

Excluded Presence: Shoguns, Minstrels, Bodyguards, and Japan's Encounters with the Black Other

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Tropes of national identity are deployed in the service of essence fabrication and jockeyings for relative position in a global hierarchy.

—Dorinne Kondo (1992)

Anthropologist Dorinne Kondo (1990) has described the Japanese Self as being “inevitably involved in a multiplicity of social relationships. Boundaries between self and other are fluid and constantly changing depending on context and on the social positioning people adopt in particular situations” (31). Kondo’s observation may be extended to include Japanese racial identity as well. Just as Japanese selves are defined in and through relationships of inside and outside, so too their racial identity has been crafted and recrafted in relation to paradigmatic oppositions of Self and Other—“civilized/uncivilized,” “pure/impure,” “inner/outer”—which are similarly protean in their adaptation to social conditions and shifting relations of power between the self and various others. In the past, Japanese defined these oppositions in relation to a Sinocentric worldview that mediated the internal and external world. By the 19th century, however, Japanese constructions of otherness acquired new meanings—and new targets—within the framework of western colonial expansionism, meanings that threatened Japanese notions of self by redefining them in terms of relationships of power between Japanese and Europeans and Europe’s colonized subjects.

This paper discusses the Japanese discourses of the black other and their deployment within the context of historical interaction between Japanese and black people, which here is used primarily to designate Africans and African Americans. Contrary to the contemporary discourse of Japanese anti-black racism, Japanese attitudes toward blacks have neither been monolithic nor consistently negative. Nor has interaction between the two groups been confined to the twentieth century. Rather these attitudes have evolved in conjunction with Japan’s relationship with powerful, influential mediating cultural entities, such as China and the West. On the other hand, black concern, disappointment and anger over widely reported incidents of Japanese anti-black prejudice and racism mark a departure from long-held ex-

pressions of affinity and solidarity with Japanese as a “colored race” and fellow victims of white racism.¹

The Black Shogun

In 1991, while working as a consultant on filmmaker Reggie Life’s documentary *Struggle and Success: The African American Experience in Japan*, I was invited to accompany him and his Japanese assistant to a private viewing of the statue of Sakanoue Tamuramaro (758 – 811) at Kiyomizudera in Kyoto, the original of which is said to have been built by Tamuramaro and his wife Takako in 778 after becoming devotees to the teachings of Avalokitesvara (Kannon Bosatsu), a Buddhist deity. Japan’s first *sei-i-tai shōgun* (barbarian-subduing generalissimo), Tamuramaro, is noted for his successful military campaigns against the Ainu. Japanese scholars generally concede that Tamuramaro was of non-Japanese descent (some argue for Korean or Chinese ancestry, others that he was himself Ainu). More controversial is the claim put forth by some black scholars that he may have been an African, though the evidence they present is far from convincing.²

One of the earliest references to Tamuramaro’s blackness appears briefly in W. E. B. Dubois’ *The Negro* (1915) in which he listed among a number of historically significant “men of Negro descent” who have “distinguished themselves abroad” “as rulers and warriors” (84).³ A more detailed description appears in *Distinguished Negroes Abroad* (1946) by Beatrice Fleming and Marion J. Pryde. In a chapter entitled “The Negro General of Japan—Sakanouye Tamuramaro,” a fictional Japanese father relates the generalissimo’s adventures to his two young sons as they stand before statues of the Japanese warrior in Kiyomizudera. After the father finishes his story, the eldest son exclaims:

¹ See Kearney pioneering studies 1991, 1992, 1994a, 1994b and 1998.

² For a discussion of Tamuramaro’s ethnicity see Papinot 1972 [1910] see under “Achi no Omi,” 3 and “Sakanoue,” 532 – 533; see also Takahashi 1986; and Reischauer and Reischauer 1967, 46. On his putative Negro roots, see Dubois 1915, 84 Fleming and Pryde 1946, 3 – 9; Rogers 1946, 20; Hyman 1989, 1 – 4; Clemons 1990, 6 – 10; Brunson 1995, 221; and Rashidi 2002.

³ While not specifically cited as such, DuBois’ source is most likely anthropologist Alexander Chamberlain’s *The Contribution of the Negro to Human Civilization* (1911) monograph for the *Journal of Race Development* which he lists as suggested reading in the *Negro* (1915) and which describes Tamuramaro as “a famous general and a Negro.” Dubois was no doubt familiar with the paper since four years after its publication it was reprinted in *Select Papers on Race Problems*, a collection of papers presented in 1915 at the Twentieth Annual Conference for the Study of Problems, sponsored by Atlanta University, a series of interdisciplinary conferences on race and the black condition established by DuBois in 1896.

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“And to think [...] Tamuramaro was a Negro!”

“What of that?” countered the father, quickly.

“I was thinking that in America and some parts of Europe such an annal would not be possible. Yet these countries consider themselves more advanced than ours.”

“Haruo,” advised the father, “You have been educated in Europe and America. Take the best of what you have learned, but always remember to regard a man as a man, irrespective of race or color. Japan did not enslave her captives nor the aliens on her shores in the time of Tamuramaro. True these were relegated to the lowly estate of serfdom but opportunities to rise and succeed were ever present. Sakanouye Tamuramaro was a Negro and true to his kind he proved himself a worthy soldier. He fought with and for us. And for is, too, he won the mighty victory. To us, therefore, he is not an alien; we think of him not as a foreigner. He is our revered warrior of Japan!” (8–9)

Assertions of Tamuramaro’s Negro origins also appear in Carter G. Woodson and Charles Harris Wesley’s *The Negro in Our History* (1946) and J. A. Rogers’ *World’s Greatest Men of Color* (1946). The legend would later be elaborated upon by Cheih Anta Diop (1974), Mark Hyman (1989), and Runoko Rashidi (2002). During fieldwork in Japan in the late-1980s and early 1990s, some black informants expressed familiarity with the legend of Tamuramaro based on references to it in *Distinguished Negroes Abroad* and the description of the statue of him at Kiyomizudera in Hyman’s book: “As seen in the temple where he has [*sic*] honored, Maro’s [*sic*] statue was taller than his fellow contributors. His hair was curly and tight, his eyes were large and wide-set and brown. His nostrils were flared, his forehead wider, his jaws thick and slightly protruded” (4).

In fact, the statue of Tamuramaro at Kiyomizudera is normally closed to the public, and Life and I were excited by the prospect that the rumors of Tamuramaro’s “African roots” might be confirmed, though we remained somewhat skeptical as to what we would actually find there. Arriving at the temple, we met with abbot Fukuoka Shôdô who, although intrigued by our inquiries into Tamuramaro’s alleged black ancestry, remained noncommittal. We were then escorted to the Kaisandô where the statues of Tamuramaro and his wife are housed. Since the statues are sealed behind two imposing wooden doors, our suspense was heightened when the key used to unlock them failed to work. One of the Buddhist monks who accompanied us went off to retrieve another key and, returning with it, finally unlocked them. The doors parted and the statue was revealed. Alas, the statue of Tamuramaro displays none of the “Negroid” features described by Hyman [Fig. 1]. Since its construction in 778, Kiyomizudera has been plagued by numerous fires and rebuilt several times. According to Abbot Fukuoka, the current statues of Tamuramaro and his wife are reproductions commissioned after one such fire in 1633. It is possible, then, that an earlier statue or statues may have depicted him differently and that Hyman’s reference is to an earlier version.

I relate this encounter with the “Black Shogun” for several reasons. First, and most

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Fig. 1. Sakanoue Tamuramaro (photo: John G. Russell).

obviously, it suggests a pre-European contact between Japanese and Africans. Second, as presented in *Distinguished Negroes Abroad*, the legend adheres to a popular belief among blacks, and one finding frequent expression during the Second World War and postwar period, that historically Japanese have been less racist toward them than whites. Third, setting aside the reality of such claims, it also voices the suspicion, not without foundation, that many blacks have regarding how the contributions of Africa and Africans to world history have been recorded by white scholars and those influenced by western scholarship, and the belief that that history has been deliberately concealed to advance white supremacy. For examples they need only point to the resistance of white scholars to the notion that the Great Wall of Zimbabwe⁴ was built by black Africans and to theories of the pyramids and ancient Egyptian civilization that are more comfortable positing an extraterrestrial origin than an earthly black one (compare the sales figures and media attention devoted to Graham Hancock's *The Fingerprints of God* to Martin Bernal's controversial *Black Athena*).⁵ Fourth,

⁴ In 1871 explorer Karl Mauch (1837 – 75) came across massive stone ruins in Zimbabwe. believed to have been erected between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. For decades Western scholars refused to accept that these structures could have been built by black Africans, maintaining that they had been built by Phoenicians, Arabs, and Europeans.

⁵ In Japan, translations of Graham's books climbed the bestseller list and became the subject of numerous television specials, where they fed the UFO boom of the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast, de-

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an important element of the story as related by African Americans I spoke with in Japan is that of deliberate concealment: material artifacts that would prove Tamuramaro's African origins are not open to public inspection. Again, one finds parallels in the Black Madonnas of Europe, which also have been withdrawn from public view and in some cases even whitened.⁶ Finally, it suggests Japanese complicity in obscuring the early history of Japanese-African contact. In the excerpt from *Distinguished Negroes Abroad* cited above, it is worth noting that the Japanese family visiting Kiyomizudera takes pride in Tamuramaro's accomplishments, and, while recognizing him as a "Negro," accepts him "not as a foreigner" but "as our revered warrior of Japan." Such sentiments, my informants suggested, no longer existed in contemporary Japan where, they maintained, the statue is concealed because Japanese are now "ashamed" that their national hero is a black man whose recognition as such challenges both the myth of black inferiority and the myth of Japanese racial homogeneity.

Copies of Hyman's book and other materials referring to Tamuramaro's African ancestry are circulated and discussed by members of the black community in Japan.⁷ On the other hand, like monk Fukuoka, most Japanese with whom I have discussed the legend were unfamiliar with it. Indeed, many were skeptical, although there were those who did not rule out the possibility, some pointing to the existence of black Buddhas throughout Asia and Japan. Clemons (1990) captures the dilemma of many blacks who are confronted with the story and more generally of black scholars confronted with inconclusive data that challenge historical orthodoxy, given its anti-black bias:

Despite the history of African leaders in Asia such as Malik Ambar, it appears that Diop's proposition that Tamuramaro was Black is based on unsubstantiated data. I find myself speculating whether the information available to the authors of Diop's primary source, *Distinguished Negroes Abroad*, was interpreted by its authors in such a manner, that the race of Tamuramaro was unclear. Moreover, I ponder my reasoning for questioning Diop's proposal. In questioning the proposition that Tamuramaro was Black, am I demonstrating the effects of years of academic socialization which has resulted from being taught in academic institutions dominated by non-Black

spite Japan's so-called black boom of the 1980s, a translation of the first volume of Bernal's book did not appear until 2005, although articles critical of it drawing largely on dismissive reviews in American magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time*, had appeared well before then. During this period, reenactments of the building of the pyramids on popular Japanese television shows typically cast Egyptians as white with nary a black (or brown) face in sight, although, the more frivolous programs sometimes showed them assisted by those ubiquitous oval-headed, almond-eyed foetal "greys" of alien abductee lore.

⁶ See Begg 1996.

⁷ Today, of course, with the rise of the internet, the discourse of the Black Shogun has expanded to include communities in cyberspace, generating discussion, albeit limited, in Japanese blogs.

thought (15).

Clemons points out the flaws in such racial reconstructions, noting the fact that others have claimed Tamuramaro as their own, including the Ainu themselves. For some blacks, the legend of Tamuramaro is strategically deployed to counter stereotypes that associate blacks with servitude and submission, after all, he is “warrior,” the first shōgun of Japan, no less: He does not fit the usual stereotypes of Africans as slave and victim. As such, his presence forces blacks to reconsider conventional constructions of history and the place of people of African descent in it, meditations which cannot be pursued without serious consideration of the social significance of race and place in modern society. Yet the mental decolonization of the self may also entail a (re)colonization of the Other as racial and civilizational hierarchies are re-calibrated to enhance the cultural status of one’s own group at the expense of another:

They [the Ainu] had become planters of crops, after many years as primitive hunters. Although they lived together in villages, and practiced certain customs which are usually characteristic of civilized peoples, they still maintained many of their fierce, fighting qualities, and constituted a dangerous foe. Even their religious services were barbaric (Fleming and Pryde, 4).

First Impressions

Whether apocryphal or not, the African roots of Sakanoue Tamuramaro raise the possibility that Africans arrived on Japanese shores prior to the arrival of Europeans and suggests that their presence in Asia was not confined to the role of manservant and slave. Chinese scholars have traced African contacts with Chinese to as far back as the Han dynasty (206 B.C. – A.D. 220) (Harris, 1987, 92). The exact date of Chinese contact with Africa is unknown, although official contacts are thought to have begun during the Ming dynasty (1368 – 1644) with the maritime expeditions of the eunuch Cheng Ho (1371 – 1433).

Scholars on both sides of the Pacific have tended to view Japan’s encounter with the West as almost exclusively one between Japanese and Europeans, ignoring the fact that nonwestern people were also present. In addition to Malays, East Indians, Indonesians and Southeast Asians, there was also an African presence, consisting of blacks who accompanied the Europeans to Japanese shores as sailors, servants, interpreters, artisans, and slaves. Images of these dark-skinned foreigners, some depicting Africans, can be found in 17th-century *namban* prints. While Japanese artists were not above demonizing foreigners, depicting blacks and whites as *oni* (demons), many of these prints are devoid of overt caricaturization, capturing in colorful detail the procession of Western power and the place of blacks within it [Fig.

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Fig. 2. Momoyama Period *namban* (from *Tokubetsuten Nanban Kenbun Ryoku*, [Special Exhibition, A Record of Encounter with the Namban Culture], Kobe City Museum).

2].⁸ In the mid-19th century artist Hashimoto Sadahide would depict the African servants of the Dutch and French in Yokohama with sympathy, dignity and grace [Fig. 3]. A keen observer, Sadahide's written impressions of the Africans he encounters stress the similarities in customs between them and the Japanese. He describes African women as "rather charm-

⁸ See Rubin 1967. I would add that the tendency among some commentators see only "black devils" in these prints may betray the biases of modern-day viewers who project upon them—and seek historical confirmation of—their own society's view of blacks, a tendency Snowden (1983) has detected in modern interpretations of black representation in Western classical art: "[T]here is no reason to conclude that classical artists who depicted blacks in comic or satirical scenes were motivated by color prejudice, Whites of many races—even gods and heroes—appeared in comic

ing” and as “bear[ing] themselves with a sort of female dignity,” declaring in the end that the African servants are “no different in human nature, being kindly and compassionate” (quoted in Meech-Pekarik 1987, 44). However, by the late-19th century and early-20th century such sympathetic portraits would give way to broad caricature [Fig. 4].

The written archive has not totally ignored the African presence. Sporadic references to Africans do appear, though for the most part they are limited to their roles as servants and slaves, as objects of Japanese fascination and derision who, we are lead to believe, the Japanese viewed as an inferior, barbarous people. This is, after all, what the contemporary discourse on Japan has conditioned us to expect from a group of people who are today saddled with the stereotype of being xenophobic, hierarchical-minded, and racist. Sadly, we know relatively little about how premodern Japanese viewed Africans or how the Africans in turn regarded their Japanese hosts. What contemporary records we do have come from Japanese who had some contact with Europeans and whose views of the Africans may have been tainted by Western prejudices.



Fig. 3. Yokohama Slaves (from Julia Meech-Pekarik, *The World of the Meiji Print*).

and satirical scenes. Why should blacks have been excluded? If Negroes had been depicted only as comic or grotesque, or if satirical scenes had been the rule and not the exception, there might be some justification for a pejorative interpretation of the Negro in classical art. In the absence of ancient evidence to support such view, however, these suggestions must be regarded as the opinions of modern critics, not of the artists themselves” (80).

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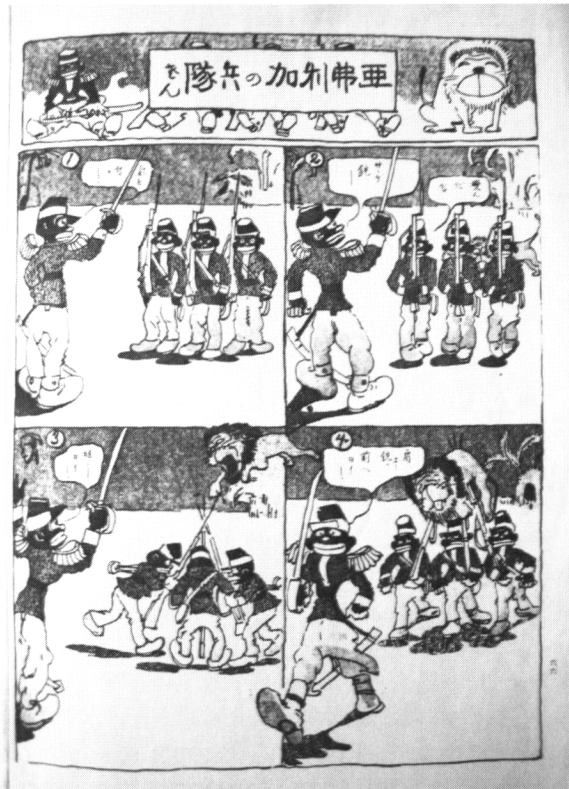


Fig. 4. “Afurika no heitai-san” [African soldiers] (*Jôtô Ponchi* [Punch Japan] October 15, 1906).

Historians trace Japan’s first contact with blacks to the arrival of Portuguese and Dutch traders in the 16th and 17th centuries. However, some scholars speculate there may have been an African presence in premodern Japan as a result of Chinese trade with Africa during the Tang (618 – 907) and Song (960 – 1279) dynasties.⁹ According to one Sinologist: “In 976 a great sensation was produced at the court of the Tang Emperor by the arrival of an Arab envoy with a ‘negro slave’ in his suite; and after that date Chinese books repeatedly refer to ‘negro slaves’ and, as has already been noticed, to the Arab Slave Trade which produced

⁹ Citing Chinese sources, Duyendak (1949, 23) posits an African presence going back as far as the Ch’in Dynasty (221 BC– 420AD). See also Filesi 1962, Irwin 1977; Harris 1971; Diop 1974; and Rashidi 1995.

them” (Coupland, quoted in Filesi 1962, 21). Duyendak (1949), citing a contemporary Chinese source, asserts that “thousands of them are sold as foreign slaves” (23).

It is not inconceivable that Africans had arrived on Japanese shores via China as early as the tenth century.¹⁰ Wagatsuma (1967) cites an intriguing reference to a black, presumably African, from a document produced in the late 1670s which suggests an African presence in Japan by way of Korea.

In the country of Inaba [Tottori prefecture] there was a man of seven feet height. He was from the country of ‘*kuro*.’ He had been captured in the Korean war [1592 – 1598] and brought over to Japan. His color was that of soot and people called him *kurombô* (43).

Beginning in the 16th century, one obtains documented evidence of Japanese contact with Africans. In 1546 Portuguese captain Jorge Alvarez brought Africans to Japan. According to Alvarez, Japanese initial reaction to them was primarily one of curiosity: “They like seeing black people,” he wrote in 1547, “especially Africans, and they will come 15 leagues just to see them and entertain them for three or four days” (Cooper, 66). The most well-documented case is that Yasuke, a Mozambican brought to Japan by the Italian Jesuit Alessandro Valignano (1537 – 1606) who was presented to *daimyô* Oda Nobunaga in 1581. The first Japanese reference to Yasuke appears in Ôta Gyûchi’s (1527 – 1613) *Shinchô Kôki* (Chronicle of the Life of Oda Nobunaga, 1600), wherein he is described as a robust young man of around sixteen or seventeen years of age, black as a bull, and of fine character (Fujita 1987a). An account of Japanese reaction to Yasuke written in 1584 by the Portuguese Jesuit Luis Frois (1532 – 1597), who accompanied Valignano to Kyoto, describes an incident in which the townspeople, clamoring for a glimpse of the African, broke down the doors of a Jesuit residence, the ensuing melee resulting in the death and injury of several of the participants. Upon seeing the African Nobunaga had him stripped and bathed to determine for himself if his skin color was natural (Cooper, 71). Perhaps more extraordinary is that Yasuke’s story does not end here. Retained as an attendant by Nobunaga, he later accompanied him into battle against the rival lord Akechi Mitsuhide (1528? – 1582) who upon defeating Nobunaga at Horyuji, spared the African and subsequently released him.¹¹

Tohoku University professor Fujita Midori places the number of Africans temporarily residing in Japan during the 16th century at several hundred. Some came to Japan as slaves,

¹⁰ Snow (1988) notes that Chinese scholars maintain that China had already established trade relations with the African kingdoms of Kush and Axum, during the Han dynasty, though “African scholars tend to take a rather more skeptical view” (2).

¹¹ Endô Shûsaku’s novel *Kurombô* (Nigger, 1973) offers a comical retelling of Yasuke’s narrative in which the titular character (renamed Tsumpa) is reduced to a cowardly, infantile buffoon.

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servants, valets, sailors, soldiers, and interpreters. Their roles were not limited to serving Europeans. Like Yasuke, a number of Africans were employed by *daimyō* in various capacities, as soldiers, gunners, drummers, and entertainers.¹² Whatever their position it appears they attracted the curious. During the Edo Period (1603 – 1867) a small number of black Africans lived in the Dutch settlement in Deshima. Despite the policy of national isolation, records reveal that black Africans mingled freely among the Japanese visitors and were allowed occasionally to leave the island, as were their European masters. Mansell Upham, a South African historian and former diplomat at the South African Embassy in Tokyo researching the genealogy of “white” European families in South Africa, has discovered a property inventory documenting the sale of one “Anthony Moor from Japan,” registered as the son of a Japanese mother and a “Moor” father, to a European settler in Capetown in 1701.¹³ Although the term “moor” is racially ambiguous and Upham has not found documentation confirming that Anthony Moor was in fact a black African, the finding does raise the question of the extent to which Africans mingled with the Japanese in premodern times, including miscegenation between Japanese and black Africans. Clemons suggests that privileged African and East Indian slaves in Japan kept Japanese slaves and mistresses, as did their European masters prior to the ban on Japanese slavery by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536 – 1598) in the late 16th century (33 – 34). Indeed, as late as 1598 the Portuguese missionary Luis Cerqueria reported: “Even the very lascars and scullions of the Portuguese purchase and carry [Japanese] slaves away. Hence it happens that many of them die on the voyage, because they are heaped up upon each other, and if their masters fall sick (these masters are sometimes Kaffirs and negroes of the Portuguese), the slaves are not cared for. These scullions give a scandalous example by living in debauchery with the girls they have bought, and whom some of them introduce into their cabins on the passage to Macao” (Murdoch, 243).

Significantly, the ban on the traffic in Japanese slaves applied to all foreigners, white and black alike. Equally significant is the fact that the Africans were allowed to have Japanese slaves at all, since, if Japanese considered blacks inferior, it is unlikely they would have permitted them to own Japanese slaves. By the seventeenth century, however, restrictions were introduced that specifically prohibited Africans from consorting with courtesans, though there is some doubt as to the degree it was enforced (Fujita 1987b).

Contemporary records reveal that in some instances the Africans were involved in criminal activities, mostly involving smuggling and the theft of animals and food, perhaps due to their mistreatment by the Dutch and that they were sometimes abetted by sympathetic Japanese who were charged as accomplices. Indeed, some Japanese were shocked by how cheaply the Dutch valued the lives of their black slaves. Physician Hirokawa Kai provides a

¹² See Leupp 1995, 2; and Fujita 1987a, 30 – 33.

¹³ *Japan Times*, 16 December 1993, 3, and personal conversation 1993.

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description of the Africans and their mistreatment by the Dutch in Nagasaki:

The *kurobō* (blacks) are brought by the Dutch and are treated as their slaves from a land called Kaburi, (Africa) a large land which lies to the southwest of India. There is no king, rather each area has its own chief. The climate is very hot so their skin is black, and thus we call them *kurobō* or *kurosu*. If they stay a few years in our country their skin lightens and becomes no different from the complexion of dark-skinned Japanese. In Kaburi it never snows. When the *kurobō* in Japan see snow for the first time, they are quite surprised. The *kurobō* possess a fine character. They perform backbreaking and dangerous tasks for their masters without complaint. They work hard, climbing the masts of ships without the least display of fear. The *kōmōjin* ["red-hairs"; i.e., the Dutch] have brought many of them here. I cannot fathom the ways of the red-hairs, who work and lash [their slaves] as if they were beasts and who kill the young and the strong who resist and throw their bodies into the sea (quoted in Fujita 1987b, 253).

Elsewhere he notes that sick blacks seldom received medical treatment and that when their condition deteriorated their Dutch masters poisoned them. Another writer reports that if the ailing blacks did not respond to treatment, they were poisoned or kicked to death (252). Another witness writes that the Dutch "valued the lives of their blacks less than their dogs" (*kurodo no inochi wa kono ku yori karozu*) (252). However, Dutch contempt was not reserved for their African slaves; according to a contemporary account by the Swedish botanist Carl Pieter Thunberg, the Dutch in Deshima also treated the Japanese with scorn and condescension: "[T]he pride which some of the weaker minded officers in the Dutch service very imprudently exhibit to the Japanese, by ill-timed contradiction, contemptuous behavior, scornful looks and laughter, which occasions the Japanese in their turn to hate and despise them; a hatred which is greatly increased upon observing in how unfriendly and unmannerly a style they usually behave to each other, and the brutal treatment which sailors under their command frequently experience from them, together with the oaths, curses and blows with which the poor fellows are assailed by them. If the Dutch sailors were frequently assailed with oaths, curses and blows by their officers, it can easily be imagined what sort of treatment was meted out to erring slaves by their owners" (quoted in Boxer 1965, 267 – 268). Dutch arrogance and abuse may explain why Japanese were willing to befriend beleaguered African slaves.

With the importation of *Rangaku* (Dutch Learning) came not only knowledge of western geography and science but also western prejudices against Africans and other subjected races. Geographic references to Africa based on conversations with the Dutch were on the whole unfavorable, depicting its inhabitants as salacious, savage, stupid, inferior, and cannibalistic. It is important to recall that few of those writing on Africa had ever visited there. Their accounts were filtered through information, much of it second hand, provided by Eu-

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ropeans merchants and missionaries and reflected European sensibilities and biases. Even when Japanese set foot in Japan, their perceptions of the land and its peoples were colored by the teachings of their European mentors. For example, the first Japanese to visit the African continent in 1586, a delegation of four teenage Japanese Christian boys returning to Japan via Africa following an audience with the Pope in Rome, disparaged the Africans as an “incompetent” (*munō*), “uncivilized” (*soya*), and “barbarous people” (*kyōyō mo naku yaban na minzoku*), though the criterion for judging them was based on whether or not they accepted Christianity (Fujita 1987a, 37). Although intrigued by the black-skinned outsiders in their midst, and sometimes ridiculed their appearance and found their language and costumes humorous, on the whole Japanese did not hold any strong animus toward them (Fujita 1987b, 279).

The process of seeing blacks through Western eyes is repeated in the 19th century when Japan is exposed to white American antiblack stereotypes. In 1854, less than a decade after its emergence as a national entertainment, Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry, returning to Edo Bay to conclude a commercial treaty with Japan, treated Japanese negotiators to a blackface minstrel show—“a serenade of pseudo-darkies” as one witness to the performance put it (McCauley 1942, 77) —performed aboard the flagship *Powhatan* [Fig. 5]. In a log entry dated 27 March 1854, Perry writes:

Previous to the dinner hour the commissioners with their attendants visited the *Macedonian* and



Fig. 5. Perry’s minstrels perform aboard the *Powhatan* (Shiryo Hensanjo, University of Tokyo).

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saw the crew of that ship at general exercise and also witnessed the movements of the engines of *Powhatan*, put in motion purposely for their examination. They were saluted by *Macedonian*, *Mississippi*, and *Saratoga*, and after retiring from the table were entertained on deck with the performances of the very excellent corps of Ethiopians belonging to *Powhatan*. Even the gravity of Hayashi [the chief commissioner] could not withstand the hilarity which this most amusing exhibition excited. He and his coadjutors laughed as merrily as ever the spectators at Christy's¹⁴ have done. At sunset they all left the ship with quite as much wine as they could well bear. Matsuzaki [another commissioner] threw his arms about my neck and repeated in Japanese as interpreted into English: "Nippon and America, all the same heart," and in his drunken embrace crushed my new epaulettes (Perry 1968, 189).

Perry's "Ethiopian minstrels," as they were called, performed in several locations throughout Japan, including the ports of Hakodake, Shimoda as well as in Macao and Hong Kong. In 1853, a year before Perry's return to Japan, his minstrels, whose repertoire included "Mr. Buck's recitation (in Nigger character)" and "Walk your chalks Ginger Blue' in first-rate style" had performed in Macao (Wiley 1990, 368). According to William Heine, acting master's mate and the principal artist of the expedition, Japanese were quite delighted by the comical, cavorting "blacks." In Hakodate, the minstrels performed "songs and dances of plantation blacks of the South." They were also a hit at another reception held for the commissioners of Matsumai and other ranking Japanese officials. "They applauded in every possible way and shouted again and again: 'Kussi! Kussi!' That word signifies the greatest degree of pleasure, mental and physical" (Heine 1990, 154 – 155).

And again, in the Ryūkyūs:

Two days before we left Loo Choo [Okinawa] the commodore gave still another farewell banquet for Loo Choo's regent. Our "Ethiopian minstrels" put on an evening of theatrical entertainment afterward. The guests all seemed pleased—they laughed a lot—but why? Perhaps even they did not know why (169).

Real blacks did serve aboard the *Powhatan*, but little is known about them, historians being more concerned with Perry's Euroamerican officers and crew. We also know that during Perry's reception in the village of Kurihama on July 14, 1853 two ornate foot-long rosewood boxes containing Perry's credentials and letter to the Japanese "Emperor" from President Millard Fillmore were borne by two (apparently white) cabin boys who in turn were "guarded by a couple of tall, jet-black Negroes, completely armed" (Perry 1968, 98), who opened the boxes,

¹⁴ Christy's Minstrels; a popular blackface minstrel troupe founded by E. P. Christy in the 1830s.

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removed their contents and displayed their seals before the Japanese (Wiley, 318 – 19). These black stewards also served as Perry's personal bodyguard. Six armed blacks escorted him when he landed in Edo Bay in 1854. Blacks also held responsible positions as captain of the gun. How Japanese reacted to them and how they in turn regarded the Japanese is unknown. It may be argued that their role was simply ornamental, yet the commodore's decision to use blacks in these roles is significant given the emphasis he places on their physicality and his use of their bodies as a two-fold projection of American power: The blacks are imposing, yet not so powerful that they have escaped domestication, since they serve—and protect—a white master. Indeed, during the Kurihama reception, Perry seemed intent on out-pomping the Japanese. Heine notes that unlike the Dutch and the Russian emissaries before them, the Americans did not “kneel and crawl, backward and forward, time after time” to their Japanese hosts. Perry would have none of that; the Americans would enter the reception pavilion standing erect, for “the commodore has made up his mind; no disgraceful humiliation would be inflicted on *him*” (73; original emphasis). The Japanese could but only comply.

True, the Japanese had objected to our survey of [Uraga] bay and to our anchoring wherever it suited us. They had tried to justify their gestures of resistance: “You have contradicted the wishes of *our* government, and we must do as *we* are told.” But we retorted: “We are honoring the wishes of our government, and we must do as we are told. Besides, we are accustomed to behave this way all over the world. So we shall behave this way here, too!” We also declared, however, and at the same time, that the United States felt nothing but friendship for Japan. At any rate, the Japanese could do nothing but comply, though our actions be new to them. For, in the end, small boats and twelve-pound cannon would have been a squeak against the roar of our mighty steamships and heavy artillery (173; original emphases).

The impact of Western attitudes toward blacks on Japanese attitudes is also suggested in the journals of delegates of the 1860 Embassy to the United States and Loanda (the Congo) and the 1871 Iwakura Mission to the United States. Stopping in Loanda on a return trip to Japan from America, a delegate to the 1860 mission wrote: “The faces of these natives are black as if painted with ink and resemble those of monkeys.... According to the Americans, they are the incarnation of apes” (*Dojin wo miru ni kau-iro sumi wo nuru gotoku saru gotoshi.... Beijin no kata nite dojin wa saru no kesshin nari to zo* (Wagatsuma and Yoneyama 1980, 64).¹⁵ Miyoshi has characterized the attitude of the delegation toward the Africans they encountered in the Congo as monotonously contemptuous: “All remarks about the Africans are more or less the same, sneering at their bare bodies and black skins, occa-

¹⁵ Oddly, Wagatsuma's English translation in *Daedalus* omits reference to “the Americans” (*Beijin*); cf. Wagatsuma 1967, 415.

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sionally adding further details concerning their body odor and movement, their tattoos and ornaments. Some describe the chain gangs of slaves, but none expresses any sympathy for the captives; nor do they deplore the inhuman treatment of the Portuguese” (Miyoshi 1979, 60 – 61). This is a significant departure from the Japanese condemnations of Dutch slavery in the 17th century.

Beasley (1995) points out that many of the negative statements about Africans during this period relied less on first-hand observation than on hearsay, reflecting not only the attitudes of their hosts, but the degrading social conditions in which the nonwhites they encountered lived under western domination and the fact that as diplomats the Japanese were spared similar treatment.

So was the picture which the travelers took home with them of non-western peoples and societies. Starting with Yanagawa Masakiyo’s comments on the blacks in 1860 and Ichikawa Wataru’s distaste for Egyptian flies and dirt in 1862, the records contain a string of references to “ugly” Africans and “lazy” Asians, contrasting with vastly superior Americans and Europeans. All this might be described as an account of the world seen from the first-class cabins on the Far East run, or from the salons of western capitals. If Indians and Arabs were poor and oppressed, the Japanese were told they lacked the qualities to be otherwise. The Pacific crossing for its part induced a ready contempt for Chinese emigrants, taking passage in the steerage class. That impression was in no way changed by a sight of conditions in Hong Kong and Shanghai. The Chinese, in fact, were commonly seen, not as the representatives of a civilization from which Japan had taken a superior culture in the past, but as decadents, justly made victims of the West’s imperialism in the present.... Against such a background, many Japanese began to see themselves, in the phrase that was sometimes used to describe them in the twentieth century, as “honorary whites.” This was one of the less attractive aspects of their voyaging (215 – 216).

Significantly, such attitudes do not seem prevalent among members of the Iwakura Mission. In *Tokumei zenken taishi Bei-ô kairan jikki* (Journal of the Envoy Extraordinary Ambassador Plenipotentiary’s Travels through America and Europe, 1878), Kume Kunitake (1839 – 1931), the private secretary of chief ambassador Iwakura Tomomi (1825 – 1883), describes the African slave trade in somewhat more critical terms, noting the harsh treatment of African slaves and commenting favorably on efforts by whites to establish schools for former slaves whom, he notes, received instruction not only in the three R’s but also in Greek, Latin, and the sciences (213). After visiting one of these Negro schools in the South, Kume remarks that blacks had made considerable progress, noting their election to congress and that some had amassed sizable fortunes (216). He goes on to write, “A considerable number of blacks possessed brilliant intellects against which uneducated whites stood no measure” (*kokujin ni mo eisai haishutsu shi, hakujin no fugaku naru mono wa, yaku wo taru ni itaran*),

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and concludes “skin color has no relation to intelligence” (*haifu no iro wa, chishiki ni kankei nai koto*) (216). Such enlightened sentiments may have been offered as a testament to the civilizing powers of Western learning; they may have also reflected the tutelage of progressive whites. Whatever their motivation, they offered the assurance that if Africans in America had the potential to obtain equality with whites by mastering western learning so, too, did the Japanese.

The attitude of Japanese adventurers in Africa toward blacks during the Meiji Period is equally ambivalent. Although they were not averse to accepting the dehumanizing portraits of Africans painted by whites, their travel logs also offer accounts of oppressive, racially stratified colonies where their own subordination to whites was a source of consternation and resentment.

I think the blacks who are oppressed in this so-called civilized country are miserable. I would like to challenge these realities for the sake of humanity. I would like to ask the English who like to act as if this were normal, is there any difference in the intrinsic worth of blacks and whites as human beings? If I could receive a clear answer to my question, I would revise my opinion of them without hesitation. But if they could not answer, I am afraid my respect for the Englishmen of South Africa would disappear.

At any rate, even if it were impossible for blacks to have the same social status as whites, where is the cruel necessity for separate train cars? Is it not the weak whom we should pity? I would like to point this out to the wise Englishmen and I shall never cease to hope that they will strive to care for the blacks and to add to their welfare (quoted in Aoki 1993, 75 – 76).

The majority of Japanese were in no position to witness the situation of blacks for themselves. Their isolation insured that they would remain dependent on information about blacks from external sources, this time from the Americans, which was no less distorted than that of the Europeans with whom they shared a system of institutionalized slavery and an unmitigated contempt for blacks based on an ideology of white supremacy, an ideology backed by a technological and military might that seemed to justify it. As DeBarry (1958) puts it, “In the mind of many in the rising generation [of Meiji intellectuals] the word of a Western philosopher or sociologist would carry more weight than all the classics of the East” (131). This was particularly true when it came to defining culture and civilization. The privileging of Western discourse is evident in the writings of Fukuzawa Yukichi (1834 – 1901), a europhile whose discussion of the hierarchy of cultures in *Bunmei-ron no gairyaku* (An Outline of a Theory of Civilization, 1875) replicates contemporary Western racial hierarchies, privileging the West as the apotheosis of “civilization” (*bunmei*), viewing Asia as “semi-civilized” (*hankai*) and Africa as “barbaric” (*yaban*) (Fukuzawa, 24). Although Fukuzawa’s europhilia was qualified with the caveat that Japan acquire only the most useful elements of European

culture, his schema leaves no doubt about the place of Africans and other non-Europeans on the ladder of cultural development.¹⁶

A New World Order

Japan's encounters with the West in the 19th century were defined in the context of power relations in which Japan occupied the subordinate position. One means of acquiring power is to appropriate and symbolically ingest those objects (material as well as ideological) thought to contain it, though their consumption may produce disturbing side-effects. In Japan, as in most of the colonized world, Western ideophagy produced a mixture of contempt for and admiration of Westerners as well as feelings of self-hatred. By the Meiji Period, Japanese had come to admire the very "hairy barbarians" whose ways they had once ridiculed and scorned, appropriating and adapting those ways toward their own ideological ends. At the same time, their adoption produced self-doubts and insecurities, inviting a self-reflexive awareness through which Japanese began to adjust their own worldview to accommodate the growth of Western cultural authority.

The influence of Western "scientific" and popular racist discourse on Japanese racial attitudes has not received the attention it merits. "The introduction of Darwinist thought in the early Meiji period (1868 – 1912) would see common-sense Japanese notions of Self and Other increasingly influenced by the Western paradigms of "race" (Siddle 1996, 10). The American zoologist Edward Sylvester Morse (1837 – 1925), a professor at Tokyo University, introduced Darwin to Japanese audiences in the 1870s. Several translations of Darwin's *Descent of Man* were published during the Meiji period (trans. 1879). Even more widely translated were the works of Herbert Spencer, of which around 30 translations appeared between 1877 – 1900.¹⁷ Other works translated during this period include Thomas Huxley's *Lectures of the Origin of Species* (trans. 1879) and Thomas Buckle's (1821 – 1862) widely read *History of Civilization in England*. According to Siddle, school textbooks also helped spread stereotyped racial images and related ideas such as environmental determinism, in which the characteristics of "races" and nations were attributed to geographic and climatic factors (12).

Western scientific notions of "race" were not imposed on Japan from the outside but em-

¹⁶ A similar ranking of races can be seen in a article by an anonymous Japanese journalist in the *Kanayomi Shimbun* (1876): "the highest race is that of the whites (European and Americans). In the middle is the yellow race (Chinese, Japanese Koreans, Ryukyans and other Asians), and lowest are the black and red races (aboriginal peoples of Africa, Australia, and South America" (Leupp 1995, 9).

¹⁷ Shimao 1981. The first abridged Japanese version of Darwin's *Descent of Man* (*Jinsoron*) was published in 1881. The first complete version, *Seibutsu shigen ichimei shugen-ron*, appeared in 1896. From 1881 to 1929 at least 15 versions, translated under various titles, were published.

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ployed by Japanese intellectuals to support various, often conflicting domestic agendas, ranging from nationalism and socialism to anti-Christian and anti-Buddhist ideologies (Shimao 1981: 94 – 95). Some reformers used Darwinism to attack Christianity and Buddhism as part of a movement to replace them with state Shintoism. For others it provided a means to account for—and reproduce—the conditions which gave rise to Western power and influence. Nationalists had only to survey the condition of their Asian neighbors to see what fate befell those who were unable to compete in the struggle for the survival of the fittest. At the same time, Social Darwinism offered a scientific basis for Japanese notions of hierarchy and proper place as well as spurring a growing preoccupation with the question of where Japan ranked in the social evolutionary scheme of things. Within Japan, the “science of race” was employed to justify policies directed at the subjugation of its own internal minorities. The Ainu were not only racialized, but became a “dying race,” whose culture had to be “preserved”—deposited in research laboratories, warehoused in museums, placed on exhibition—before they completely vanished. With the support of Heinrich von Siebold and other Westerners, Japanese scholars launched their own “scientific” forays, inaugurating *Ainugaku* (Ainu Studies) which embraced them with the same kind of “imperialist nostalgia,” to borrow Rosaldo Renato’s term, that Westerners had displayed toward other “primitive” peoples whose time had passed.¹⁸ As an “inferior race,” the Ainu were forced to assimilate through the enactment of paternalistic laws ostensibly aimed at their “protection.”

If for the Japanese the Ainu represented the “lowest rung” on the evolutionary ladder within Japan, the precepts of social Darwinism left little doubt as to the positioning of Africans and their descents. Racist caricatures of Africans as primitive exotic were not confined to scientific discourse; they were also to be found in Western popular culture imported to Japan. While Japanese intellectuals were extolling the virtues of Hegel and Spencer (whose reasoned contempt for Africans was if anything far from implicit), the masses thrilled to such scientific romances as Jules Verne’s *Five Weeks in a Balloon* (Japanese trans. 1880), Henry Morgan Stanley’s *Through the Dark Continent* and *In Darkest Africa* (Japanese trans. 1890 and 1899, respectively) and other works that cultivated the image of Africa as a mysterious, savage “dark continent” (*ankoku tairiku*), imagery that would eventually serve as a template for Japanese adventure story writers, illustrators, and armchair explorers.

¹⁸ “The Ainu have repeatedly told me that they fear that the customs and way of life of the Ainu have passed down from the remote past will be lost due to the *wajin* (Japanese). In fact, the Ainu may face the same fate as the American Indian. Already the Imperial government of Japan has banned the custom of tattooing and ear-piercing as inconsistent with the principle of civilization. ... In the end, as time passes the days of freedom and happiness will certainly disappear.” (Siebold 1996 [1881] 20). See also Oguma 1995, 72 – 86 for a discussion of the impact of Darwinism on anthropological studies of the Ainu.

Particularly influential were the Tarzan films, beginning with the Elmo Lincoln silent *Tarzan of the Apes* (1918) which was released in Japan in 1919. Their impact is evident in Shimada Keizô's *Bôken Dankichi* (The Adventurous Dankichi, 1933 – 1939), a children's book that depicts the adventures of a Japanese child shipwrecked on an island in the South Pacific inhabited by black-skinned primitives who crown him their king. The black “*bankô*” (primitives) Dankichi encounters are drawn in the Sambo mode, comical entities with round, bulging eyes and bulbous white lips, a depiction not noticeably different from those of Africans in American animated cartoons and European storybooks of the same period [Fig. 6]. There can be little doubt, however, Western images of Africa inspired its imagery, for in addition to caricatured black-skinned primitives this *South Pacific* island is also populated by fierce lions. Another work, *Bôken Ken-chan* (The Adventurous Ken), a comic strip advertisement touting the hygienic benefits of Lion Brand toothbrushes serialized in *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* in 1934, clearly shows the influence of Shimada, though the savages its depicted are decided-



Fig. 6. *Bôken Dankichi* (originally serialized in *Shônen Kurabu*, 1933 – 1939, *Boken Dankichi Zenshû* Vol. I., Tokyo: Kodansha 1967: 33).

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Fig. 7. Bôken Ken-chan advertisement (*Tokyo Asahi Shimbun*, 1934).

ly African [Fig. 7]. A more direct influence can be seen in the work of Tezuka Osamu, Japan’s “Cartoon King” and the “Walt Disney of Japan,” whose Africans in *Jyanguuru Taitei* (Jungle Emperor, 1950 – 1954) show the stylistic signature of his namesake, as well as Shimada’s, whose work he much admired [Fig. 8]. Like Shimada, Tezuka follows the imaginary geography laid down by Western views of Africa and its inhabitants, borrowing inspiration from the Tarzan films of the 1930s and 1940s, a genre he attempted to imitate in early works such as *Jyanguuru makyô* (Jungle World of Devils, 1948), *Taruzan no himitsu kichi* (Tarzan’s Secret Base, 1948) and other works.

Apart from their imagery, these works reveal how Western colonialist iconography was adapted to Japan’s own colonialist project. On the one hand, visions of conquest and supremacy were personified in the form of male children whose mission is to reform the world in line with Japan’s proper place cosmology. In these imaginary geographies only Japanese and whites are recognized as human, as torchbearers of civilization. The island upon which Dankichi is shipwrecked is described as “*mujin-tô*” (uninhabited), despite the presence of its black-skinned inhabitants. This is Japan’s Orient, for like the inhabitants of Palestine, the indigenous inhabitants of the island are invisible, an “excluded presence,” to borrow from Said, who are transformed into “*dojin*” (natives) only after they have been domesticated by Dankichi, received from him the gifts of civilization and enlightenment, taught by him to speak the language of “men” [Japanese], to follow their customs, and to accept his benevolent rule. Ironically, although it was common during the 1930s and 1940s for apologists for Japanese colonialism to express solidarity with their subjects as fellow people of color,

Shimada himself makes no pretense about the pigmentation of his diminutive hero. After landing on the island and discovering its ebony-skinned cannibalistic inhabitants, Dankichi disguises himself as a “*kurombô*” by covering his body with mud, only to be restored to his “original white self” (*moto no shiroi Dankichi*) during an ill-timed tropical shower.

The hero of Tezuka’s *Jungle Emperor*, Shin’ichi, is also white, or at least partly so, since he is the product of an interracial union between a Japanese woman and a white American man and as such is living proof of the superiority of white-Japanese hybrids, realizing, if only in fiction, the aspirations of eugenic-minded Meiji intellectuals who advocated miscegenation between Japanese and whites as the ultimate solution to Japanese inferiority. Naturally, Shin’ichi is vastly superior to the black Africans, infinitely better looking, and, like Dankichi, speaks the language of men.¹⁹ A similar conceit is seen in Minami Yôichi’s *Barûba*



Fig. 8. *Jyanguuru Taitei* [Jungle Emperor] (originally serialized in *Manga Shônen*, 1950 – 1954, *Jyanguuru Taitei* Vol II, Tokyo: Gakken, 1990: 19).

¹⁹ Language and its rendering play an important part in the construction of the Other in Japan, particularly in manga (comic books). One convention is to render the speech of Africans in meaningless symbols, an indication not only that their language is incomprehensible but that they are barbarians in the classical Greek sense. Manga artists may also render Japanese words spoken

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no bōken kata-me ōgon shishi (The Adventures of Baluba and the One-Eyed Golden Lion, 1948). Standing two meters in height, Baluba, the son of an American pharmacologist and a Japanese woman, is an imposing figure who, with his “high, narrow nose, tight, thin lips, and long black hair” resembles a god-like figure “out of Greek mythology” (Fujita 1990, 344). Like Edgar Rice Burroughs’ original ape-man, he is raised in the jungles of East Africa by a band of apes and protects the animals against the savage Masai.

One can imagine the excitement of young Japanese readers who had once thrilled to the adventurers of Caucasian god-kings, and who, after the war, were compelled to confront the god-like presence of white Americans in occupied Japan. In the pages of these stories, Japanese could momentarily escape the humiliation of their defeat and identify through their hybrid heroes with a former enemy whose fantasies they shared, for here one could be white and Japanese, too.

As in premodern times, the Meiji preference for white skin is linked to perceptions of power and status: “White” skin alone would not suffice—only that which most closely approximated the “purity” of European skin, shrouded in other markers of elite status and Western cultural capital (European clothes, architecture, knowledge). These changes in aesthetic tastes could not, however, disguise the fact that Japanese who had been exposed to Western ideas now regarded themselves and other people of color as inferior and ugly. The acceptance of Western racial hierarchies even prompted some Japanese intellectuals like Mori Arinori (1847 – 1889) to advocate abandoning the Japanese language in favor of

by foreigners in *katakana*, the syllabary reserved for onomatopoeic expressions and Western loan words (very much as foreign words are italicized in English), a visual telegraphing of their otherness. It is not uncommon for Japanese television shows featuring foreigners who speak clear and fluent Japanese to caption their Japanese in *katakana*. Defenders of the practice point out that the speech of Japanese is also captioned (usually to telegraph important remarks, mark humorous expressions and aid understandability when the audio is indistinct or the speaker is using dialect); they conveniently fail to mention, however, that in such instances it is not rendered in *katakana*. The link between language and civilization or sophistication is observed by translator Kanaseki Hisao, a professor of American literature and culture at Tokyo’s Komazawa University, who notes the convention of rendering southern black dialect into Kita Kantō-ben, or *danbe-chō*, a dialect found in northeastern Japan that is considered bumpkin-ish and inferior to standard Japanese (See Kanaseki 1989, 204 – 205). A similar effect is achieved when Japanese studios dub the voices of blacks who appear in foreign films or television shows using voices that mimic the cadences of “black speech” or that seem suited to the physical characteristics of the actor, even when the original voice lack these qualities. Thus, one often hears dubbed black actors speaking Japanese with the resonating, booming vocal timbres of a James Earl Jones, or “jiving” in a high pitched whine. (See Russell 1991, 17). Such practices help to maintain the alterity of the Other, snugly keeping them in their proper place as outsiders, even as they transgress deep-seated Japanese constructions of the foreign.

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more “logical” and “progressive” European languages while others like Takahashi Yoshio and Katô Hiroyuki (1836 – 1916) advocated intermarriage with whites in order to “improve the Japanese race.” Presumably, others, like Taguchi Ukichi (1855 – 1905), saw little advantage in miscegenation since they maintained that as members of the Aryan race Japanese were already white.²⁰

Japan’s encounter with the West forced it to re-evaluate fundamental assumptions about its place in the racial order of things. Japanese would attempt to secure racial self-esteem, political rights and power by appealing to Western scientific discourse on race in such a way as to bestow upon them a racial genealogy that located them within the “white race.” Genealogical cuckoldry was not confined to Japan. In 1922 Takao Osawa unsuccessfully argued, before the U.S. Supreme Court that legislation denying American citizenship to Japanese was unjust because as descendants of the Ainu, then regarded by many Western scholars as proto-Caucasoid, Japanese belonged to the white race (Kearney 1991, 108). Austrian anthropologist Josef Kreiner notes that a similar argument was used by the Nazis to justify Germany’s political alliance with Japan (Umehara and Fujimura 1990, 32 – 35). Similarly, Japanese scholars, such as linguist Kinda Ichikyôtsuke (1882 – 1971), largely accepted European racial theories that classified the Ainu as white, some employing them to promote forced assimilation government policies and to justify their persecution as non-Japanese.

Just as the Western discourse on difference influenced Japanese concepts of its own racial otherness, it also assisted Japanese constructions of the Black Other. An analysis of Japanese representations of blacks suggests that these images evolved in tandem with—not independent of—Western hegemony in Asia and Japan’s increasing exposure to European and American antiblack racial stereotypes. Japanese attitudes toward blacks do not so much reflect a unique, culturally encoded disdain for dark-skinned races, as much as an awareness of status inequalities as defined and shaped by the realities of Western power. Japan, hungry for Western acceptance and recognition as worthy of donning the mantle of civilized peer, adapted Western racial hierarchies to its own distinctive but by no means unique preoccupation with rank, hierarchy and proper place. Western subjugation of blacks provided an analog of Japan’s own system of social stratification. That Japanese writers of the 19th century should equate black slaves and Native Americans with *senmin* (base people) and *eta/hinin* outcasts, is not simply a matter of color symbolism but a reflection of the fact that these groups occupied analogous positions within similar hierarchies of power. Wrote Kimura Tetsuya, another member of the 1860 mission of American racial segregation: “The laws of the land separate the blacks. They are just like our *eta* caste. But [the whites] employ the blacks as their servants. The whites are of course intelligent, and the blacks stupid.

²⁰ For a discussion of the Meiji discourse on white supremacy, see Oguma 1995, 172 – 185; and Minami 1994, 23 – 28.

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Thus the seeds of intelligence and unintelligence are not allowed to mix together” (quoted in Miyoshi, 61).

These changes in Japanese perceptions of blacks may reflect the “blackening” of slavery in Japan. European slavery in Japan was not confined to Africans; Japanese were also sold into slavery until the practice was banned in the late 16th century, though Cocks’ diary suggests that Japanese were still retained as paid indentured servants. Whereas during the early decades of Japanese contacts with Europeans, Africans and other dark-skinned people served as crew, valets, indentured servants, and interpreters; by the mid-17th century “the only blacks brought to Japan were either slaves or employees treated as slaves” (Leupp 1995, 6). The banning of Japanese slavery and the creation of Deshima may also have contributed to the rise in negative perceptions of Africans. With Japanese no longer available as slaves, Europeans would have had to rely increasingly on non-Japanese slaves, increasing their numbers in Japan and, consequently, the opportunity for selected Japanese to witness their degradation at the hands of their white masters. The 16th-century ban on Japanese slavery, Clemons points out, ultimately resulted in a hierarchy based on skin color in which Africans were “relegated to the lowest status because [Japanese] were no longer participants in the system of hierarchy” (30). Moreover, by confining foreigners to Deshima, and restricting the availability of non-Western sources of information about Africans as well as opportunities for Japanese to interact with them as they had prior to the isolation decree. “This scenario may have been the most damaging situation imaginable for an early Japanese understanding of Africans. Formerly, when Europeans had provided erroneous information about Africans, Japanese had the opportunity to interact with the people themselves and compare the European reports with their own personal experiences. There was no such interaction after 1639” (36). The presence of African slaves in Japan may also have served as a humbling reminder to Japanese themselves that they themselves had once been sold into European slavery.

Shifting Hegemonies and Hierarchies of Difference

Japanese attitudes toward blacks have never been static, monolithic, or universally negative. Rather they have evolved in tandem with Japan’s exposure to outside cultures, principally those of the West whose own attitudes toward blacks and other dark-skinned peoples were decidedly negative when it encountered Japan in the 16th century. Cultural reductionist models that attribute Japanese anti-black racism to deeply embedded, remarkably static “traditional values” tend toward an ahistoricism that retreats from interrogating power relations and the role Western paradigms of race have played in the global invention of blackness. They do not explain why racially ascribed characteristics such as laziness, stupidity, and hypersexuality which had been ascribed to other outsiders regardless of skin color, largely came to be associated with dark-skinned people, nor why—unless one is prepared to posit a

universal negrophobia—these traits are virtually identical to those ascribed to blacks in the West.²¹ Following the same color-coded logic, color symbolism does not explain how whites, who, one assumes, would have been privileged by virtue of their skin color were nonetheless despised as uncivilized hirsute barbarians and feared and mocked as demonic *tengu* (long-noses) during the early stages of Japanese-European contact, but gradually came to be regarded as the embodiment of civilization, sophistication and physical beauty.²²

The line separating Japanese discourse on people of African descent from Western discourse is a difficult one to draw, given the fact that Japanese-language accounts about them were written after contact with Europeans. Miyoshi notes the revulsion they felt toward black skin, citing journal accounts of Japanese envoys dispatched to the United States in the 19th century (60). In his discussion of modern Japanese attitudes toward blacks, anthropologist Wagatsuma Hiroshi, writes, “Although they are ambivalent toward Caucasian physical characteristics, the Japanese are *unequivocally* and *unanimously negative* toward the negroid features of black Americans and Africans” (Wagatsuma 1978, 121; emphasis mine).

The general scholarly consensus has been to characterize Japanese perceptions of blacks as decidedly negative. Wagatsuma and Yoneyama (1980) attribute the phenomenon to cultural values involving traditional Japanese color symbolism, noting that in Japan the color black has long carried negative connotations (e.g., death, illness, disease, misfortune and evil). While I recognize the existence of a symbolic dislike of the color black in Japan, I am doubtful of the extent to which it informed premodern Japanese perceptions of “black” peo-

²¹ This primordial theory has been put forward by Snowden, with whom I disagree. For those who would argue that skin color symbolism is associated with fears of darkness programmed into the human psyche since primordial times, I offer the observations of Marco Polo who, describing his visit to South India, wrote: “The darkest man here the most highly esteemed and considered better than the other who are not so dark. Let me add that in very truth these people portray and depict their gods and their idols black and their devils white as snow. For they say that God and all the saints are black and the devils are all white” (Marco Polo 1958, 276).

²² An intriguing question posed by the authors’ research is whether premodern Japanese viewed Europeans as “white.” The authors observe that prints depicting Portuguese do not distinguish their skin color from that of Japanese males (though Japanese women are often depicted as lighter skinned) and postulate this may be because the Portuguese and Spanish were not as fair-skinned as northern Europeans or because their skin had been darkened through exposure to the elements during their long journey to Japan. In contrast, the Dutch are depicted as white or grayish in color. Nonetheless, in one illustration depicting a Japanese woman standing beside a Dutch man, the woman is rendered as whiter. The authors suggest that the skin color of Europeans does not become an important element in Japanese construction of Western barbarians until Japanese contact with the fairer skinned Dutch. What seems to have impressed the Japanese more were differences in hair texture and color, height, the shape and color of the eyes, and hirsuteness (Wagatsuma and Yoneyama, 53 – 54). “Hairiness” was already a feature of the Barbarian Other associated with not only the Ainu, but Chinese and Koreans as well. See Leupp 2003, 86.

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ple. Certainly, this is not to suggest that Japanese were “color blind.” A variety of terms were used in premodern Japan to refer to dark-skinned outsiders, including *kurobō*, *kurobōshu*, and *kurosu*, the last employed in the 16th century to identify black Africans but which by the Edo period (1615 – 1867) had grown to include all dark-skinned people (Fujita 1987b, 240, 243). Another Japanese term, *konrondo*, “black slaves” is derived from the Chinese ideograms *kunlun-nu* (崑崙奴, slaves from Kunlun), *kunlun* (崑崙) originally referring to a fabled mountain range that was believed to span parts of Tibet and later India but which by the fourth century came to be applied to frontier tribes, Khmers and, in the eighth century, Malaysians and Africans. Originally *konrondo* referred to East Indians, but like its Chinese cognate later grew to include Arabs and Africans (244). Duyvendak (1949) notes that “the Chinese applied the term ... to peoples, mostly of the Malay race, whom they found at the ends of the earth. At first chiefly confined to the races of the South-West, later, as the geographic knowledge of the Chinese expanded, the same term was applied to the native races of the countries around the Indian Ocean, including the negroes” (23).²³ The derivation of *kurombō*, a pejorative term for blacks and dark-skinned people often glossed in English as “nigger” or “darkie,” is somewhat obscure.²⁴ Citing an unidentified philologist, Wagatsuma contends that the term was derived from Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) since the dark-skinned servants aboard the Dutch ships were “identified as people from Colombo” (Wagatsuma 1967, 432). Philologist Suzuki Tōzō (who may, in fact, be Wagatsuma’s unidentified source) makes essentially the same claim.²⁵ While these terms sometimes conflated Africans with Malays

²³ Irwin (1977) rightly cautions that given the ambiguity of the term as a racial marker those “described as *kunlun* in medieval Chinese accounts cannot be assumed to be African unless other evidence supports that conclusion” (170). Thus, while the term was also used as a sobriquet for a fourth century priest and a Chinese consort, it may simply have been bestowed due to their dark-complexions. Still, it suggests that despite their dark complexion these individuals enjoyed positions of power and privilege in pre-modern China. By the tenth century, however, accounts of *kunlun* with “frizzy” or “wooly” hair would suggest an African origin.

²⁴ Unlike the neutral *kokujin* (“black person”), the term *kurombō* (“black boy, black one”) is pejorative and belittling and is customarily glossed as “nigger.” The adjectival/verbal suffix “-mbō” connotes childishness and immaturity. Such connotations can be seen in terms such as *okorimbō* (“hot-head”), *wasurembō* (“absent-minded one”); *abarembō* (“violent one”), *amaembō* (“pampered one”), *kechimō* (“skin-flint”), *chorimbō* (a derogatory term for *burakumin*) and *shiorimbō* (“white one,” “whitey”), an appellation once applied to Caucasians. It may also be used to express endearment, as in *akambō* (“baby”), though the term is considered belittling when applied to adults. *Kurombō* is also applied to naturally dark-skinned and tanned Japanese. It is interesting, though purely coincidental, that despite different etymological roots, the western term of black belittlement, “sambo,” fits snugly within this family of Japanese pejoratives.

²⁵ See Suzuki 1992, 102; The book is a reprint of *Kotoba Monogatari* (The Story of Words), *Nishi-Nihon Shimbum*, 1961).

and other dark-skinned peoples, such was not always the case. A letter written in 1618 describes the *konrondo* slaves on the Dutch ships as originally coming from Kaburi (Africa), adding that the Dutch called them *suwaruto yongozu* (*zwartzejongen*; black youth).²⁶

Whatever the nature of Japanese premodern sensibilities, they do not appear to inform Japanese modern constructions of blackness. Rather, it is the lineage of Western-inspired imagery that survives. When I have asked Japanese informants what images come to mind upon hearing the term “*kokujin*” (black person), most mentioned “*Chibi kuro Sambo*” (Little Black Sambo), *Gone with the Wind*’s “*Mami*” (Mammy), and “*Tomu Oji-san*” (Uncle Tom), figures drawn from neither Japanese mythology nor literature, yet icons familiar to virtually all educated Japanese. Also problematic to the understanding of Japanese constructions of blackness and attitudes toward blacks is the fact that the historical conditions out of which Western images of blacks evolved did not exist in Japan, whose own colonial projects involved neither the systematic exploitation of Africa nor the barbarities of the slave trade. This is not to suggest that mechanisms of othering based on culturally meaningful categories of difference, including skin color, did not exist in Japan prior to European contact or that contemporary manifestations of Japanese racialism are entirely Western derived: Japan’s treatment of its internal and colonial subjects (Ainu, Ryūkyūans, Koreans, Chinese and Southeast Asians) as well as *burakumin* testifies to the prior existence of such systems. However, they do not entirely account for negative black imagery in the absence of projects specifically aimed at their subjugation and oppression and the fact that changes in that imagery closely parallel those taking place in the West.

An objection may be made that by focusing on Western influences my analysis neglects Chinese influence, since China’s contact with African slaves spanned fifteen centuries, from the fourth century A.D. to the eighteenth century. Dikötter (1992) argues that premodern Chinese held Africans in contempt, viewing them as an inferior, ugly and savage people and had acquired African slaves well before its contact with Europeans. Given these encounters and China’s historical ties with Japan, the possibility of a Chinese influence on Japan images of blacks predating exposure to European influence cannot be ruled out. Indeed, in the case of skin color, Japanese preference for white skin had been influenced by Chinese aesthetics: The Japanese practice of *oshiroi* (cosmetic skin whitening) originated among the court elite of the Nara (710 – 794) and Heian Periods (794 – 1185) in imitation of the Chinese aristocracy, though among the elites of both societies, skin color served as a symbolic marker of class not racial difference. The association of dark or black skin with slave status predated Chinese contact with Africans, having its roots in the treatment of dark-skinned Chinese peasants who had acquired their “black” skin toiling in the sun.

However, the question remains whether even these negative attitudes toward Africans

²⁶ *Tsūkō ichiran* (Transit Summary) Vol. 239, Osaka: Aobundō shuppan 1914, 717.

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derived from Chinese color symbolism or were mobilized by Chinese to justify their own, albeit limited, enslavement of Africans. There is some disagreement among scholars as to the precise nature of premodern Chinese attitudes toward Africans. While Dikötter describes them as primarily negative, others suggest they were more ambivalent, even favorable. In his discussion of premodern Chinese contacts with Africans, Philip Snow (1988) has pointed out that Tang dynasty Chinese regarded Africans with “a mixture of admiration and awe” (18), particularly with regard to their physical skills, discipline, and power. Tang literature often depicted black Africans as resourceful, magical, and heroic beings, though certainly not equals of the Chinese (Harris 1987, 92; Filesi 1962, 19; Irwin 1977, 172). Song accounts also reveal that Chinese were impressed with their skills as seamen on Chinese ships (centuries later Japanese commentators would be equally impressed with the skills of the *korosu* aboard Dutch vessels). Most scholars agree, however, that by the Song dynasty, with the growth of the African population in Canton composed, in part, of runaway slaves, Chinese images of Africans turned increasingly negative.

These slaves of Canton are no longer being glimpsed through the blurred fancy of a short-story writer but scrutinized, for the first time, by the ordinary citizen. To understand his reaction we need only recall the impact of large-scale slavery in Europe. Europeans in mediaeval and early modern times looked on Africans respectfully as inhabitants of hazy but imposing lands. When the African slave trade reached its peak in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they ceased to feel that respect. They saw at close quarters African victims of slavery, helpless and therefore contemptible; and they extended their contempt in due course to Africans in general. In China, fortunately, the slave trade never spread. There is no sign of mass slavery anywhere except Canton, and no sign that the presence of slaves in Canton affected Chinese attitudes to Africans who were not slaves themselves (Snow 1988, 19).

Significantly, many of the disparaging remarks made by Chinese about Africans cited by Dikötter as examples of pre-European contact anti-African imagery are drawn from Song dynasty accounts, a period during which “reports on the Arab slave trade became more common” (15). It is possible therefore that these negative images of Africans were acquired from Arab and Persian slave traders in very much the same way Japanese acquired theirs from Europeans centuries later. It is particularly noteworthy that some Chinese terms for blacks were transcriptions of Arabic words such as the term *Ts'engchi* and *T'seng-po*, which are derived from the Arabic Zinj (“Negro”) and Zanizibar (Zanguebar, “land of the blacks”), respectively. As Dikötter himself points out, “The equation of ‘black’ with ‘slave,’ an important factor in the development of racial discrimination [in the West] was thus realized at a relatively early stage in China” (16). Pointing to the role of Arabs and Muslims as middlemen in Chinese trade with Africa, and its dependence on them for information about the continent

long before actual physical contact, Dathorne (1996) suggests Chinese saw Africans, who were unknown to them, through the eyes of Arab and later Muslim intermediaries and speculates that Cheng Ho, who was a Muslim himself and whose father had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, may have influenced by Arab constructions of Africans (78, 85). More intriguing is his suggestion that these second-hand accounts dovetailed with Chinese conceptions of primitive *kunlun* barbarians as the ultimate Other. Noting that even prior to actual contact with Africans, the concept of *kunlun* had lost its magical connotations and came to be associated with generic barbarian tribes without specific regard to skin color (76). Thus, whether one is dealing with Persian, Arab, Muslim, Chinese or later European African slavery, the common denominator is the historical condition of slavery and the perception of slaves as inferior to their masters. While Europeans were not the first to enslave Africans, by the 17th century the West dominated the trade in black bodies.

As in premodern China, there is evidence to suggest that attitudes toward dark-skinned people in premodern Japan were not as uniformly negative as some scholars maintain and that changes in their depiction were—and continue to be—influenced by social and historical factors. Blackness also had positive associations. The practice of *nesshi*, blackening the teeth, is believed to have entered Japan from Southeast Asia and, like *oshiroi*, was practiced by the aristocracy and central to Japan's aesthetic universe until it was banned by decree in 1868 (Wagatsuma 1967, 436). In 1683, an English visitor to Japan, Christopher Fryke wrote Japanese that aesthetic notions were “directly opposite to ours, taking Black to be the Livery of Mirth and Pleasantness, and white of Grief and Mourning” (quoted in Leupp 2003, 93). Some Japanese representations portrayed the Buddha as both black and African. Describing the image of Sakyamuni Buddha in a letter to King James, merchant Richard Cocks wrote in 1616: “[I]n a littell Closet or Cubbard, was a negro or a blackamore's image, wch they tould me was the Idoll of Shacka [Shaka; the Buddha], the Cheefe god the[y] Adore....” (quoted in Leupp 1995, 4). Indeed, the association of black Africans with the Buddha lasted well into the 19th century, though by then some Japanese had begun to doubt the wisdom of venerating the representative of an “inferior” people. Consider the diary entry of Muragaki Awaji-no-Kami, a member of the 1860 mission, recorded during a stopover in the Congo on its return to Japan:

In making a closer study, we come to discover that the natives of India and of Africa both belong to the same tribe, of whom that Buddha must have been a chieftain. If so, methinks it is absurd to worship Buddha or Amithabha at our altar; perhaps more absurd it is that our priests shave their head in imitation of these natives' frizzled hair, wear a surplice of gold brocade in the same fashion as these natives cover themselves with shawl-like cloths, and carry their bowl of offering in the same manner as these natives use coconut cups to eat their food from (quoted in Clemons, 53).

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The reification of skin color into fixed racialized entities would not take shape until the arrival of Europeans on Japanese shores, and vice-versa, where exposure to racial inequality reinforced status symbolism. Had Chinese hegemony continued well into the 17th century a stronger case might be made for the Chinese origin of antiblack prejudice in Japan. Traditional Japanese skin color preferences alone do not account for Japanese attitudes toward white-skinned Europeans. Wagatsuma and Yoneyama's historical analysis itself reveals that early Japanese attitudes toward "white-skinned" Caucasians were at best ambivalent. Although their contention that Japanese traditionally found such physical characteristics as frizzled hair, thick lips and broad noses unattractive prior to the arrival of Europeans and Africans strongly suggests a pre-existing cultural aversion to blacks, they fail to explain why despite the valorization of white skin Japanese nonetheless initially regarded Europeans as repulsive and animal-like. According to the authors, European "white" skin was perceived as qualitatively different and generally inferior to their own, being described, variously, as "coarse" (*kime ga araku*), "wrinkled" (*shuwa ga ooi*), "dirty" (*kitanai*), "unpleasant" (*iya na kanji*), "ugly" (*minikui*) and even "colorless" (*iro ga nai*), and its texture equated with the hide of animals (Wagatsuma and Yoneyama, 68). Unfortunately, the authors' nuanced discussion of skin texture does not extend to black skin, but instead fixates on the subjective feeling of physical revulsion and symbolic pollution: That black skin may also have been thought to have certain textural qualities valued by Japanese escapes their analysis. Yet since the apparent textural "deficiencies" of Caucasian skin did not lead to the uncategorical recognition of white-skinned Westerners as full human beings, one should not assume *a priori* that traditional Japanese negative attitudes toward the color black have conditioned Japanese to reject dark-skinned peoples. I would argue that more is involved here than symbolic color significations and that the social significance of skin pigmentation evolved through power relations between Japan and the West in which the "white skin" of Caucasians, like that of the leisured Chinese aristocrats before them, came to signify status and power.

Despite their initial repulsion, in a little more than three centuries Japanese had somehow managed to overcome it. By the Taishō Period (1912 – 1926) straight black hair, once so desirable, had been replaced by the pageboy style popularized by Clara Bow and would later, during the postwar period, be permed and dyed in imitation of white Hollywood stars. At the same time, the adoption of European aesthetic values produced self-doubts and insecurities, inviting a self-reflexive awareness through which Japanese began to adjust their own worldview in the shadow of growing Western cultural authority and power. Nowhere is this adjustment more apparent than in Japanese attitudes toward their own physical appearance, which they now began to be regarded as "flawed," an unacceptable deviation from European standards of beauty. As the following passage from Tanizaki Jun'ichirō's (1886 – 1965) *In'ei raisan* (In Praise of Shadows, 1933) makes clear, the recalibration of aesthetic sensibilities was facilitated by, ironically, invoking indigenous aesthetics as a rationale for its acceptance.

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From ancient times we have considered white skin more elegant, more beautiful than dark skin, and yet somehow this whiteness of ours differs from that of the white races. Taken individually there are Japanese who are whiter than Westerners and Westerners who are darker than Japanese, but their whiteness and darkness is not the same....For the Japanese complexion no matter how white is tinged by a slight cloudiness....Thus it is that when one of us goes among a group of Westerners it is like a grimy stain on a sheet of white paper. The sight offends even our own eyes and leaves none too pleasant a feeling (31 – 32).

As Tanizaki develops his argument, it becomes clear that power relations in the form of racial status relationships are not far from his mind. In the passage which follows, both whites and blacks function as self-reflexive symbols through which Tanizaki attempts to rationalize feelings of racial inferiority toward whiter skinned Westerners by identifying with them, while he commiserates with blacks as objects of white racial contempt.

We can appreciate then the psychology that in the past caused the white races to reject the colored races. A sensitive white person could not but be upset by the shadow that even one or two colored persons cast over a social gathering. What the situation is today I do not know, but at the time of the American Civil War, when the persecution of Negroes was at its most intense, the hatred and scorn were directed not only at full-blooded Negroes, but at mulattos, the children of mulattos, and even the children of mulattos and whites. Those with the slightest taint of Negro blood, be it but half, a quarter, a sixteenth, or a thirty-second, had to be ferreted out and made to suffer. Not even those who at a glance were indistinguishable from pure-blooded whites, but among whose ancestors two or three generations earlier there had been a Negro, escaped the searching gaze, no matter how faint the tinge that lay beneath their white skin.

And so we see how profound is the relationship between shadows and the yellow races. Because no one likes to show himself to bad advantage, it is natural that we should have chosen cloudy colors for our food and clothing and houses, and sunk ourselves back into the shadows. I am not saying that our ancestors were conscious of the cloudiness of their skins. They cannot have known that a whiter race existed. But one must conclude that something of their sense of color led them naturally to this preference (32 – 33).

Having rhetorically adopted the point of view of whites, Tanizaki concludes that the preference for white skin is “natural,” even though Japanese do not become aware of the “cloudiness of their skins” until *after* their exposure to lighter skinned Westerners, and he finesses the point by positing some vague ancestral memory to account for this preference. His observations on the status of blacks, however, should chasten those who would decry Japan’s blood chauvinism and preoccupation with racial purity. Tanizaki’s narrative is explicit about the American racial hierarchy and the Japanese place within it. Having more or less accepted it,

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he is left with little recourse but to urge Japanese to resign themselves to their *impurities* and compensate for them by, as it were, praising shadows. Not only are “white-skinned” Japanese unable to compete with the whiteness of Europeans, by the end of the passage they are no longer white but “yellow,” and rejected by Caucasians as a colored race.

The impact of Western views of race had (and continues to have) a profound impact on both Japanese views of blacks but also on themselves, an impact not limited to “scientific” discourse on the subject. Much of the impact was provided through displays of cultural capital, like those displayed at Ritsumeikan described by Tanizaki. It would also come to manifest itself in the early prewar and postwar years in American popular culture. In Tanizaki’s era, Hollywood provided the template of fashion, behavior and beauty that was adopted by Japanese women and men who, modeling themselves on Western movie stars, respectively, redefined themselves as “modern girls” (*moga*) and “modern boys” (*mobo*). Hollywood not only furnished them with its version of modernity but of primitivism as well, reproducing, if in a more subtle and thus more easily digestible form, the racist hierarchies of the social sciences. If Japanese were encouraged to identify with Tarzan and Jane and to view Africans as threatening and comic savages, they also identified with Rhett Butler and Scarlett O’Hara and shared their bemusement at the comical darkies that populated their palatial estates. In 1949 and 1950 translations of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* (1939) ranked second and third, respectively, on Japanese best-seller lists.²⁷ An even greater influence would be wielded by television, which as a new medium for the circulation of American films and television programs perpetuated the myth of America as a essentially “white nation” in which blacks served as mindless buffoons, if they appeared at all.²⁸

²⁷ *Shuppan nenkan* (Publisher’s Annual) 1979, 80. The film version remains extremely popular. Polls of Japanese consistently rank the film as the one of the popular film in Japan. In 1993, the all-female Takarazuka Revue staged a musical production of the film version to commemorate the revue’s 80th anniversary. Interest in both book and film was rekindled with the publication of Alexandra Ripley’s sequel *Scarlett* (1991), which was serialized in Japanese editions of *Cosmopolitan* and spurred Atlanta tourism, with Japanese travel agencies offering “Gone With the Wind” tours and Vivien Leigh look-alikes visiting Japan to promote the city. The popularity of both film and book promised to be a boon to Atlanta tourism during the 1996 Atlanta Olympics as Japanese tourists made planned pilgrimages to “The Dump,” the hotel where Mitchell completed her manuscript, only to have them dashed when it was burned to the ground in September 1994, an event solemnly reported by the Japanese media.

²⁸ From 1955 to 1974 over 100 American television programs were broadcast in Japan, including *Superman* (1956), *Lassie* (1956), *I Love Lucy* (1957), *Father Knows Best* (1958), *The Lone Ranger* (1958), *Bonanza* (1959), *Perry Mason* (1959), *Rawhide* (1959), *The Untouchables* (1961), *The Mickey Mouse Club* (1961), *The Little Rascals* (1961), *Ben Casey* (1962), *Mr. Ed*, *The Ed Sullivan Show* (1965), *Tarzan* (1966), *Bewitched* (1966), *Star Trek* (1969); and *Columbo* (1973) (Gekkan Akurosu Henshūshitsu 1989, 21). Imported American television fare continues to provide Japanese audienc-

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es with images of a largely lily-white middle-class society devoid of people of color. Despite the growing number of American television programs featuring black actors, few have been picked up by Japanese networks. From 1989 – 1998, several popular U.S. programs, ranging from sitcoms and soap operas to revisionist westerns and science fiction, aired regularly on Japanese television, many on NHK, Japan's government-operated public broadcasting system and its satellite service and enjoyed long runs, including *Little House on the Prairie*, *Growing Pains*, *Alf*, *Beverly Hill 90210*, *Melrose Place*, *Dr. Quinn: Medicine Woman*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *ER*, and *the X-Files*; in contrast, *The Cosby Show* aired only briefly. Only two programs, *Webster* and *Diff'rent Strokes*, both situation comedies featuring diminutive black boys raised by paternalistic whites, gained a popular following. Perhaps the longest running black program in Japan is *Soul Train*, which began airing in Japan in the late 1970s, and until recently could be seen on one of NHK's satellite services.

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