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The Metaphysical Dilemma of a Black Girlhood:
A Comparison of the Reception of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in China and Japan

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1. *The Bluest Eye*: the emergence of Pecola's voice in American literature

Toni Morrison started her writing career with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* in 1970. It was the very first time that a battered black little girl, Pecola Breedlove, became the protagonist of the story, which was unprecedented in the history of American literature. *The Bluest Eye* seems to be an inverted version of the typical American story of the innocent venturing out into the sophisticated world. However, what awaited Pecola at the end of the story was not disillusionment but madness. Besides, Pecola never had to embark on a journey since the black community she lived in proved to be an alien world to her already. People's intentions of love were warped as a result of being bound to social conditions of poverty and low position, making any manifestation of kindness only possible through violent means. For instance, the inability of Cholly, Pecola's father, to express love in a positive way resulted in Cholly "tenderly" raping her daughter in a drunken stupor (Suranyi, 2007).

When young children's vulnerability is linked to absentee parents, irresponsible adults and a society or community that reinforces despair with its own words, regulations and images, they are destined for a journey to destruction. Pecola internalized an alien or white standard of beauty and sought love and acceptance through the miracle/nightmare of blue eyes. *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison was an attempt to infiltrate the life of Pecola, who is least likely to withstand such destructive forces due to her age, gender, and race.

In this paper, I will analyze Toni Morrison's first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and how it was received in East Asia, specifically China and Japan. To do this, I will draw on the theoretical framework of literary polysystems, which was developed by Israeli researcher Itamar Even-Zohar (1990) and later revised and put forth by Nam Fung Chang (2001). In the first section, I will look at a number of important aspects of *The Bluest Eye*, including childhood, gender, race, and personal and historical memories. Next, the history of *The Bluest Eye*'s reception in postwar Japan will be explored in the second section, which best demonstrates the emergence of a feminist consciousness in the practice of literary translation at the beginning of the 1980s. The agency of female editors and translators such as Kazuko Fujimoto will be discussed in this section. In the third and final section, I will use *The Bluest Eye*'s reception in mainland China at the turn of the century as a case study to illustrate

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how the present Chinese cultural pluralist system intends to create its own World Literature Canon in response to political ideology's demands.

This paper will cover a number of significant issues, including: how does the concept of race get transplanted into an East Asian context? In terms of ethnicity, China and Japan appear to be homogeneous societies, and the variation in skin tone as an obvious manifestation of ethnicity is not apparent as that in the United States. When the nine-year-old Claudia, the story's narrator, speaks in black English, how is the message communicated when it is translated into modern Japanese and Chinese? What kinds of changes occur to the perception of literary works when they are subjected to the pressure of ideological demand? What kind of role does the gender of the translator or editor play in interpreting the translated texts?

In order to answer these questions, an examination of the essential components in *The Bluest Eye* is needed. Childhood or girlhood is the first keyword I want to address. It should be noted that *The Bluest Eye* is a story about a poor black child recounted by a child, with Morrison acting as an omniscient narrator who occasionally steps in. Why did Morrison make a little girl the main character in her debut book? In an interview, Morrison was asked about the inspiration behind creating *The Bluest Eye*, and she described a conversation she had with a friend when she herself was a young girl.

> I began to write that book as a short story based on a conversation I had with a friend when I was a little girl. The conversation was about whether God existed ; she said no and I said yes. She explained her reason for knowing that He did not: she had prayed every night for two years for blue eyes and didn't get them, and therefore He did not exist. What I later recollected was that I looked at her and imagined her having them and thought how awful that would be if she had gotten her prayer answered. I always thought she was beautiful. I began to write about a girl who wanted blue eyes and the horror of having that wish fulfilled ; and also about the whole business of what is physical beauty and the pain of that yearning and wanting to be somebody else, and how devastating that was and yet part of all females who were peripheral in other people's lives. (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, pp. 95-96)

Morrison may have been inspired to write the novel by conversations from her youth, but she made a deliberate decision to tell the story from a child's perspective. The perception of the world would seem "very much exaggerated and new and fresh" from the point of view of a child, and Morrison was fascinated by "their mystery and their eccentricities" (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p.172). As Toni Cade Bambara once commented that "the initiation or rites of passage of the young girl is not one of the darlings of American literature"(Rosenberg, 1978), rare cases such as *The Bluest Eye* read more like anti-bildungsromans. For example, the chapters of *The Bluest Eye* are organized in the reverse sequence of the four seasons——autumn, winter, spring and summer——symbolizing Pecola's descent into chaos and lunacy. Morrison herself commented in one of her interviews that after reading the draft, she "had to go back and restructure all of the novel" and "introduced a time

sequence of the seasons, the child's flow of time" (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p. 97).

One may contend that a disjointed and thwarted upbringing is the origin of the "metaphysical dilemma" that black women face. Actually, the "metaphysical dilemma" in the title of this paper is a borrowed phrase from Ntozake Shange's acclaimed choreopoem *For colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf*. In the choreopoem, Shange used the following words to summarize the situation faced by black women in a racist and sexist culture in America: "& it waz all i had but bein alive & bein a woman & bein colored is a metaphysical dilemma/ i havent conquered yet"(1975, p. 45). The tragedy of Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* is an embodiment of the "dark phrases of womanhood of never havin been a girl" as Shange described at the beginning of the choreopoem (1975, p. 3).

In addition, Morrison is renowned for her novels' oral quality and return of the language to its original potency in terms of linguistic innovation. In *The Bluest Eye*, the taboo subject of menstruation was fearlessly addressed in the vernacular of young girls. Sometimes, the language used in the girls' talk created a funny impact by imitating adult black women's speech, such as by pronouncing words like "incorrigible" as "incorrigival" and "ministratin" in place of "menstruating"(Suranyi, 2007, p. 16). In a word, the use of children's language to create humor paradoxically gave Pecola's predestined fate a depressing twist.

Actually, Morrison was the first author to express in literature the metaphysical conundrum of a black girlhood and served as an inspiration for writers of the next generation such as Alice Walker. Walker was able to depict Celie, a poor black girl, throughout her life journey in *The Color Purple* (1982), but Morrison needed two books——*The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* (1973)——in order to follow the development of the black female experience from childhood to womanhood because the first book is an anti-bildungsroman, as was previously mentioned. Nevertheless, her choice in *The Bluest Eye* to center on a young girl succeeded admirably since it marked the debut of a black female writer and enabled Morrison to show the girl as a total and complete victim of her environment. As will be covered in the sections below, *The Bluest Eye* which features black girlhood, wasn't the first choice of mainland China and Japan in translating Toni Morrison. *Sula*, 1973, and *Song of Solomon,* 1977, which were both translated into book form, coincidentally came out before *The Bluest Eye*. In the case of mainland China, there was even an astonishing eighteen-year gap.

Gender and race are the second set of key phrases I want to talk about regarding *The Bluest Eye*. In the case of a black girlhood, they are always linked and cannot be separated from one another. Due to the fact that Pecola was a little black girl, she was treated as being insignificant and invisible throughout the entirety of *The Bluest Eye*, and especially in her encounter with the shop keeper Mr. Yakobowski. When selling her nine lovely orgasmic Mary Janes, the white male owner refused to look her in the eye or touch her filthy little hands. Mr. Yakobowski, based on his surname, was most likely one of the 23 million immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe who came to the United States between 1890 and 1920. When the immigrants first arrived, the WASPs (White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant), who made up the bulk of the population at the time, saw them as a threat because they were predominantly Jews, Catholics, and Russian Orthodox. But instead of substantially

undermining the white hegemony, the immigrants chose to assimilate into the 'white' majority (Morrison, 2019). This means that the presence or, paradoxically speaking, invisibility of a black young girl contrasts with and is constantly exposed to the white gaze, or un-gaze (neglectance) of a grown-up, like Mr. Yakobowski.

Gender and race are inextricably linked in *The Bluest Eye* and Pecola's misery was rooted in intersectionality, a concept coined by Crenshaw, which features several, simultaneous oppressions that frequently reinforce one another (1991). Both the actual social setting that Pecola lives in and the historical period in which Morrison was writing the book are examples of a racist and sexist culture. It should be noted that Morrison wrote at a time when a distinct black feminist consciousness was taking root, and that she could be regarded as a vital member of the emerging group of black women writers who would change the course of African American, American, and world literature. Thus, any attempt at reception that does not place Toni Morrison in the context of the larger body of work by black women writers, including writers like Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, Maya Angelou, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and Gayl Jones, is likely to be biased (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, vii).

Finally, I want to discuss the personal and historical memories as shown in the setting of the time and space in *The Bluest Eye*. As Jennifer Gillan (2002) observes, *The Bluest Eye* can be read as a "commentary on the artificial boundaries of citizenship, gender, race, and history." The grand historical narrative is incorporated in Morisson's decision to name the three whore in the novel after significant wartime locales: Maginot Line, China, and Poland. Besides, the story of *The Bluest Eye* takes place between 1940 and 1941, which is when the United States officially enters World War II. According to Gillan (2002), the time frame of the story is important because it highlights the irony of the United States' efforts to join its allies in combating the Nazis' racist ideologies while ignoring the history of pervasive racial oppression within its own borders.

On the other hand, the locale of *The Bluest Eye* is a small Midwestern community, which is reminiscent of Lorain, Ohio, the hometown of Morrison. In one of her interviews, Morrison acknowledged that the description of Pecola's town contains autobiographical elements. She "used literal descriptions of neighborhoods and changed the obvious things, the names of people, and mixed things all up", but the description of the house where she lived, the description of the streets, the lake, and all of that, is very much the way she remembers Lorain, Ohio (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p. 171). Also, Morrison said that she frequently draws on her recollections of the past to construct specific geographic locations in her novels, but every time the past seemed in a different light.

> It is difficult always for me and probably any writer to select those qualities that are genuinely autobiographical because part of what you are doing is re-doing the past as well as throwing it into relief, and what makes one write anyway is something in the past that is haunting, that is not explained or wasn't clear so that you are almost constantly rediscovering the past. I am geared toward the past, I think, because it is important to me; it is living history. (1994, p. 171)

Morrison believes that writing about the past involves rediscovering the past. In Morrison's case, personal memories recollected from living history are used as a weapon against the overarching general historical narrative. "Memory," as Michel Foucault once argued, "is actually a very important factor in struggle…if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamism… It is vital to have possession of this memory, to control it , administer it, tell it what it must contain" (1975). Morrison's strong sense of place is rooted in memories of her own, and is described in terms of "the details, the feeling, the mood of the community, of the town" rather than "the country or the state." (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p. 10). Thus, time and location both play significant roles in *The Bluest Eye.* However, the novel's relevance in time and space is likely to change when placed in the East Asian setting, as I will discuss later.

To sum up, the essential components of *The Bluest Eye* include, but are not limited to, the uniqueness of childhood and girlhood, the complicated relationship between race and gender, and the historical and personal memories that are ingrained in the story's setting. However, when *The Bluest Eye* is placed in the East Asian context, these elements are likely to undergo significant alterations. As I shall go into greater depth later, China and Japan each have their own interpretation of the novel.

One focus in studies of how translated literary works function in the target culture would be Even-Zohar's model of literary polysystems. According to Even-Zohar, translated works of literature "are seldom incorporated into the historical account in any coherent way," which frequently leaves particular literary translations out of context (1990, p. 45). However, it is essential to make an effort to reconstruct a context that readers in the target language can relate to, otherwise the message the novel intends to convey is lost in translation. In most cases, transplanting the context is more challenging than translating the words. Without the appropriate background, readers would be unable to comprehend the novel, and this is particularly true in the case of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. In *What is Literature*, Jean-Paul Sartre places a lot of emphasis on the function of readers and the dialectical connection between writing and reading.

> This dialectic is nowhere more apparent than in the art of writing, for the literary object is a peculiar top which exists only in movement. To make it come into view a concrete act called reading is necessary, and it lasts only as long as this act can last. (1988, p. 50)

He then goes on to lament on the fact that "now, the writer cannot read what he writes, whereas the shoemaker can put on the shoes he has just made if they are his size, and the architect can live in the house he has built" (Sartre, 1988, p. 50). However, Toni Morrison, who reads what she writes, is definitely an exception. In fact, another significant aspect about *The Bluest Eye* is that it was inspired by the author's wish to read a book featuring a young black girl as its main character. In interviews, Morrison has frequently stated that she was unaware that this kind of book existed in 1964, which inspired her to write her first novel. Morrison has even emphasized the value of reading one's own work in an interview, as shown here.

> I was writing for some clear, single person——I would say myself, because I was quite content to be the only reader. I thought that everything that needed to be written had been written: there was so much. I am not being facetious when I say I wrote *The Bluest Eye* in order to read it. And I think that is what makes the difference, because I could look at it as a reader, really as a reader, and not as my own work. (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994, p. 89)

Morrison initially created *The Bluest Eye* with the intention of reading it. Second, reading the drafts actually altered the way the novel was organized. For example, the MacTeer sisters, Claudia and Frieda, weren't originally included in the draft, and it wasn't until Morrison read it that she understood there was no connection between Pecola's life, her parents, and the reader. At the time, Morrison was the only one who had read *The Bluest Eye*. She then introduced the two little girls, and assigned Claudia the task of the narrator so that someone her age might empathize with Pecola. Finally, Morrison is able to maintain a distance from her own writing through the act of reading.

Besides, Morrison's experience as an editor is also evident in her capacity to examine her own writing critically. It wasn't long before Morrison became senior editor at Random House after she relocated to New York in 1968. She was working on novels by a number of predominantly black authors, including Toni Cade Bambara, Gayl Jones, Muhammad Ali, and Angela Davis and released *The Black Book* in 1974 (Taylor-Guthrie, 1994). As a result, Morrison may be said to be particularly reader-conscious, which is what I want to emphasize by highlighting her reading habits. She is also very concerned about the environment in which her own works are perceived overseas based on her own experiences as an editor. Any attempt to transplant *The Bluest Eye* into another cultural milieu should go beyond simply translating the words and instead provide a framework in which the translated words actually make sense to the reader. In short, this paper deals with what Rebecca L. Walkowitz coined "the dynamics of reception", namely, "how an original text with intrinsic features travels from one political context to another, and how it is deployed in each of these contexts" (2015, p. 87).

In the following section, I want to concentrate on how *The Bluest Eye* was received in postwar Japan, which could be viewed as a success of both literary translation and context reconstruction.

2. Pecola in Japan: an effort to name the past in *Women as Contemporaries*

Generally speaking, there have been a number of turning points in the reception of American literature in postwar Japan that line up with the various stages of the society's growth at that time. The first major turning point occurred in 1952 when the Allies' occupation and rehabilitation of a militarily defeated Japan came to an end. Prior to 1952, the occupying forces, led by General Douglas A. MacArthur enacted widespread military, political, economic, and social reforms in Japan. For instance, General Headquarters (GHQ) immediately after the Occupation in 1945

instituted a policy that required translations of foreign literature to request permission from the GHQ and even after the permission was obtained, the GHQ would censor the translated manuscripts before they were published. As a result, the 1920s and 1930s literary masterpieces, particularly those by modernist masters like William Faulkner, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway, received the majority of attention in the early years of American literature's reception in translation. All three of them are well-established literary giants[1], and their white, manly looks support the occupying forces' partially fabricated idealized portrayal of the United States as a liberal, all-white country.

In fact, Faulkner traveled to Japan in 1955 and, at the invitation of the US government, convened a seminar in Nagano with other eminent experts in American literature. This seminar attracted five hundred Japanese educators and government representatives from the national, prefectural, and municipal levels (Wada, 1956). While in Japan, Faulkner frequently remarked that he was a straightforward southerner who was deeply loyal to the South, which he referred to as "my country, the South" (Baker, 2001), rather than being a patriotic American. These remarks put Faulkner in a unique position to empathize with his Japanese contemporaries and the Japanese intellectuals and officials could also relate to Faulkner since the North winning the Civil War and then occupying the South is similar to how the United States won against Japan and then occupied their land (Baker, 2001).

Japan was given more latitude to choose and translate American literature after the occupation ended in 1952. When Japan entered the phase of rapid economic expansion in 1956, however, Japanese society started to catch up with and, in a sense, synchronize with the United States. The common Japanese people in the Anpo protests against the United States-Japan Security Treaty could relate to black Americans in their struggles in the African-American Civil Rights Movement, much as the Japanese intellectuals and bureaucrats could relate to Faulkner in their defeat to a stronger force. It was under such conditions that the second turning point in terms of reception of American literature in Japan took place in 1961 with the publication of the twelve volumes of the *Collected Works of Black Writers* from Hayakawa Shobo, a publishing house that focuses on popular fiction such as detective novels and SF.

Under the supervision of the editor-in-chief Fukuo Hashimoto, the series was published over the course of three years and featured mainly male writers and poets such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Owen Dodson, William Demby, and Ralph Ellison, among others. One of the major translators of post-World War II American literature, Fukuo Hashimoto was the first to translate *The Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger into Japanese in 1952 under the title *Dangerous Age*, one year after it was released in the United States. In addition, Hashimoto is renowned for the excellent afterwords he writes for his translations, which establish his credibility as a reliable source of information as well as instructions for readers.

In fact, the very last volume in the twelve volume series was a research book titled *A Symposium : American negro literature and its background* by Hashimoto, on the very first page of which, Hashimoto defined Black American literature as a "literature of resistance" (Hashimoto, 1963). The civil rights movement was at its height at that time in the US, bringing to light conflicts

between black and white people living in the same society. On the other side of the pacific ocean, the dissident young people in postwar Japanese society found it simple to sympathize with the black male writers——the majority of whom were being introduced to Japan for the very first time——thanks to Hashimoto's definition, since their own uprisings against the security treaty may easily be related to Hashimoto's concept. But as is the inherent flaw of the civil rights movement, women and children were once more made invisible throughout the entire process. In the case of the twelve volumes of the *Collected Works of Black Writers*, only *Spunk* by Zora Neale Hurston was included in a short story collection. The publication of the twelve volumes does, however, coincide with the Black Aesthetic (Arts) movement in the US in the 1960s. This movement portrayed "art as political, anti-white, anti-American, and anti-middle-class" (Tally, xvi).

Yet for another reason, 1961 stands out as a pivotal year in the development of translated literature in Japan since it was in this year that the Special Meeting of Afro-Asian Writers took place in Tokyo. Two years before the gathering, in February 1959, the literary journal *New Japan Literature* (Shin Nihon Bungaku) released its first issue of Afro-Asian literature. As the publication of the *New Japan Literature Society*, *New Japan Literature* was established in 1946 by writers from the previous Japan Proletarian Writers' League. On the whole, translations of Afro-Asian literature were mostly published in small literary periodicals connected to the Communist Party throughout the 1960s, with the Tokyo meeting serving as its apex. The introduction and translation of Afro-Asian authors after the Tokyo summit contributed to expanding the body of anti-white literature in Japan, despite the fact that some of the translations utilized Chinese as a relay language. Even though the publications only managed to reach a small readership, they nevertheless made Afro-Asian literature more widely accepted as an alternative to the canonical western masterpieces.

In addition to *New Japan Literature*, a regional literary publication *Circle Village* in connection with the Communist Party is also worth considering, since it was on the pages of *Circle Village* that a unique feminist awareness was formed through the interactions between female intellectuals and ordinary women residing in the Chikuho area, a coal-mining town of the Kyushu island. When it challenged the capitalist notion of originality/copyright and emphasized the benefits of community invention, the *Circle Village* movement——from which the journal emerged——had a tremendous cultural impact even though it only spread to a small portion of the island of Kyushu and lasted for merely three years. First of all, a group of female intellectuals, including writers and poets like Kazue Morisaki and Michiko Ishimure, as well as historians and researchers like Kiiko Nakamura and Nobuko Kono were initially drawn to the movement. Second, Kazuko Fujimoto, the ideologue in terms of how Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* was received in Japan, was to carry on the legacy of the *Circle Village* women decades later.

The publication of the seven-volume *Women as Contemporaries: Representative Works by Contemporary North American Black Women Writers* starting in 1981 marked the third pivotal moment in the history of American literature's reception in Japan as racial and gender issues were intertwined for the first time. Coincidentally, Toyoko Nakanishi launched the first women's issues-focused bookstore in Japan, Shokado, in Kyoto in 1982. Shokado made the second floor of the

bookstore available for women's activities in an effort to support the development and growth of women's networks, directly aiding in the 1988 Japanese translation and publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (Nakanishi, 2006). If the women's cultural space established by Shokado could be considered a direct offspring of the women's liberation movement, which began with Mitsu Tanaka's manifesto *Liberation from the Toilet* in 1970, the seven volumes of *Women as Contemporaries*, edited by Kazuko Fujimoto, could be said to have its spiritual roots in the *Circle Village* movement around 1960. Overall, the series reveals a mode of reading that explores the intersectionality of gender, race, and class with emphasis on the specific historical, social, and cultural contexts of each work, which is reminiscent of the oral transcriptions carried out by *Circle Village* women such as Kazue Morisaki and Michiko Ishimure.

The Bluest Eye, the first book in the series, stands as a perfect example of this new mode of reading. For example, the translated text is typically followed by an authoritative translator's afterword in literary translations in Japan. As is customary, the translator would show fidelity to the original and take on the responsibility of educating the readers. In contrast, *The Bluest Eye* of the *Women as Contemporaries* series is juxtaposed instead with two other texts, one is an introductory essay written by the editor that includes an interview with the author Toni Morrison, and the other is a literary criticism written by writer Yuko Tsushima. As a result, *The Bluest Eye* creates a polyphonic cultural environment in which Pecola's delicate voice is not muffled but instead strengthened by that of her creator as well as echoed by two other sympathetic voices in Japanese. For instance, in her introductory essay, *Naming the Past*, Fujimoto made an effort to confront the silence and discontinuity of black history in the US which for so long rendered black young girls like Pecola invisible. Fujimoto gave particular emphasis to the significance of collective awareness and memory, following in the footsteps of the *Circle Village* women writers Kazue Morisaki and Michiko Ishimure.

> The continuity of life, the inheritance of intelligence, and the continuity of will, all of which have been conscious by the individual, are brought to light. Through this path, it is reacquired as a collective consciousness. (my translation, Morrison, 1981, p. 259)

Additionally, Fujimoto acknowledged to Morrison during her interview with her that she is “a writer preoccupied with collective memory, collective imagination, and collective experience as a collective thing” (Morrison, 1981, p. 264). Tsushima, on the other hand, noted that the main character of Morrison's second novel, *Sula*, may be seen as either a more mature version of Pecola or as the continuation of Pecola's tragic life in her essay *Discrimination as A Remedy*,

> The connection between the female protagonist and her friends from her girlhood, her mother, her grandmother, the people of the village, and the white world connected to the village, all of these things can never be disjointed like one giant body, and the female protagonist lives and is kept alive by that giant body. (my translation, Morrison, 1981, p. 248)

According to this perspective, *The Bluest Eye*, the first book in the series, was translated into Japanese as part of an effort to reconstruct the past; hence, any other works by Toni Morrison should be viewed as a continuation of the problematic black girlhood depicted in *The Bluest Eye*. The *Women as Contemporaries* series therefore served to reintroduce Toni Morrison to Japanese readers as a writer whose principal concern is the metaphysical dilemma arising from a black girlhood. In practice, the series went to considerable lengths to recreate the original novel's context and attempt to stimulate a dialogue between women who lived in the same time period, just as the subtitle of the series indicates it intended to portray *Women* from different cultures *as Contemporaries*. Another effort would have been to invite none other than the *Circle Village* women writers Kazue Morisaki and Michiko Ishimure to write criticism for the two novels Fujimoto herself translated in the series, namely *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975) by Ntozake Shange and *Let the Lion Eat Straw* (1979) by Ellease Southerland. As Simon argues in *Gender in Translation*, "for feminist translation, fidelity is to be directed toward neither the author nor the reader, but toward the writing project —— a project in which both writer and translator participate" (1996, p. 2). In this sense, the *Women as Contemporaries* series is committed to the project of promoting understanding and forging bonds of solidarity between black women in the US and Japanese women with a definite feminist agenda. This is the context in which Pecola's voice or wordless cries remain audible.

However, Hayakawa Shobo, the publisher of the twelve volumes of the *Collected Works of Black Writers*, unquestionably contributes to the development of Toni Morrison's position in Japan in terms of how her works are received. For instance, Hayakawa Shobo published translations of Morrison's *Sula* (1973) and *Song of Solomon* (1977) in the yearly Hayakawa Novels series before *The Bluest Eye* came out. *Sula* appeared in the Hayakawa Novels series that came out in 1979, which consists of 48 translations of foreign novels from various countries and areas, under the title *Tori wo rsuretekita onna* (*The Woman Who Brought the Birds*). *Sula* was presumably picked over *The Bluest Eye* because of the book's surroundings, which are reminiscent of science fiction. Even though the English text was translated into Japanese, the context of the novel was obscured as compared to *Women as Contemporaries*' rendering, and Morrison's name was also lost in a sea of foreign authors. However, the situation drastically changed when Toni Morrison received the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature. After so many years, Morrison would become the first officially designated Nobel Prize Laureate of Hayakawa Shobo. *The Bluest Eye* was consequently a part of the Toni Morrison Collection series that came out in 1994 and the Selected Works of Toni Morrison in 2001[2]. But this time, courtesy of the *Women as Contemporaries* series and Kazuko Fujimoto's relentless efforts, the Japanese context of Morrison's works' reception had already been fully established in the 1980s.

In 1982 and 1986, respectively, Fujimoto released two oral transcriptions of common black women in the US: *Salt-Eating Women: An Oral History of North American Black Women* from Shobunsha and *The Blues are Only a Song* from Asahi Shimbunsha. These two oral transcriptions of personal narratives revealed a collective consciousness that was present in the *Women as*

Contemporaries series. What's more, a Japanese translation of Claudia Tate's *Black Women Writers at Work* came out from Shobunsha in 1986. All of these texts, whether translated or original[3], are interconnected with each other, and form part of a "giant body", to use Tsushima's phrase earlier. The *Women as Contemporaries* series not only succeeded in creating hypothetical encounters between black female writers and their Japanese counterparts while evoking a sense of synchronicity and solidarity, but also set the pace for translating black women writers in the following decades. In contrast to the previous decade, in which there were only 7 translations of black women writers out of a total of 68 book-form translations of African-American literature, there were 25 translations of black women writers published in the 1980s, making up the majority of the 34 African-American works translated, according to statistics provided by Toru Kiuchi (2003), co-editor of *The Critical Response in Japan to African American Writers*. Notably, Kiuchi was also responsible for translating Michael Awkward's *Inspiring Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels* into Japanese in 1993. The subtitle of the Japanese translation reads like *kousuru-tamashii*, which literally means *corresponding souls*. All of these developments started with the translation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, therefore it could be argued that the translated text of *The Bluest Eye* marked the beginning of a new era in the reception of not only Toni Morrison but African American literature in general in Japan.

Finally, the 1980s, which saw the emergence of black female writing through translation in Japan, were a time when "new models" replaced "the old and established ones that are no longer effective," and literary translation became a way to experiment with "new (poetic) language," "compositional patterns," and "techniques," according to the theoretical perspective of literary polysystem (Even-Zohar, 1990). Furthermore, the Macro-polysystem hypothesis of Nam Fung Chang holds that the ideological polysystem at that time in Japan may also have contributed to the overall development (Chang, 2001). For instance, following the women's liberation movement in the 1970s, there was a resurgence of feminism and at the same time a influx of postcolonial thinking served to undermine the notions of nation and national languages. These favorable circumstances allowed Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* to flourish on the soil of Japan.

3. Pecola in China: an attempt toward literary consecration in *World Literature Forum*

Mainland China witnessed a surge in the study of foreign literature from the 1980s to the early 1990s, which was a time of relative freedom. Although critical attention was given to the pre-World War II Western classics, post-World War II contemporary writers were also being introduced to the Chinese readers. For example, a number of African American women writers, including Toni Morrison, caught the attention of certain Chinese researchers. According to statistics, there were in total 25 articles published relating to African American women writers and their novels in the early 1980s: ten on Alice Walker, eight on Toni Morrison, three on Zora Neale Hurston, two on Paule

Marshall and two articles on African American women writers in general (Wang, 2019). Although Morrison didn't get the majority of the attention, her name was nonetheless positioned along with other black women writers who were engaged with historical constructs of black womanhood.

In 1981, Dingshan Dong's (1981) survey *Recent Publications of African American Writers* featured the name of Toni Morrison as well as three of her novels: *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977) and the recently published *Tar Baby* (1981). The novels chosen reflected how Morrison's works had been regarded in the United States: *Sula* was nominated for a National Book Award in 1975, and *Song of Solomon* won the award from the National Book Critics Circle in 1977. Five years after the first appearance of the survey, Dong (1986) published an article titled *Double Shackles on Afro-American Women Writers*, in which he examined and analyzed the particular social phenomena and human manifestations in women's novels, drawing extensively on Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, Paule Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983) as well as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1985). Dong's bicultural background may have contributed to his ability to offer incisive analyses of black women writers; although having lived in the United States for more than half a century, Dong still identifies as Chinese in terms of cultural knowledge and emotional belonging. When the cultural restrictions in mainland China were loosened at the end of the 1970s, Dong felt a sense of mission to transmit modern literary concepts from Europe and America into the Chinese cultural scene and began writing in Chinese from the other side of the Pacific. Dong's accurate analysis of black women writers paved the way——or, to put it another way, drew the line——for *Dushu* (*Reading*)*'s* targeted readership, mainly intellectuals of middle rank and above, to become familiar with Toni Morrison. The magazine *Dushu*, where Dong published his essays, distinguishes itself from both professional academic research journals and general popular publications in terms of its readability.

Along with critical essays, academic periodicals published translations of excerpts from Morrison's novels. The first Chinese scholar to try his hand at translating Morrison's work was Gongzhan Wu, who chose to translate Chapter 9 of *Tar Baby* in 1984, published in the third issue of *Foreign Literature* under the title *He Hai* (*Black Baby*). Notably, Morrison traveled to Beijing in 1984 to take part in the Chinese Writers Association and University of California, Los Angeles co-sponsored literary symposium *The Sources of Creativity*. One can speculate that Wu actually spoke with Morrison at this conference, which gave him the idea to translate *Tar Baby*, Morrison's most recent book at the time.

A conference participant named Hong Li (2019) claimed that Morrison attended with a group of American writers that included Harrison Salisbury, Allen Ginsburg, Francine Du Plessix Gray, Gary Snyder, William Gass, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Leslie Marmon Silko. Three of the group's women writers——Maxine Hong Kingston, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Toni Morrison——actually got back together in 2011 to discuss their shared experiences after twenty six years had elapsed since their journey to China (Cheney, 2011). In her speech at the International Club Hotel while she was in Beijing, Morrison revealed the three inspirations behind her writing: first, lingering disgust over the contempt and indifference that African Americans encountered on a daily basis; second, distrust

of literature from the 1920s and 1930s as well as the inability to relate to the literary language; and third, the experiences of the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Hong, 2019).

Despite the fact that Morrison addressed a Chinese audience in a direct manner during her stay, there is still a misunderstanding or misreading among Chinese scholars. For instance, Wu prefaced his translation with a brief commentary on the novel's characters and plot, but made no mention of the cultural implications of the novel. It was normal for translators to evaluate the novels they had translated, but because access to first hand information was limited in the 1980s, scholars from China tended to place more emphasis on the text's style than on the novel's cultural and historical background. Wu's remarks may therefore appear a little disjointed and superficial in comparison to Dong's thorough interpretation.

The first Chinese translation in book form was not released until Yunheng Hu's translation of *Song of Solomon* was completed in 1987. If Dong and Wu may be considered pioneers, Hu is unquestionably a key figure in the reception and translation of Toni Morrison's works in China. Merely a year later, Hu published his second translation of Morrison, *Sula*, in book form. In addition to taking on duties as a professor at universities, Hu also translated works of literature and worked as an editor and reviewer at the People's Literature Publishing House. Hu has a propensity to examine literary works through the prism of literary history and the essence of creative expression against the backdrop of the tradition, as evidenced by the books he edited, such as *A Brief History of American Literature*. The important contributions Hu made to Toni Morrison's reception in China are evident in two places: first, the prefaces to the translations of *Song of Solomon* and *Sula*, and second, a research paper Hu contributed to the anthology *Essays on Contemporary American Novelists* edited by Qian Mansu titled *The Black Jewel: a Black Woman Writer Toni Morrison* in 1987.

In reality, the prefaces to the translations had a significant role in the early stages of reception because they functioned as a guide for common readers. Prior to this, only a select group of academic readers had access to Dong's critical writings in *Dushu* and Wu's remarks in scholarly journals. In the two prefaces, Hu analyzed the image of the protagonist and the distinctive narrative structure of *Sula* and concentrated on the ideological ideas and artistic elements of *Song of Solomon* while expressing the difficulty of translating Black American English. In particular, Hu made the connection between Morrison's fiction, western literature, and black folklore traditions, which was a significant advance for scholars from the mainland. Hu was also able to turn his somewhat ad hoc ideas——which are evident in the preface——into a methodical analysis of Morrison's works through the process of translation. In addition to *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, Hu (1987) also drew examples from *The Bluest Eye* and *Tar Baby* when he was examining the overarching themes in Morrison's novels and the literary impact of her characters in *The Black Jewel: a Black Woman Writer Toni Morrison*. Morrison herself had made it clear during her talk in Beijing that one of her motivations for writing is distrust of literature from the 1920s and 1930s as mentioned above. As a result, Hu's attempts to connect Morrison's works to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and the so-called protest phase of the 1930s may come across as a little blunt. Hu attempted to position

Morrison on the development of the African American literary tradition in the United States using a linear perspective on historical development. This viewpoint may run the risk of overlooking important aspects of Morrison's works, such as gender. Additionally, Hu's interpretation of the Harlem Renaissance, which attempts to incorporate Morrison into the grand narrative of a resistance literature, may be at odds with Morrison's, to borrow the symposium's title, *sources of creativity*. It should be noted that Morrison felt the literary language of the 1920s and 1930s was inaccessible to her, which is why she worked to develop a language for women. All of her efforts began with *The Bluest Eye*, a story centered on a young black girl. Hu did, however, cite Morrison's rather obscure debut novel *The Bluest Eye* in his paper. Jiaxiang Wang's *A Glimpse into the Writing of Afro-American Women Writers Toni Morrison* was another academic study that discussed *The Bluest Eye* at that time, which concentrated on the potential impact of internalized racial prejudice on the plight of black women in the US(Wang, 1988).

In the initial phase of Toni Morrison's reception in China, which stretched from Dong's survey in 1981 until the time when Morrison won the Nobel Literature Prize in 1993, *Song of Solomon* and *Sula* remained the center of attention. *The Bluest Eye* received little attention despite occasional mentions in academic works, just as it did when it was first published in the United States. It is possible that this is because Chinese readers——while the majority of them were intellectuals in the 1980s——were not used to reading about a black young girl or girls' narration. The concentration of academic research is comparable to the state of literary translation in that period. The 1980s saw the publication of just two translations——*Song of Solomon* and *Sula*. Even though a chapter from *Beloved* (1987) was translated and published in the fourth issue of *Foreign Literature* in 1988, the whole translation by Youxuan Wang wasn't published until 1990.

The instigator Dingshan Dong and the main translator Yunheng Hu became the two major advocators as well as spokespersons of Toni Morrison in China. Although Morrison did come to China in 1984 and expressed her thoughts directly in English, it is important to keep in mind that meanings sometimes can get distorted through the practice of interpretation and there could never be an absolutely unbiased reading of any literary work. Therefore, it is intriguing to note that Dong tends to interpret Morrison in a synchronic way, comparing her literary endeavors with those of other black women writers and commenting on the double binds they experience in a racist and sexist society. Hu, who is a professor of literary history himself, interprets Morrison in a diachronic way and views her contributions to the African American literary heritage as a new phase in the postwar period.

The 1993 Nobel Literature Prize announcement both changed the course of research on black women writers and marked the beginning of the second phase of Morrison's reception in China. After a decade of vigorously importing western ideas and theories, academic publications with a literary theoretical framework started to boom in the 1990s. Previously, Chinese scholars had mainly focused on biographical information and literary themes in the works of black women writers like Toni Morrison. Besides, a shift of focus from Alice Walker to Toni Morrison is also obvious in the sheer number of academic articles published from 1994 to 2000. According to statistics, 82 articles

on Morrison and 18 articles on Walker were published during this period, as compared to merely 4 articles on Zora Neale Hurston (Wang, 2019). But Morrison's enormous popularity did lead to the introduction of other black women writers including Gloria Naylor, Gayle Jones, and Maya Angelou (Wang, 2019).

In a nutshell, the second phase of Toni Morrison's reception in China, which lasted from 1994 to 2000, was characterized by a desire to analyze her writings from a variety of theoretical perspectives. The following four topics frequently appeared in research papers published in Chinese: black feminism, the African American cultural tradition, historical implications and social significance, and storytelling techniques (Du, 2007). Thus, the release of the book *Gender, Race and Culture: Toni Morrison and Twentieth Century Black American Literature* by Shouren Wang and Xinyun Wu in 1999 marked a turning point in the development of Chinese literary studies and the conclusion of the second phase. This is the very first comprehensive, in-depth and influential study of Toni Morrison in book form and the three keywords in the book title describe the major approaches adopted by Chinese academics.

Notably, Wang and Wu (1999) devoted a whole chapter to Morrison's debut book *The Bluest Eye*, which was rare given how the book had previously been received. However, they preferred to interpret Pecola's tragedy in terms of femininity throughout the debate of *The Bluest Eye* rather than relating to the idea of childhood. They came to the conclusion that Pecola and her family will inevitably suffer catastrophe as a result of their naïve assimilation of white culture and rejection of black traditional culture. Again, the interpretation process softens the protagonist Pecola's predicament. She was vulnerable as a child and hence made the ideal victim of her circumstances. Chinese scholars are unaware of the deeper implications of Toni Morrison's decision to focus her first book on a black girl, the necessity of this decision in terms of narrative tactics, and how *The Bluest Eye*, which focused on childhood and girlhood, served as the model for the later novels that deal with black womanhood.

This persistent omission or misinterpretation explains why Pecola, who was actually Toni Morrison's prototype for black women, was paradoxically chosen as the new image to represent the literary world of Toni Morrison, now deemed as the honored Nobel Prize-winning author in the third phase of reception in the twenty-first century. Notably, in 2004 a revised edition of *Gender, Race and Culture: Toni Morrison and Twentieth Century Black American Literature* was released with an essay on Morrison's most recent book at the time, *Love* (2003); two years later, in 2006, a related academic monograph by Hongmei Tang, *Race, Gender and Identity: A Study of Novels by Alice Walker and Toni Morrison*, was made available to readers. It was between the reprint of *Gender, Race and Culture* and the release of *Race, Gender and Identity* that the Chinese translation of *The Bluest Eye* finally came into being in 2005 as part of a combined edition with *Sula*. The second phase in the 1990s seemed to stagnate in terms of literary translation as compared to the growing body of research publications. *The Bluest Eye* and *Tar Baby*'s complete translations in book form did not thus arrive in the book market until 2005, and it was all due to a World Literature project.

In fact, *The Bluest Eye* actually had a chance to be translated into Chinese in the 1990s.

Following Morrison's receipt of the Nobel Prize, the Institute of Foreign Languages of the Academy of Social Sciences extended an invitation for Morrison to visit China again as a Nobel Prize laureate, and the magazine *World Literature* organized a contest to translate selected passages from *The Bluest Eye* (Yang, 2013). Morrison didn't make it, though, and instead another Nobel Prize winner, Kenzaburō Ōe arrived in September 2000. After Rabindranath Tagore's visit to China at the beginning of the twentieth century, Ōe was the first and so far the only Nobel Literature Prize laureate to visit China since 1949. During his stay, Ōe met Mo Yan in Beijing, whom he had long admired, and had a cordial conversation with his Chinese counterparts such as Wang Meng, Tie Ning, Yu Hua, Yan Lianke and Xu Kun, as well as scholars and leaders from the Academy of Social Sciences. It was during this visit that he came up with the idea of organizing a World Literature Forum in China (Morrison, 2005).

Consequently, the *World Literature Forum: New Masterpiece-ism Series* came into being. As the deputy editor-in-chief Zhongyi Chen explained in the preface, the main reasons for the editors to discern and select literary works for Chinese readers are as follows:

> ……to give the reader a base, a base that has been filtered, a space that is as diverse and multidimensional as possible, with both the West and the East, as well as new friends and old ones (for example, Mr. Ōe, who is still writing, and Sontag, who has just died); There is a continuation of modernism and postmodernism, as well as a return to realism and idealism. (my translation, Morrison, 2005)

Chen didn't specifically state in the same preface the standards for the type of filtration that was done to give the reader "a base" or a foundation to approach world literature (Morrison, 2005). Instead, he recounted an old Native American folktale about a man who lived in the wilderness and had no idea what to do with a canoe that he had purchased from a market. According to the legend, when it rained heavily, the man placed the sampan on the roof with its back resting on the roof. Then the sampan, which was full of rainfall, crushed his house. It's possible that Chen used a figure of speech to allude to the peril of blindly adopting or borrowing from western ideas. The section title's use of the Chinese word *Na-lai*, which literally translates as "taking over," conveyed a nuance that indicated a sloppy and careless imitation of western theoretical frameworks. Chen critiqued the tendency of western literature to become more theoretical, abstract, and "philosophical" in the main body of the preface (Morrison, 2005). According to Chen, this trend was pushed by a range of notions that are, to put it frankly, nakedly ideological or anti-ideological thinking in the twentieth century. He also bemoaned the disappearance of distinctions between literature and other superstructure components like philosophy and politics. In order to bolster his case, Chen emphasized the significance of the plot and went to great efforts to look at how plots sufficed in ancient Chinese and Greek books (Morrison, 2005). In light of this, Chen urged a return to realism and idealism as well as a reappreciation of literature as "the best expression of complicated human nature in a complex society"(Morrison, 2005). It is possible that Chen's academic training as a specialist in Latin

American literature with a focus on magical realism accounts for his antipathy to modernism and fondness for idealism.

The terms used in propaganda also somewhat sum up the nature of the series, in addition to Chen's preface, which reads like a manifesto to reject western influence. The World Literature Forum first gave this series the label *Xinmingzhu-zhuyi*, namely *New Masterpiece-ism*. Ironically, the Chinese term for "ism," *zhuyi*, in the series' name partially alludes to an effort to canonize literature from throughout the world into masterpieces or classic works, which in and of itself counts as an act based on specific ideology. According to the so-called *New Masterpiece-ism*, readers growing up in a globalized world need vivid, contemporary literature that has roots in various cultural contexts so they can experience life with all of its complexities and conflicts as well as the blending and conflicting of various cultures. And the "new" in "New Masterpiece-ism" refers to the necessity to reinterpret the canons of world literature in light of a globalized world as opposed to the traditional practice of value judgment based on a linear historical view of national literature. In particular, three phrases were used to describe the characteristics of this series: contemporary, authoritative and classic. First of all, the term "contemporary" indicates topicality, therefore it is selected to refer to writers who are still working in the twenty-first century and is itself a farewell to the traditional classics of the twentieth century. Second, the fact that the series was co-sponsored by the Institute of Foreign Literature, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and was curated by Kenzaburō Ōe in collaboration with Mo Yan reflects the series' authority. Third, The New Masterpiece-ism series' novels are supposed to serve as living examples of what the term "classics" means in the contemporary era.

In reality, the World Literature Forum invites a dozen of the most influential contemporary writers and thinkers to participate in regular seminars and 23 works by 12 renowned authors from China and abroad were chosen to be included in the first collection, showcasing the panorama of contemporary world literature and culture. Below is a list of the books' titles along with bibliographical details including their authors, country of publication, and catchphrases on the book cover.

	Country	Author	Book titles	Catchphrases on the book cover
1	Japan	Kenzaburō Ōe	*The Infant with a Melancholic Face, Japan, the Ambiguous, and Myself: The Nobel Prize Speech and Other Lectures*	The latest full-length autobiographical novel by the 1994 Nobel Laureate in Literature, a profound critique of Japanese nationhood by the 1994 Nobel Prize winner
2	USA	Toni Morrison	*The Bluest Eye, Tar Baby*	The most important contemporary black American writer, winner of the 1993 Nobel Prize in Literature

3	USA	Susan Sontag	*Project for a Trip to China, The Aesthetics of Silence*	The conscience of the American public, a specimen of true intellectualism
4	USA	Oliver Sacks	*Awakenings, A Leg to Stand On*	A contemporary American physician and author, hailed by the *New York Times* as the poet laureate of medicine, The film of the same name, *Awakening*, was nominated for three Oscars in 1990
5	Italy	Alessandro Baricco	*The Legend of the Pianist on the Ocean, Genuine Shooting People with A Guitar*	*The Legend of 1900*, by Giuseppe Tornatore, the author of the original novel and the most spectacular new star of contemporary Italian literature after Calvino and Eco
6	China	Mo Yan	*The Garlic Ballads*	The most personal and imaginative writer in contemporary China
7	UK	Tom Stoppard	*The Coast of Utopia, Travesties*	The mantle of Shakespeare and Wilde, whose work *Shakespeare in Love* won the Oscar for the best play in 1998
8	Spain	Rosa Montero	*The Heart of the Tartarus, Stories About Women*	The most popular female writer in contemporary Spanish literature, professional journalist
9	Russia	Vladimir Makanin	*The Forerunner, Escape Hatch*	The most powerful and prestigious contemporary Russian writer, winner of the Russian Booker Prize and Pushkin Prize for Literature
10	Mexico	Sergio Pitol	*The Love Parade, The Art of Flight*	Winner of the 2005 Cervantes Prize for Literature, veteran diplomat, the most famous contemporary Mexican writer, scholar and translator
11	Israel	Amos Oz	*The Hill of Evil Counsel, Don't Call It Night*	The most internationally influential contemporary Israeli writer, winner of the 2005 Goethe Culture Prize
12	Egypt	Jemal Hretoni	*The Call of the Sunset, The Strange Case of Zaafarani District* (*only available in Chinese*)	The most imaginative and creative Egyptian writer of our time, winner of the French Order of Arts and Letters

The Bluest Eye was the second book to be published in the New Masterpiece-ism series, and Toni Morrison was referred to as "the most important contemporary black American writer." In actuality, this is a compilation of Morrison's two books, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula*, but strangely, the name of the translator, Yunheng Hu, is listed on the book cover but not the second book title *Sula*. Judging by the layout of the book cover, Morrison's debut novel *The Bluest Eye* was chosen as the center of attention over *Sula* this time, suggesting an effort to reconstruct the discourse governing

Morrison's reception in China. *The Bluest Eye* did remain untranslated before the release of the series, and at a closer look Morrison's name was rendered in a slightly different way this time by using a different Chinese character Mo *Rui* sen as opposed to the traditional Mo *Li* sen.

It should be noted that Chinese readers quickly became aware of the societal motivations behind Morrion's writing, notably the *Double Shackles on Afro-American Women Writers*: gender and race, thanks to Dingshan Dong's precise interpretation published in *Dushu* in the 1980s. More keywords were added during the three stages of Morrion's reception in China to better explain the intersections of gender and race, such as culture (Wang and Wu, 1999), identity (Tang, 2006), and others. They are all necessary for reading Morrison or any other work by a black woman. In an interview with *The Common Reader*, Morrison emphasized on how writing by black women instantly sets itself apart from writing by other people.

> So what is different, I think, is that black women, who seem to be the only people writing who do not regard white men and white women——the white world——as the central stage in the text. White men write about white men, because that's who they are; white women are interested in white men because they are their fathers, lovers and children, family; black men are interested in white men because that's the area in which they make the confrontation. Those are the people who have denounced them, confronted them, repressed them, and those are the white men who have in large part told them that they are lesser. Black men are serious about this confrontation. Black women don't seem to be interested in this confrontation.(Brown, 2019)

Instead, black women writers, like Morrison, tend to write about the endless turmoil that results from the internalization of self loathing and undertake an introspection of the inner being. The overlapping of gender and race——the intertwining of which is an essential element in reading Morrison's works——could be used to interpret this turmoil. In addition, Morrison's introspection began with a child named Pecola in her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* and ended with yet another child in her last book, *God Help the Child* (2015).

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* was published in China in book form for the first time by the *New Masterpiece-ism series* in 2005, which deserves recognition for that accomplishment. However, in an effort to consecrate Morrison's works within the canon of world literature, it was unable to create a context that readers in China could relate to. As a result, Pecola became a mere icon during this act of consecration. Furthermore, despite the fact that the New Masterpiece-ism series should be commended for challenging the traditional Eurocentric trend in world literature canons, it appears that it was heavily influenced by literary evaluation in the west, as evidenced by the frequent use of the word "prizes" in the book covers' catchphrases. The inclusion of Morrison's works appears to have been mostly influenced by the fact that she won the Nobel Prize in Literature one year before the advisor Kenzaburō Ōe, and coincidentally the only Chinese writer to be included in the series Mo Yan would become a Nobel Prize laureate in 2012.

However, a new edition of *The Bluest Eye* was published in 2013 by a different translator,

Xiangrong Yang in a new series titled *Complete Works of Toni Morrison*. This time, not only was Morrison's name changed back to Mo-*li*-sen in Chinese, but the translator also realized the distinctive rhetorics of a black girl's narrative in *The Bluest Eye* although he didn't go into any detailed analysis.

Finally, the translation of *The Bluest Eye* in mainland China was incredibly intriguing when examined from the standpoint of Chang's Macro-Polysystem Hypothesis since it addresses both the political polysystem and the ideological polysystem. Institutions of power like the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences played a significant influence in the former by canonizing lesser-known works by underrepresented communities in the US. With respect to the latter, the New Masterpiece-ism highlighted "competing and conflicting ideologies" by both rejecting and depending on western aesthetics (Chang, 2001).

4. Conclusion

This paper investigates the changes that Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* endured when it was translated and published in China and Japan at various historical junctures. The fundamental components of *The Bluest Eye*, which were examined in the first section, including childhood, gender, race, and personal/historical recollections, were either rewritten in order to forward a feminist agenda or filtered in accordance with the politics of world literature.

In Japan, Toni Morrison was reintroduced to a wider readership as a black woman author who is concerned with the passing down of collective wisdom and cultural heritage of black people in the US when *The Bluest Eye* came out as the very first book of the *Women as Contemporaries* series in 1981. The voices of Pecola, an eleven-year-old protagonist, and Claudia, a nine-year-old narrator, resound on the pages of *The Bluest Eye* alongside those of Toni Morrison, the author, Kazuko Fujimoto, the editor/author of the introductory essay, and Yuko Tsushima, the commentator. When a dialogue between women of various cultural origins was achieved, the little black girl Pecola from *The Bluest Eye* was brought to light, and Toni Morrison's writing was redefined against the context of postwar Japan. On the other hand, *The Bluest Eye* wasn't released as a standalone novel until 2013 in China, and the initial attempt to tell Pecola's story to Chinese readers was unsuccessful in 2005 when Nobel Prize laureate Toni Morrison underwent a seemingly *reverse* literary consecration. The New Masterpiece-ism was an extremely ambitious initiative that sought to establish a canon of contemporary literature based on lists of accolades received abroad, the most significant of which being the Nobel Prize in Literature. The silhouette of a little black girl like Pecola was dimmed under such limelight.

1. Notably, Hemingway earned the same accolade five years after Faulkner became a laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1949.
2. Both of the series include Kazuko Fujimoto (editor in chief / translator of Women as Contemporaries)'s translation

of Toni Morrison's fourth novel *Tar Baby*. Therefore it could be said that both series strive to integrate Fujimoto's efforts in introducing and translating women's literature to some extent.

3. Actually, Fujimoto's oral transcriptions, although originally written in Japanese, could still be viewed as a form of translation since all her writings were based on the English narratives of black women in the US.

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The Metaphysical Dilemma of a Black Girlhood : A Comparison of the Reception of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in China and Japan

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Summary

In 1993, Toni Morrison became the first African-American woman to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature for her novels' poetic language, innovative storytelling techniques, and amazing imagination. Morrison was extremely concerned about the language she uses, American English, which powerfully evokes and compels people to utilize covert symbols of racial superiority and cultural hegemony. Morrison was renowned for her tenacious efforts to incorporate the legacy of black oral literature into her work and to develop original linguistic expressions for black women. For instance, Morrison devised an unconventional narrative technique based on the perception and the innocence of black girls in her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970) in an attempt to challenge the racism that was ingrained in the linguistic unconscious. As a result, a battered black little girl, Pecola Breedlove, became the protagonist of the story, which was unprecedented in the history of American literature.

This paper explores the dynamics of reception, namely, how an original text with intrinsic features, such as Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, travels from the political context of the United States to East Asian countries such as China and Japan, as well as how it is deployed in each of the local contexts. The first section of the paper focuses on several significant aspects of *The Bluest Eye*, such as childhood, gender, racism, as well as historical and personal memories. The second section then delves deeper into the background of *The Bluest Eye*'s reception in postwar Japan and makes the case that, thanks to editor-in-chief and translator Kazuko Fujimoto, the *Women as Contemporaries* series (1981-1982), which started with the publication of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, not only succeeded in creating hypothetical encounters between black female writers and their Japanese counterparts while inspiring a sense of synchronicity and solidarity but also set the pace for translating black women writers in the following decades. The third section examines the reception of Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in mainland China and argues that the *New Masterpiece-ism* series (2005-2007), which was responsible for publishing the first book form of *The Bluest Eye*, failed to reconstruct a local context that readers in China could relate to, and as a result, the protagonist of *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola was reduced to the status of an icon in an effort to achieve literary consecration.

All of the analysis was carried out within the theoretical framework of literary polysystems, which was created by Israeli scholar Itamar Even-Zohar and then refined and advanced by Nam Fung Chang.

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