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Blackface in 1930s and 40s Japan: Ambivalence of Mimicry in Enomoto Kenichi's Performance

This paper discusses comedian Enomoto Kenichi's blackface performance in 1930s and 40s Japan. I examine two phases of wartime blackface, Enomoto's initial experiments in theatre and film, The Casino Folies's negro dance and the blackface revue in *A Millionaire - Continued*, and the later development of racial mimicry in the 1940s. To our contemporary eyes, yellow-faced Enomoto's blackface, as in the blackface performed by white people, is a form of racist caricature emphasizing the stereotypes of black people. I argue why Enomoto adopted blackface during wartime and question if Japan's mimicry of West-born blackface was inculpable simply due to ignorance of slave history in American social memory or a cross-cultural exchange of the black diaspora. The second phase makes clear that Japan's racial mimicry becomes associated with its imperialist project in war propaganda plays and Japanese orientalism under the influence of Euro-American orientalism, still active in Japanese show business industry.