run every week; the final record was stretched out into six long years from 1912 to 1918. In effect, the name of Hashimura Togo was, at that point, virtually a household word for American middle-class families.

Though Wallace Irwin had not contributed a line to the scenario of this silent film, his name was also credited along with the scenario writer Marion Fairfax, the director William C. de Mille, and other (white and Japanese) actors and actresses. The title role of Hashimura Togo was played by the Japanese Hollywood star Sessue Hayakawa, who was then at the prime of his popularity. The film of this silent movie is no longer extant, but from its scenario and other available material we can reconstruct “Hashimura Togo” on the screen.³⁵

A short synopsis given in *American Film Institute Catalog* reads:

Bearing the burden of an accusation of a breach of diplomacy committed by his brother, Hashimura Togo leaves Japan in disgrace for the United States where he enters the employ of Mrs. Reynolds as a butler. Togo soon learns that Mrs. Reynolds’ daughter Corinne, although in love with Dr. Garland, is being coerced into marrying Carlos Anthony who, having appropriated all of her deceased father’s funds, now promises to save the family from financial ruin in return for Corinne’s hand in marriage. Enlisting the aid of a reporter, Togo succeeds in proving Anthony’s duplicity in time to stop the marriage, thus freeing Corinne to marry Garland, and after a series of misadventures, returns home, his name cleared, to his sweetheart in Japan.³⁶

Togo on the silver screen is in double jeopardy: he risks his life and honor for his unworthy brother; and he risks his love and job for his beloved

mistress knowing that she is in love with someone else. To accommodate this new Togo, a new social background is created. Throughout the film, Togo is a noble man (the second son of a Japanese noble, Baron Katzu) thinly disguised as a butler, a job at the top of the hierarchy of domestic labor. He is thus no longer a Japanese schoolboy at the bottom of the domestic hierarchy, with no particular Japanese social background to speak of. So even when Hayakawa-Togo fights against the racism of his fellow domestic workers at Mrs. Reynolds's, his upper-class gentleness gains the upper hand. To the maid who insistently demands that he eat the food drenched with Tabasco sauce in scene 90, Togo simply declines to dine, saying, "I have already eaten with my honorable nose." To the chauffeur who openly declares war with Togo in scene 83, he fights using *jujitsu* with elegance. Unlike Togo in the magazine, Togo on the screen is always the winner of the "race riot."

The personae of Togo on the silver screen and Togo in the magazine seem very different at all points. The fact that the Japanese Hollywood star Hayakawa played the title role of Togo explains these differences. The Hollywood star system controlled and used star identities, beyond the confines of individual films, as "capital" and "image" to promote films to the public.³⁷ Sessue Hayakawa's Oriental star image—the exotic, sexy, glamorous man from the Orient—curbed the dry laughter that punctuated Togo's social critique of American middle class households. Accordingly, on the screen, Hayakawa-Togo was more glamorous than absurd, more sexy than troubled, with a sense of humor more quiet than loud.

Still a Togo, Hayakawa on the screen writes and speaks in Togo English to show the Togo trademark of cultural ignorance and/or innocence. Applying for a job, he writes the following recommendation letter all by himself. The letter is a masterpiece in its imitation of Togo's characteristic grammar. "To lady, Dir Sir: Hire Togo and you will wonder why! He can cook without pain. O see. See how well he boils pies and other American vegetables. Can ron furnaces, babies and ottomobiles. Behaves like sweetheart to strangers. He will be a nice trial for you. I have know Togo since baby. Yours truly, Togo."³⁸ The mistakes in spelling and grammar, mixing things of different categories (a "pie" is an "American vegetable," "furnaces, babies and ottomobiles"), gender inversion ("lady" is addressed as "Sir"), unlikely phraseology ("boil pies," "cook without pain," "behaves like sweetheart to strangers"), and oxymoron ("nice trial") are typical of Togo's acrobatics of English.

On the screen, Hayakawa-Togo alone speaks in broken English that reinforces its racist aspect. However, in such an exceptional scene of relaying messages, we can have a glimpse of the Togo world in the magazine where all speak in the same broken language, regardless of their racial, gender, and class differences. Knowing that her beloved Dr. Garland is at the door, Corinne asks Togo, “Tell Dr. Garland that I’m not dressed but will be right down,” which Togo conveys to Dr. Garland as “Miss Corinne no dress on—but be right down.”³⁹ Though on a small scale, this is the movie version of a comic scene of a prudish lady speaking in Togo English. Here the joke is not only on Togo, but also on Corrine who is stripped with words and on Dr. Garland who is teased with them.

Thus Togo through the power of his English transformed Hayakawa into a comedian. More often than not, however, it was Hayakawa who transformed Togo to conform to his own “star” image: a sexy, glamorous, Oriental lover whose deathly embrace will captivate women. We can see Hayakawa’s Togo in a still photo, where he appears in a white kimono in a dim candlelit room (Fig.2). Here on his body two opposite instincts of life and death, Eros and Thanatos, are doubly encoded, and both of them contribute to the creation of the new Hashimura Togo.

According to the scenario, the scene depicts Hayakawa-Togo attempting suicide. Here in the photo, we see him kneeling down in a frontal position on the white carpet holding a dagger in his hand. His pale face and white kimono stand out against the dimness surrounding him. Taking the responsibility for his brother’s treasonous crime, he submits to his father who has blindly urged him to die with “honor.” In the original Togo columns, no such pathetic scene of suicide exists; there, “harakiri” is only a comical interjection used always with an exclamation mark. The idea of “death with honor” might remind the contemporary audience in the 1910s of another “Japanese” death enacted on stage, Madame Butterfly’s. “To die with honor . . . when one can no longer live with honor” is the supposed inscription on the blade with which she commits suicide.⁴⁰ In 1917, Togo thus joined the long procession to come of dead or dying Asians on stage, who can become “real” only through their “death or self-effacement” for Western spectators.⁴¹ Not only kimono, but also “harakiri,” an archaic style of suicide practiced by the samurai class in feudal Japan, is part of the film’s interpretation of Japonism or Orientalism.

A small detail of this kimono, however, leads us to its dual meanings.



Fig. 2 “Hashimura Togo,” 1917 (Courtesy George Eastman House)

Taking a closer look at Hayakawa’s kimono sleeves, we see his cuff-buttoned shirt sleeves slightly sticking out. If this kimono is worn as formal attire for a traditional Japanese suicide, this western shirt underneath does not make sense. Rather, it is conceivable that Hayakawa wears this kimono also as an American dressing gown for white consumption. Over the body of Hayakawa in an Americanized kimono fashion, codes of (forbidden) sexuality and exoticism play a duet. In fact, Hayakawa’s head, slightly raised, looks as if it is on a pillow on the bed behind him. The burning candle is placed in a way that looks phallic, as is the dagger in his hand. Hayakawa’s facial expression looks ecstatic and his open arms seem ready to embrace a phantom white woman on this side of the photo.

In the scenario, Togo’s embraces are for a particular “phantom” woman on the screen, his Japanese fiancé O-Noto-San, whose role was played by a white actress in yellowface makeup. The name O-Noto-San is similar to the name of the pseudo-Japanese author Onoto Watanna, whose Japanese romances had been very popular in the 1900s. Onoto

Watanna (Winnifred Eaton) was a Chinese Canadian author in America writing Japanese romances with a Japanese-sounding pseudonym. Her forte was the sentimental romance between men and women of a different race but similar class often set in an exotic Japan. In her search for inter-racial woman-to-woman sympathy, Watanna's works shared much of the sensational design of the Orientalist dramas of *Madame Butterfly*, whose role was often played by white actresses and singers on stage.⁴² Watanna's works, beautifully illustrated, were sold as Christmas books to millions of American middle-class readers. Watanna and Irwin were two contemporary pseudo-Japanese authors. Irwin's forte was in stark contrast to Watanna's; his was the realistic social commentary (sugar-coated with comical slapstick) from the viewpoint of the underclass, which was also coded by race, gender, and sexuality. The marriage of Hashimura Togo (young Baron Katsu) and O-Noto-San suggested in the last scene of the movie epitomized the marriage of two Orientalist traditions of American pseudo-Japanese narratives in “Hashimura Togo” in 1917.⁴³

The desexualized Hashimura Togo that Irwin created in print, and the sexual Togo that Hayakawa enacted on screen, are apparently at odds. However, let us recall that Hayakawa's star image is rooted in popular cinematic Orientalism, where Japanese, Burmese, Indian, Chinese, Arabian, and Hawaiian symbolize the same Other to middle-class America; therefore, the two contrasting Togos can also be conceived as the two sides of one coin. If the original Togo is rooted in the Orientalist tradition of yellowface slapstick-cum-social commentary, this new Togo is a curious hybrid blossom, romanticizing the Orient as in Onoto Watanna's Japanese romances.

About this Hayakawa-Togo, the reviews were mixed. *Motion Picture News* called Hayakawa's Togo “natural and realistic,” while *Rafu Shinpo*, a Japanese-American newspaper, found Hayakawa's performance unsatisfactory, stating that “Hayakawa is not much of a comedian.”⁴⁴ Wallace Irwin, also dissatisfied with Togo's mutation on the screen, was going to publish the alleged anti-Japanese novel *Seed of the Sun* in 1921. Irwin later stated that his primary motivation for writing this serious novel was to “give a realistic view of the Japanese living in America” to the public. Irwin believed that Americans “had fed too long on romantic stuff about the people of Nippon who, according to the popular version, live mostly under cherry blossoms, wangling samisens and committing hara-kiri according to the ancient code.”⁴⁵

And yet, let it be said that by exploiting sexuality and exotic nobility in the comical servant Togo, a character that originated in the minstrel tradition of social commentary, Hayakawa gave Togo (and himself) a chance to balance the competing popular Orientalist traditions. By mixing the two to create the hybrid Togo on screen, Hayakawa at least searched for a way out of stock caricatures of the Japanese in America, and perhaps also out of his own star/stock image of the Oriental villain. “Will White Man and Yellow Man ever mix?” Togo asks and answers in the affirmative. In the case of Hayakawa-Togo we may find another affirmative answer to the question. Togo has been a cultural arena in which not just Anglo America but Asian America took part in their struggles for meanings within and outside American Orientalism.

NOTES

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Smith College in 1999, and at the Conference of the American Literature Society of Japan at Konan University in 2004. I would like to thank Floyd Cheung, Daniel Horowitz, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, and Mitziko Sawada for their insightful comments and suggestions.

¹ I have given a detailed discussion of how this photo-portrait relates to the Togo stories in my paper, Yoshiko Tomishima, “Nippon danshi urimasu: Wallace Irwin to koka monogatari [A Japanese Schoolboy for Sale: Wallace Irwin and the Discourse of Yellow Peril]” *Monogatari no yurameki [American Narrative in the History of Consciousness]*, ed. Takayuki Tatsumi and Momoko Watanabe (Tokyo: Nanundo, 1998), 245–70.

² Quoted in “The ‘Japanese Schoolboy’,” Editorial Bulletin, *Collier’s: The National Weekly*, 23 May 1908, 7.

³ “A Letter from Mark Twain,” photoengraved in “Editorial Bulletin,” *Collier’s*, 8 Aug. 1908, 22.

⁴ Undated newspaper clippings, Wallace Irwin Papers, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁵ See Elaine H. Kim, *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Frank Chin, Jeffrey Paul Chan, Lawson Fusao Inada, and Sawn Hsu Wong, eds., *Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1974); Robert G. Lee, *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Yuko Matsukawa, “Representing the Oriental in Nineteenth-Century Trade Cards,” *Re/collecting Early Asian America: Essays in Cultural History*, ed. Josephine Lee, Imogene L. Lim and Yuko Matsukawa (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Krystyn R. Moon, *Yellowface: Creating the Chinese in American Popular Music and Performance, 1850s–1920s* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

⁶ Kim, *ibid.*, 22–23.

⁷ Wallace Irwin, *Letters of a Japanese Schoolboy* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1909), 3–4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 41.

¹⁰ Irwin, *Mr. Togo: Maid of All Work* (New York: Duffield & Co., 1913), 5.

¹¹ Irwin, *Hashimura Togo: Domestic Scientist* (New York: Hearst's International Library, 1914), 43.

¹² Irwin, *Mr. Togo*, 47.

¹³ Irwin, “Togo and the Vegetarian Diet,” *Good Housekeeping*, September.1915, 332.

¹⁴ Kim, *ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵ Irwin, “Are You One of Those Perfect Housekeepers?” Wallace Irwin Papers. This essay is narrated from the viewpoint of a baby named Wallace Irwin, who is constantly at odds with his mother, a perfect housekeeper and believer in the scientific rearing of children based on the germ theory of disease and modern dieting. Because of her, the baby Irwin cannot do what he wants to, such as sucking his thumb to his heart's content. Although limited to non-verbal protests he nonetheless presents a commonsense criticism against trendy cults firmly believed by the middle-class households in the early 20th century. The position of the baby narrator is comparable to that of Togo, whose innocence or ignorance makes him at once a victim and a critic of “perfect” housekeepers' reigns.

¹⁶ Lois W. Banner, *Women in Modern America: A Brief History* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 54; David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), especially chapter 1.

¹⁷ The excellent studies that have shed light on the lives of early Japanese student-immigrants are Yuji Ichioka, *The Issei: The World of the First Generation Japanese Immigrant, 1885–1924* (New York: Free Press, 1988); Mitziko Sawada, *Tokyo Life, New York Dreams: Urban Japanese Visions of America, 1890–1924* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

¹⁸ About Niijima as possibly the first Japanese schoolboy, see, for example, *Daijiro Yoshimura, Saikin shisatsu seinen no tobei: Kugakusha no tengoku* [A Recent Survey of Young Japanese Going to America: A Paradise for Poor Students] (Tokyo: Chuyodo, 1902; repr. Tokyo: Yumani-shobo, 2000), 98–99.

¹⁹ See, for example, Yoshimura, *ibid.*; Seisyu Fujimoto and Syuko Akihiro, *Kaigai kugaku annai* [A Guide to Self-Supporting Student Life Abroad] (Tokyo: Hakuho-do, 1904; repr. Tokyo: Yumani-shobo, 2000), 185–386.

²⁰ Hamilton Holt, ed., *The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans As Told by Themselves* (New York: James Pott & Co., 1906), 261–2.

²¹ Yoshio Markino, *When I was a Child* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912), 216.

²² Kyuin Okina, *Waga Issho: Uminokanata* [My Life: Beyond the Ocena] (Okina Kyuin Zensyu Kankokai, 1972), 37–38. My translation.

²³ Teruko Kumei, *Gaikokujin wo meguru shakaishi: Kindai America to nihonjin imin* [A Social History of Foreigners: Modern America and Japanese Immigrants] (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 1995), 79. My translation.

²⁴ Keieisei, *Beikoku kugakusei jikki* [A Memoir of a Poor Student in America] (Tokyo: Naigaisyuppan-Kyokai, 1911), 82–85. My translation.

²⁵ Translated by and quoted in Ichioka, *ibid.*, 24.

²⁶ Shozo Mizutani, *Nyuyoku nihonjin hattenshi* [History of the Japanese in New York] (New York: Japanese Association of New York, 1921; repr. Tokyo: PMC Publishing Co., 1984), 380, 381. My translation.

²⁷ Sawada, *ibid.*, 28.

²⁸ Yone Noguchi, *The Story of Yone Noguchi Told by Himself* (London: Chatty & Windups, 1914), 36, quoted in Ichioka, *ibid.* 25.

²⁹ Henry Yoshitaka Kiyama, *The Four Immigrants Manga: A Japanese Experience in San Francisco, 1904–1924*, trans. Frederik L. Schodt (Berkeley: Stone Bridge Press, 1999), 32–49; Keieisei, *ibid.*, 59–61.

³⁰ *Nihon gaiko bunsho* [Archives of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs], vol. 42: no. 2 (Tokyo: Nihon kokusai rengo kyokai, 1961), 684–85. My translation.

³¹ Correspondence from Toku Oe, Wallace Irwin Papers.

³² See Irwin, “I Look at Me[autobiography],” 204, Wallace Irwin Papers.

³³ Kiyoshi K. Kawakami, “Japanned-English, English-Japanned,” *The New York Times Saturday Review of Books*, March 27, 1909, 180.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ “Hashimura Togo,” Paramount Scripts, Special Collections, The Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. I am grateful to Daisuke Miyao for information and perspectives regarding this scenario of “Hashimura Togo.”

³⁶ Alan Gevinson, ed., *American Film Institute Catalog: Within Our Gates: Ethnicity in American Feature Films, 1911–1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 436.

³⁷ See Paul McDonald, *The Star System: Hollywood’s Production of Popular Identities* (London: Wallflower Publishing, 2000), 38–39.

³⁸ Scene 68 in “Scenario” (dated May 19, 1917), “Hashimura Togo,” Paramount Script. The Margaret Herrick Library.

³⁹ Scene 94, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ David Belasco, *Six Plays* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1928), 32.

⁴¹ As for the idea of “death of Asia” on stage, see James S. Moy, *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 82–94. Kevin Brownlow’s caption to this still photo stresses not just Togo’s but Hayakawa’s own experience of attempted “harakiri” when he was “dismissed from the Japanese Navy.” Brownlow, *Behind the Mask of Innocence: the Social Problem Films of the Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 350.

⁴² See Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), chapter 3.

⁴³ Different interpretations of this film version of Togo can be found in Donald Kirihaara, “The Accepted Idea Displaced: Stereotype and Sessue Hayakawa,” *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema*, ed. Daniel Bernardi (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 81–99; Daisuke Miyao, “‘East is East and West is West’: A Cross-Cultural Study of Sessue Hayakawa’s Silent Stardom” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2003), 248–265. Kirihaara argues that in the film version of Hashimura Togo, the “accommodationist narrative” of Irwin’s Togo stories provided Hayakawa with not just humor but “useable narrational goals” such as “characteristics of earnestness and cleverness, and a nostalgia for the past” (Kirihaara, 89–90). Miyao observes the “Americanization” of Hayakawa’s star image by Japonism in the film “Hashimura Togo.”

⁴⁴ “A Wallace Irving [sic] Story Adapted to Screen, Sessue Hayakawa in Comedy-Drama,” *Motion Picture News*, 25 August 1917, 1275; “Katsuhai wo seisai seyo [Punish These Motion Picture Actors],” *Rafu Shinpo* 25 August 1917, 3.

⁴⁵ Undated miscellaneous personal correspondence, Wallace Irwin Papers.