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Black Bottom in Modernity: Racial Imagination of Japanese Modernism

This study explores the centrality of blackness in the imagination of Japanese literary modernism that emerged in the early 1930s. Despite the general neglect, representations of Africanness provided Japanese authors with a new aesthetic inspiration in the early twentieth century. With that inspiration, they attempted to express their critical insight in modern civilization without being subsumed into the proletarian propaganda, a dominant politico-artistic paradigm of the age.

The new literary motif having obviously influenced by the primitivist tendency of the Western artistic modernism, however, also knew the principle of the Harlem Renaissance: the first African American artistic movement through which black artists exercised their cultural authority. Through investigating the motifs of shame and honor, and anguish and pleasure in representations of race in several works of Japanese authors, I will locate the trace of diasporaic imagination of Africa, and clarify the creativity that racial imagination could singularly activate.