

# The Trend of African–American Studies in Japan since the 1960s

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[This paper was read at a symposium on “The Impact of African Independence and the Black American Revolution on Black Studies in Japan” which was organized for the 35th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association. The conference was held in Seattle, Washington, November 20–23, 1992. Prof. Mitsuo Akamatsu (Tokushima Bunri University), Prof. Hiromi Furukawa (Kyoto Women’s University), and Prof. Tsunehiko Kato (Ritsumeikan University) made presentations at the symposium, as well as myself. All four of us are members of the Black Studies Association in Japan whose purpose is to do joint research of the African Diaspora.]

I confined my approach to the topic, “The Trend of African–American Studies in Japan since the 1960s” within the field of literature only, in which I am relatively clear about how the situation has been and what is going on now. I do hope my limited approach will complement that which the other delegates share with you as general survey of the Japanese perception of the African Diaspora.

I would like to focus on two very distinctive phenomena which characterize each period before and after the mid 70s.

First, as Mr. Akamatsu and Mr. Furukawa have already stated, it is statistically obvious that African independence and the Civil Rights Movement in America had a great influence on the study of African–

American literature in Japan. Two decades before 1960, aside from biographies, only 14 literary works were translated into Japanese. Out of the 14, there were 6 works by Langston Hughes, and 4 by Richard Wright. Therefore, besides those two writers, only 5 writers were introduced to Japanese readers : W. E. B. DuBois, Ann Petry, William Gardner Smith, Ralph Ellison, and Arna Bontemps who collaborated with Hughes.

Out of the 1960s, came a sudden remarkable development. As is shown in the chart of appendix A, from 1961 to 1962, *The Collected Works of Black Writers* were published in 12 volumes, which was really an epoch-making event. This collection included novels, short stories, poems, and essays by James Baldwin, Jean Toomer, Owen Dodson, William Demby, and many other writers. Even some folksongs and folktales were also introduced in one of these volumes. In 1963, as a supplement to this series, the 13th volume was published under the title of *A Symposium : Black Literature and Its Background*. This is a collection of essays written by Japanese scholars which turned out to be the first book-length criticism in Japan on African-American literature, as you see in the list of appendix C. The chief editor of the series, Mr. Fukuo Hashimoto, stated in the postword to this volume that the editors were pleased to release the last volume of the series coincidentally in the year of the centennial anniversary of the Emancipation, and that this should be the beginning of deeper and wider studies on Black literature in Japan.

In response to his suggestion, a symposium entitled "Evaluation of Black Literature" was held at the annual national conference of the American Literature Society in 1963. And in 1964, the magazine *The Rising Generation*, which is widely known to Japanese scholars of literature in English, featured articles of Black literature.

Such a phenomenon was in correspondence with that of college classrooms. Every year hundreds of various kinds of textbooks are ad-

opted for freshman and sophomore English classes at Japanese colleges and universities. Scores of new kinds come out yearly, and those in small demand are left to go out of print. There were only 2 English textbooks by African–American writers during the 26 years previous to 1960 : The autobiography of Booker T. Washington and a short story of Richard Wright. Although we have to take it into consideration that the number of college students in those days was by far smaller, still this strikes us as shockingly scanty. In contrast to this, in just one decade during the 1960s textbooks by African–American writers counted approximately 40. The same trend can be also pointed out concerning textbooks by African writers. We can safely say that this phenomenon showed willingness on the side of teachers to introduce Black history or Black culture to their students.

However, the number of those writers who were taken up in critical essays or for textbooks was very limited. For example, in the 13th volume of *The Collected Works of Black Writers*, Wright, Hughes, Baldwin and Ellison were the subjects of study. Both at the symposium in the national conference of the American Literature Society and the special issue of *The Rising Generation* mentioned above, only Wright, Hughes and Baldwin were discussed. Wright, Hughes and Baldwin were a sort of “Big Three”. Their works have been almost constantly chosen for textbooks, too. In 1968, for instance, 9 textbooks by African–American writers were published, and 5 out of the 9 were Baldwin’s works.

The statistics in appendix B were made by Mr. Toru Kiuchi, who is planning to publish a book with the title of : *The Reception of African–American Writers in Japan : An Annotated Bibliography* in a few years. He kindly shared part of his materials with me. According to these statistics, among the 1670 critical essays and reviews on African–American literature printed since 1927 up to 1991, those on Richard Wright greatly excel

others in number. There are 240 essays on Wright alone. If the essays discussing Wright along with other writers are also included, they count 369 in all. Besides, two book-length critical studies solely on Wright were published respectively in 1968 and in 1981; 4 and 9 of appendix C.

Following Wright is Baldwin. There are 189 essays on Baldwin alone and 325 in all if those discussing Baldwin along with others are added. No book-length critical study on Baldwin has been published yet. However, when we consider that Baldwin was introduced to Japanese readers for the first time in 1961 through the translation of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (the 8th Vol. of *The Collected Works of Black Writers*), his popularity is by no means inferior to that of Wright who was first introduced 20 years earlier in 1940.

In regards to popularity, many of Chester Himes' works were translated but his best works, *If He Hollers, Let Him Go* and *The Third Generation* have yet to be translated, which is why there are few critical essays on him. There are many other black writers who, like Chester Himes, have no critical essays written on them so far.

The works of Langston Hughes, who visited Japan in 1933, have enjoyed the longest popularity and he takes fourth place in the statistics. The third is Alice Walker, essays on whom have begun surging out since 1980. At this point, I would like to summarize briefly the trend in the period previous to 1975. I am afraid I may have given an impression that African-American literature was very popular in this period. My intention was, however, to emphasize the sudden increase of interest. Actually scholars of African-American literature were still in the minority. As Mr. Akamatsu said, research materials and information they could get were poor and scarce. They were, as it were, "groping in the dark." Basically, this period was productive in terms of introduction of African-American literature. Yet, among the book-length critical studies published in this

period, there are some that go beyond mere introduction. *An Introduction to Black Literature* by Mr. Furukawa (C-6 in the appendix) can be regarded as the highest achievement for literary analysis in this period, because of its full perspective from slave narratives to the conception of Black Aesthetics in the 1970s.

In this period, there was also a constant trend of taking it for granted that African-American writers should protest against social unfairness and claim justice. Those works with emphasis on any other aspects were seldom introduced or discussed. In this respect, looking at C-7 in the appendix, *The Surroundings of Black Literature: A Symposium* can be said to have been ahead of the times. Mr. Fukuo Hashimoto suggested in the preface that Japanese scholars should be free from narrow assumption to broaden their viewpoints. He also suggested the necessity of rethinking the ethnic identity of African-American people. Also in this book, Ms Hiroko Sato for the first time gave a general survey of African-American women writers from the 18th century to the 1960s. She suggested that it was the time to start research on women writers and their works. Let me mention that Ms Sato contributed an essay on Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset to *The Harlem Renaissance Remembered*, which was edited by Arna Bontemps and published in 1972 in the United States.

In the latter half of the 70s, there came a new wave. The remarkable change can be seen most clearly in the world of translation. I will talk only of book-form translations, putting aside any other translations that appeared in journals. And I include translations of science fiction by Samuel Delany and Octavia Butler, and juvenile literature of Virginia Hamilton and Sharon Bell Mathis in my list. As is apparent in chart A, there were only two book-form translations of women writers' works throughout a quarter century previous to the mid 70s — *The Street* by

Ann Petry, translated in 1950, and *Children of Longing* by Rosa Guy, translated in 1973. There are some poems and short stories by women writers included in the series of *The Collected Works of Black Writers* and in the anthologies like *Harlem U. S. A.*, translated by the Black Studies Association in 1968, and *American Negro Short Stories*, translated by Mr. Akamatsu in 1974. Yet, as far as book-length translation is concerned, there were only two.

However, beginning with *A Dialogue* between Nikki Giovanni and James Baldwin which was translated in 1977, women writers' works burst into translation. In 1978, Giovanni's *Gemini* was translated. In 1979, came four translations — Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, Virginia Hamilton, and Sharon Bell Mathis. In 1980, there were five — Toni Morrison, Rosa Guy, Virginia Hamilton, Nikki Giovanni and Maya Angelou. Chart A shows that translations in book-form after 1960 up to the present count about 160, one half of which were published before 1974. Out of other half which appeared after 1975, at least 37 were books by women writers. The figure in parenthesis shows the number of women writers' works.

Among these translations, *The Selected Works of African-American Women Writers* in 7 volumes, seen in chart A, should be given particular notice. This series appeared in 1981 to 82, with a subtitle of "In Search of Contemporariness of Women". Its publication obviously pushed forward the tide which had been already rising. This series consists of five books by Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Ellease Southerland, Ntozake Shange, and Michele Wallace, and two anthologies including the works by Mary Helen Washington, Zora Neale Hurston and others. In all 14 women writers were introduced through this series. However, the editor Ms Kazuko Fujimoto stated that her purpose was not only to introduce those women writers but to open Japanese readers' minds, by "starting from the

substance of life”, which refers to the true meaning of basic, daily life. To promote this purpose, she added to each volume one or two appreciative essays by Japanese women writers who are standing in the foreground of Japanese contemporary literature, such as Michiko Ishimure, Kazue Morisaki, Yuko Tsushima, and others. Most of those Japanese women writers had not necessarily studied African–American literature before. When they began to read, each of them recognized some kind of deep spiritual affinity in the respective works on which they were asked to compose an essay. Ms Kazue Morisaki reconsidered her thought about the essential quality of human life, by comparing the small town in North Carolina in Ellease Southerland’s novel, *Let the Lion Eat Straw*, to the southern–most island in Kyushu in Japan. Ms Fumiko Yamaguchi, strongly moved by Meridian, the heroin of Alice Walker’s novel, couldn’t help comparing the suffering of African–American people to that of those second generation Koreans living in Japan whose ancestors had survived oppression. Ms Yuko Tsushima later published a story of an “outcast”, for which she had been inspired by Toni Morrison’s *Sula*.

The direction Ms Kazuko Fujimoto had chosen in editing this series seems to have influenced the way of acceptance of African–American women writers in Japan. In 1990, *Our Alice Walker* was published with the subtitle of “For All the Women on Earth” (C–15 in the appendix.) This title is literally suggestive of the way of acceptance of Alice Walker in Japan. The book includes very personal impressions written by a woman novelist, a woman photographer, and women social activists along with critical essays by women scholars. Here, too, we see the trend of comparing and sharing experiences along with a sympathetic understanding towards their contemporaries.

After *The Selected Collection* in 7 volumes came out, there were some significant events in the academic world somewhat similar to that in the

beginning of the 60s. *The Rising Generation* featured special articles concerning African-American women writers in 1987. This time, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Maya Angelou and Nikki Giovanni were taken up. Symposia on women writers have taken place at various occasions. The one held at the annual conference of the Black Studies Association in 1984 is the first on record, and the one held at the annual national conference of English Literary Society in May of this year is the latest. The first critical essay on a woman writer on record is Mr. Akamatsu's on Lorraine Hansberry in 1968. "Sojourner Truth: Her Thought and Literary Activities" by Mr. Sekio Koike in 1972 is one of the earliest essays discussing women in slavery. Since the 60s, Mr. Koike has continued studying slave narratives, and in 1987, the fruits of his persistent labour and sincere study came out in *An Introduction of The Literature by Those Who Experienced Slavery : 1701—1855*. (C-12 in the appendix.) This book is regarded as a very precious achievement. Mr. Koike's essays on Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley were recently accepted into the American literary criticism series of Gale Research Incorporated in the United States.

Essays, reviews, and translations concerning women writers which appeared between 1960 and 1974 approximately count 33, out of which 13 are newspaper articles on Angela Davis. Since 1975 to 1992, there are at least 410 items. As you can guess from B of the appendix, the largest part of these essays and reviews are centered on Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. Walker and Morrison are the "big two". Zora Neale Hurston, Paule Marshall, and Virginia Hamilton come after them. The first essay on Morrison appeared in 1979, and that of Alice Walker, in 1980, which means that many essays like these were produced within only a decade or so. Moreover, these essays surpass those on Wright or Baldwin in their variety of topics; for examples, the relationship with Caribbean culture or

the similarity to African women writers such as Bessie Head or Buchi Emecheta. *An Ark Bound for the 21st Century* (C-13), edited by the Black Studies Association, shows the common link between cultures. It is a collection of essays on African, African-American, and Asian-American literature which shows our viewpoints are becoming global.

And those who write essays on African-American women writers are often women themselves. Needless to say, there are exceptions like Mr. Tsunehiko Kato who has published two books on African-American women writers with a perspective on their history and backgrounds. Also, the number of women translators of African-American literature has been noticeably increasing. Before the mid 70s, only 11 women took part in translation, whether as a translator of entire books, of a piece in an anthology, or as a co-translator. From 1975 to the present, the total number of women who engaged in translating African-American literature in book-form is 49. At lectures open to public, or at meetings of women's study groups where I have lectured, Japanese women are almost always eager to speak out on what they have learned from the works by African-American women writers — on the importance of spiritual heritage, creativity in daily life, solidarity among women, strong will to survive, and so on.

In 1990, soon after the publication of *Our Alice Walker*, a book fair of African-American women writers was held at a women's bookstore in Tokyo. This was a pleasant event which we could not have imagined 20 years ago. I am positive that today African-American women writers have a much wider audience among Japanese women. In spite of disgraceful words from certain politicians and the terrible deeds of those involved in the business world, I truly feel a deeper understanding has been growing in the grass roots. To me, the future seems bright for African-American Studies in Japan.

APPENDIX

A. African-American literary works translated in Japan

[Time Period]	# of book-form translation (# of women writers' works)
1940s	3
1950s	11 (1)
1960s	51                   incl. <i>The Collected Works of Black Writers</i> in 12 volumes. (1961-62)
1970s	
70 — 74	32 (1)
* * *	* * *
75 — 79	36 (6)
1980s	34 (25)                   incl. <i>The Selected Works of African-American Women Writers</i> in 7 volumes. (1981-82)
1990s	
90 — 92	9 (6)

B. Mr. Toru Kiuchi's statistics on the number of essays and reviews of African-American literature in Japan. [Mr. Kiuchi will publish a book : *The Reception of African-American Writers in Japan : An Annotated Bibliography* .]

[Time Period] 1927—1991   [Total Number] 1670

# of exclusive essays or reviews. (# of essays or reviews mentioning the writer.)

Richard Wright	240	(369)
James Baldwin	189	(325)
Alice Walker	152	(176)
Langston Hughes	129	(193)
Toni Morrison	84	( 89)
Ralph Ellison	52	(115)

The Trend of African-American Studies in Japan since the 1960s

This chart shows the # of essays and reviews of African-American writers during each decade by Japanese Critics from 1945—1985.

— 1945 —	19
— 1955 —	264
— 1965 —	475
— 1975 —	488
— 1985 —	306

C. Book-length Critical Studies on African-American Literature by Japanese Scholars. [This is not a complete list.]

1. *A Symposium : Black Literature and Its Background*. (Vol. 13 of *The Collected Works*) ed. by Fukuo Hashimoto, 1963.
2. *Negro Writers in the U. S. A.* by Jiro Ari, 1966.
3. *Black Literature* by Giichi Oouchi, 1967.
4. *The Life of Richard Wright* by Masao Takahashi, 1968.
5. *Beyond the Blues* by Takao Kitamura, 1969.
6. *An Introduction to Black Literature* by Hiromi Furukawa, 1973.
7. *The Surroundings of Black Literature : A Symposium* by Takao Kitamura et al., 1973.
8. *Liberation and Literature of Black American People* by Hideo Ikegami et al., 1979.
9. *The World of Richard Wright* by Mieo Suzuki & Giichi Oouchi, 1980.
10. *African-American Literature and Folklore* by Atsuko Furomoto, 1986.
11. *The World of African-American Women Writers* by Tsunehiko Kato, 1986.
12. *An Introduction to The Literature by Those Who Experienced Slavery in What Is Now the United States of America : 1701—1855*, by Sekio Koike, 1987.
13. *An Ark Bound for the 21st Century* ed. by The Black Studies Association, 1987.
14. *A Study of Afro-American Literature* by Hiromi Furukawa, 1989.
15. *Our Alice Walker : For All the Women on Earth* ed. by Kazuko Kawachi, 1990.
16. *African-American Women Writers* by Tsunehiko Kato, 1991.

## 要 約

# 1960年代以降の日本における アメリカ黒人文化研究の動向

風呂本 惇 子

本稿は、1992年11月20日-23日、シアトルで開催された第35回アフリカ学会の『アフリカ諸国の独立とアメリカの黒人運動が日本の黒人文化研究にあたえた影響』と題するシンポジウムで、文学分野における60年代以降の研究動向を担当した筆者が発表したものである。

60年代から始まっためざましい進展の第一は12巻の『黒人文学全集』(61-62年)の刊行。奴隷制時代の民話、民謡から最新作家に至る多様な作品を紹介し、黒人文学に対する日本の読者の関心を引き起こした画期的企画であった。その補遺、第13巻として日本人研究者による初の黒人文学評論集が翌年、奴隷解放百周年に刊行されたのを機に、アメリカ文学会や『英語青年』誌上のシンポジウムに黒人文学が活発にとりあげられるようになった。大学の英語テキスト業界でも、60年までの四半世紀にわずか2種類だった黒人作家のものが60年からの10年間に40種類出ている。とはいえ、評論やテキストに選ばれる作家の範囲がごく限られていた(ライト、ヒューズ、ボールドウィン、エリソン)のは、資料も情報もまだきわめて不十分だったこと、及び黒人文学を抗議文学としてのみ見ていたことの反映であろう。

70年代半ばにやってきた新しい波は翻訳の世界に最も明白である。表Aで見ると40-74年の単行本翻訳で女性作家のものは2冊だけだが、75-92年には37冊出ている。70年代半ばから動き始めた波を一挙に推し進めたのは7巻の『北米黒人女性作家選集-女たちの同時代』(81-82年)である。編者は「人生

の本質から始めて」日本人読者の心を開く意図をもって、各巻に日本の現代女性作家の読後エッセイをつけ、共通性を強調した。評論集『わたしたちのアリス・ウォーカー：地球上のすべての女たちのために』でも、題名が示すように作家のメッセージを人種を越えたところで受け止めようとする姿勢が見られる。表Bが示す通り、ウォーカーやモリスンに関する評論の数はわずか数年の間にライトやボールドウィンに肉薄し、視点もかつての一律的傾向に比べ、アフリカ、カリブ、アメリカ先住民、アジア系アメリカ人作家との比較など、グローバルになっている。こうした動きは、政治や経済の世界と違うより深い黒人に対する理解が、文学を通して日本の社会に浸透してきたという希望を抱かせてくれる。