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## JAPAN AFTER FUKUSHIMA

Cultural images in literature and film do not exist in a vacuum, so it is necessary to examine what kind of non-literary commentary was being produced by both Japanese and non-Japanese authors and public intellectuals on the subject of post-3.11 Japanese society. This brief overview of non-literary expressions guides the analysis of the selected cultural responses in the following chapters by giving a general background to how people began to reimagine Japan following the disaster. It is important to emphasise that the focus of this chapter is on revealing imaginations and visions for Japan's future in the immediate aftermath of the disaster, rather than determining the true state of post-3.11 Japanese society.

The discourse produced on post-3.11 Japanese society was not homogenous by any means. Heightened emotions as a result of the disaster had a polarising effect on Japanese society, dividing both public and expert opinion on political and social matters from long-term energy options to issues of national security. The 2014 gubernatorial election of Tokyo was a testament to this continued polarisation in the country, with the candidates' policies on nuclear power receiving greater voter scrutiny than other issues, such as the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and welfare policy.<sup>1</sup> The gubernatorial race had seven candidates, but in the end the pro-nuclear Masuzoe Yōichi was elected. However, when all the votes were tallied, there was a relatively even split between those who had supported pro-nuclear versus anti-nuclear candidates.<sup>2</sup>

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1 “Nuclear power” cited the Most in Tokyo Governor Election Tweets’ (2014).

2 There were approximately 2,700,000 votes for Masuzoe and Tamogami Toshio combined and 1,900,000 for Utsunomiya Kenji and Hosokawa Morihiro combined (Tokyo Metropolitan Government Election Administration Commission, 2014).

These two opposing camps have painted post-3.11 Japanese society in diametrically opposite ways. Although simplistic, writer Tachibana Akira's (2012) summary of these two main views can be used as a starting point for my discussion: 'Japanese disaster victims moved the world and Japanese politics drove citizens to despair' (p. 5). Tachibana's description of disaster victims roughly corresponds to the discussion on disaster nationalism in the section 'Putting the Group Before the Self' below, whereas his description of Japanese politics corresponds to my discussion of the 'anti-nuclear left-wing' presented in 'A Disaster "Made in Japan"'. The pro-nuclear right-wing is a more recent development, which is partially derived from disaster nationalism and is explored in 'Japan as (Still) Number One'. This analysis is followed by the discussion of non-fictional responses from the literary world. Although real-life ideological divisions are not as clear-cut as this summary implies, it is useful to first paint a broad picture of the discourse emerging from these main camps, to demonstrate the full spectrum of images that are being produced.

In both journalism and commentaries from intellectuals, the discourse on 3.11 has crossed Japanese borders in many ways, not only in the sense that today's big names in the Japanese literary world, such as Murakami Haruki, Ōe Kenzaburō, Karatani Kōjin and Tawada Yōko have global renown and influence, but that they chose to deliberately express themselves on international platforms, perhaps because they felt that their views would be disseminated more widely if published outside of Japan. Much of the commentary on 3.11 by these Japanese authors was published exclusively in foreign languages. For example, Murakami Haruki's interview with Judith Brandner was not published in the Japanese edition of her book, whereas Ōe wrote a special contribution for *The New Yorker* and gave an interview to French newspaper *Le Monde*. Foreign-language news stories and texts were also enthusiastically received and circulated within Japan, with translations made available by avid readers on the internet. This coexistence of and, to some extent, convergence between self-images and hetero-images is an integral part of understanding post-3.11 Japan.

## Putting the Group Before the Self

As one would expect from a nation facing an unprecedented natural disaster, the government focused on a nationalistic narrative of a united and strong nation, harking back to traditional ideas and myths of Japanese-ness. In particular, authorities emphasised the bond, or *kizuna*,

between citizens in the reconstruction efforts. As psychiatrist and critic Saitō Tamaki (2011) argued, the term *kizuna* was originally used to describe various types of intimate and personal bonds involving people and places, such as the love for one's family or hometown, rather than public relationships. Conversely, following 3.11, *kizuna* has also been used to sentimentalise and standardise positive and heart-warming bonds or relationships between Japanese people today—an attitude that may be summed up simply as 'caring for others and working together', which is almost synonymous with Nihonjinron keywords such as 'group-oriented' and 'community'. This broadened conceptualisation is especially useful for the Japanese authorities, who wish to unite Japanese people in the effort to reconstruct the nation. Post-3.11, the authorities have succeeded in incorporating *kizuna* into the Nihonjinron discourse, to make it seem as though prioritising reconstruction is part of the natural disposition of Japanese citizens. It is implied that this prioritisation is carried out, if necessary, at the expense of more personal and familial goals, which is a complete departure from the original uses of the term, albeit a popular one.

The state has been so successful in disseminating this ideology that the concept of *kizuna* has become inseparable from the disaster. The term, which was publicly recognised as one of the vogue words of the year,<sup>3</sup> was voted *kanji* of the year in 2011, ahead of other *kanji* such as 災 (*sai*) or 震 (*shin*), meaning 'disaster' and 'quake', respectively. *Kizuna* has been used as a keyword by numerous projects set up to support the disaster-hit areas, such as Ken Watanabe's 'Kizuna 311', Japan News Network (JNN)'s 'Kizuna Project' and Japan Foundation's 'Kizuna (Bond) Project', which sent high school and college students from Asia/Oceania and North America to the Tōhoku region. The concept of *kizuna* was also evoked indirectly in the ubiquitous Advertising Council Japan television advertisements, which replaced withdrawn commercials, such as the one featuring soccer player Uchida Atsuto's message: 'Japan is all one big team'. Even a centre-left 'Kizuna Party' was formed in January 2012 by former members of the Democratic Party of Japan. The state took advantage of this to promote the country to the world. As early as a month after the quake, the term was disseminated internationally as Prime Minister Kan Naoto's words of gratitude for international aid, 'Kizuna—the bonds of

3 This was for a *shingo ryūkōgo taishō* award. Established in 1984, the *shingo ryūkōgo taishō* awards are awarded to the top 10 vogue words of the year, which are chosen by a committee of seven judges from a pool of public nominations.

friendship', were printed as a three-quarter page advertisement in major international newspapers, including the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, *Le Figaro*, Russian newspaper *Kommersant* and South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo*, as well as China's leading newspaper, *People's Daily* (Tsuruoka, 2011).

However, one question remains unanswered: why did the concept become so widespread and popular in the first place? Although it is clear from the examples given above that *kizuna* has been actively promoted through Japanese official discourse, it is also true that foreign-language news stories on 3.11 played an equally important role. For example, anglophone news media including *The Japan Times*, *The Telegraph* and ABC News 20/20 carried numerous stories on the behaviour of Japanese people in the disaster-hit areas, such as the absence of looting. They related this to Japanese national stereotypes, such as group-orientation and a high level of social order (Chavez, 2011; James and Goldman, 2011; West, 2011). This evoked the concept of *kizuna*, albeit indirectly. Since before the disaster, Japanese citizens had been able to watch foreign news on the NHK's BS2 channel, which runs programs from various countries with Japanese simultaneous translation. What was interesting in the case of 3.11, was that these stories were widely discussed by internet users, who posted and viewed these stories on social media, where they were accompanied by translated comments written by users from other countries.<sup>4</sup> These posts glorified what are seen as typically 'Japanese' values of unity and cooperation. Through the activities of these netizens, the international perception that Japan was a country that was calm, collected and united in the face of disaster was made known to many Japanese people. These values came to be seen as national characteristics to be proud of and *kizuna* was linked to them. This may serve as a partial explanation for why this form of disaster nationalism was so readily accepted by ordinary Japanese citizens.

Another important example is American-born Japanologist Donald Keene (2012, p. 275), who praised the unique ability of the Japanese people to stay calm, humble and respectful towards others in a disaster of this scale. Keene was so impressed that he decided to show his support towards the disaster victims by moving to Japan permanently

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4 An example of this is 'Kaigai 'Nihonjin ni kokoro kara no keii wo': shinsai ji no 'Nihon no tamashii' ni gaikokujin kandō' [The world sends their heartfelt respect to Japanese people: foreigners are touched by the 'Japanese spirit' displayed after the earthquake] (2013).

and obtaining Japanese citizenship, in a time when many foreigners were fleeing the country (Keene, 2012, pp. 274–81). This decision was announced at a news conference in Tokyo's Kita Ward and reported by media outlets both in Japan and overseas, including *Asahi Shimbun*, *The New York Times* and *The Japan Times* (Arita, 2012; Fackler, 2012). As popular culture critic and novelist Azuma Hiroki (2011b) observed five days after the disaster, these positive foreign reactions were 'a surprise to the Japanese themselves', which led to the sentiment that 'we aren't so bad as a whole nation after all'. According to Azuma (2011b), this came as a welcome change for Japan, which was 'a timid nation worrying about its eventual decline' prior to the earthquake. These positive images of Japan, or at least the Japanese perception of them, played an important role in helping Japanese people to define the future of their country.

Although many Japanese people view *kizuna* as a positive concept, it is also true that some have expressed discomfort at the mindless repetition of the term, which carries the risk of masking other serious issues of 3.11. For example, Saitō Tamaki (2011) warned that *kizuna* is not something that can be strengthened through effort, but rather is a product of time. Further, he feared the spread of what he calls '*kizuna* bias'—a tendency to become blind to the shortcomings of society as a whole, as a result of excessive groupism. In Saitō's (2011) view, '*kizuna* bias' suppresses dissent and encourages people to work together towards local and national goals rather than thinking about how to make changes in society. He also believed that this bias has the potential danger of letting the government place the full burden of the care of the weak and vulnerable, including disaster victims, on the shoulders of their families, in the name of *kizuna*.

Another related term that was observed frequently in the media was *gaman* (persevering in the face of adversity, often by putting others before yourself), although it was often generalised to describe the behaviour of all Japanese people rather than just the Tōhoku people.<sup>5</sup> Starting with an article by Nicholas Kristof (2011) in *The New York Times* on the day of the quake, *gaman* was a term especially favoured by foreign journalists in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.<sup>6</sup> However, an article in *The Economist* on 20 April 2011, 'Silenced by Gaman', pointed out the negative side of this *gaman* mentality, in a similar way to the criticism directed at *kizuna*

5 See Burgess (2011) for a detailed exploration of the use of the term in the international media.

6 Also seen in Roan (2011), Beech (2011) and 'Crushed, but True to Law of "Gaman"' in *The Australian*, 16 March 2011.

within Japan. The article, which refers to *gaman* as a typically Tōhoku characteristic, observed that ‘people in Tohoku are beginning to resent the phrase, because it sounds like a demand to endure even more’.<sup>7</sup>

Some commentators questioned the assumption that there was any increase in *kizuna* following 3.11. In her Fukushima reportage, Ogino Anna (2011, pp. 73, 181, 214) argued that although altruistic behaviour could be observed, it was also true that large amounts of cash were being stolen from safes and some disaster victims were hoarding or even stealing emergency supplies. An important loss of intergenerational *kizuna* was observed in Minami-Soma city. While it was previously common for two or three generations to live under one roof, many young people had made the decision to move and start a separate household to escape potential radiation (Yanagida, 2013, p. 13). Japanologist Richard J. Samuels (2013) is one of many who remarked on the ‘shallowness of local identities’ due to the large-scale municipal mergers that concluded a year prior to the disaster (*heisei-no-daigappei*: ‘the great Heisei mergers’). According to Samuels (2013), ‘reports of distrust among the new neighbours were reflected in choices of temporary shelters and undercut the ideals of community that were being spun by political leaders and editorialists’ (p. 40). Further, despite his previous optimism, Azuma Hiroki (2011a, p. 12) observed in September 2011 that 3.11 served to reveal the lack of solidarity in Japanese society. The earthquake demonstrated that, despite the illusion of homogeneity and equality, personal circumstances such as income, place of residence and age translated directly to undeniable differences in the ability to deal with such disasters (p. 14). According to Azuma (2011a), Japanese people were coming to terms with the depressing realisation that they were on their own and that even their government could not be relied on in the case of such disasters, which is a far cry from the image of social cohesion evoked by *kizuna*.

Apart from *kizuna*, there are many other examples of Japanese national myths being evoked in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The talk between Fujiwara Masahiko, author of *Kokka no hinkaku* [The dignity of a state] and journalist and ex-TV presenter Sakurai Yoshiko in the 20 May 2011 issue of the *Shūkan Post* is one example. In this talk, Fujiwara

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7 Another phrase that the article refers to is *ganbarō* [let’s hang in there], which is ‘a phrase that smacks of heads-down endurance, rather than the hope of better things to come’. The phrase ‘*ganbarō nippon*’ [hang in there, Japan] was even described as a ‘tool of violence’ by philosopher Nakajima Yoshimichi (2011, p. 134), for reasons similar to Saitō’s idea of ‘*kizuna* bias’—the individual is forgotten in the pursuit of larger national goals.

tells the story of a firefighter who messaged his wife before departing on a life-risking mission to water and cool down the Fukushima power plants and received as a reply: 'Please become Japan's saviour'. This unselfish wife was praised by Fujiwara as a true 'samurai wife' and the couple as an embodiment of the values of *bushido*, which are written into Japanese genes since the Yayoi or even Jōmon period. Similarly, Fujiwara also gave the example of his acquaintance, who was Emeritus Professor at Tōhoku University and the director of the Red Cross hospital at Ishinomaki, whose tireless efforts were attributed to the fact that he is a descendent of the *byakkotai*—a military unit composed of teenage samurai from Aizu (now part of the Fukushima Prefecture), who fought in the Boshin War. Fujiwara and Sakurai conclude this talk by observing that, because of these traditional Japanese virtues, Japan was well-qualified to be a model nation for the world in the twenty-first century.

Michael Hoffman (2011) is one foreign commentator who raised alarm at this display of 'extreme nationalism' in a popular national publication (*Shūkan Post* is one of the most popular weekly magazines in Japan), where he argued that conservative right-wing 'fringe thinking', thought to have been 'buried in the rubble of World War II', 'is becoming mainstream'. However, not all foreign commentators viewed this surge in nationalism as a negative outcome. For example, Benedict Anderson (2012, p. 206) stated in an interview that although nationalism had a negative side (especially when exploited by right-wing politicians), it also had a beneficial side for post-disaster Japan because it created a feeling of responsibility, which encouraged Japanese people to help each other and respect laws and societal rules. According to Anderson (2012, p. 207), nationalism had replaced religion as the main source of hope for the future in today's world and the hope for creating a better Japan for future generations was what drove the support that Japanese people gave each other in the aftermath of the earthquake.

## A Disaster 'Made in Japan'

Meanwhile, many citizens expressed their discomfort with such an outward display of nationalism and patriotism because they were more concerned with the man-made aspect of the disaster—nuclear radiation. New platforms of expression on the internet allowed strong criticism against the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) and the government's response to the disaster to be voiced by citizens from all

walks of life. These commentaries often criticised the entire Japanese system, starting with the practices and attitudes that were deemed to be responsible for the unresolved situation at the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, which culminated in protests against the use of nuclear energy in the country. In the words of Murata Mitsuhei, former Japanese ambassador to Switzerland: ‘I call it the sickness of Japan. First, we hide, then we postpone and then we assume no responsibility’ (in Willacy, 2012, n.p.).<sup>8</sup> This perceived tendency for Japanese authorities to hide information and act as though nothing was happening has often been described as *impei shugi* (hide-ism; a tendency to hide; e.g. Yanagida, 2013, pp. 86–93) and *koto nakare shugi* (preferring peace at any price; e.g. Shiono & Andō, 2012, p. 324). Also on people’s lips were perceived Japanese characteristics, such as a tendency to *sakiokuri* (postpone) or *tanaage* (pigeonhole), often referring to the unwillingness of Japanese authorities to prepare for potential disasters, which is thought to have caused the Fukushima incidents (‘Genpatsu taisaku’, 2014; Tsunehira, 2011). These characteristics can be summed up with the term *genshiryoku mura* (nuclear power village), which is used to describe the way the nuclear industry behaves similarly to a traditional Japanese *mura* (village) society and that is characterised by strong hierarchy and groupthink tendencies (Iida, Satō & Kōno, 2011). Pseudonymous whistle-blower Wakasugi Retsu’s controversial 2013 novel *Genpatsu howaitoauto* [Nuclear whiteout], which explores the possibility of a terrorist attack on nuclear power plants in Japan, is an allegorical exploration of the power relationships within this ‘nuclear power village’.<sup>9</sup>

However, the blame was not solely placed on this ‘nuclear power village’. Energy is a resource that is used by the whole population, which meant that the emotional impact of the tragic disaster evolved into a sense of collective guilt for some citizens, in a manner reminiscent of the post-war period.<sup>10</sup> As Chairman of the Fukushima Nuclear Accident Independent Investigation Commission, Kurokawa Kiyoshi (2012) described it:

8 In *Owaranai genpatsu jiko to ‘Nihon byō’*, Yanagida Kunio (2013, p. 4) also refers to *Nihon byō* [sickness of Japan], which is a failure of social systems such as the government and businesses to protect human life. Yanagida also refers to Japan as *musekinin shakai* [an irresponsible society] (p. 98).

9 This kind of imagination of terrorist attacks on Japanese nuclear power plants (also explored by other Japanese authors such as Higashino Keigo in the past) has impacted real-life Japanese Government policy following the disaster. For example, nuclear power plants are now required to be fully protected against terrorist attacks, such as a plane crash.

10 Higashikuni Naruhiko, a former prince turned prime minister in 1945, famously proclaimed the motto ‘*ichioku sō zange*’ [collective repentance (of a hundred million people)] to avoid attributing war responsibility to the Emperor.

What must be admitted—very painfully—is that this was a disaster ‘Made in Japan’. Its fundamental causes are to be found in the ingrained conventions of Japanese culture: our reflexive obedience; our reluctance to question authority; our devotion to ‘sticking with the program’; our groupism; and our insularity. Had other Japanese been in the shoes of those who bear responsibility for this accident, the results may well have been the same ... The consequences of negligence at Fukushima stand out as catastrophic, but the mindset that supported it can be found across Japan. In recognizing that fact, each of us should reflect on our responsibility as individuals in a democratic society (p. 9).

There is a sense that the whole population was guilty of turning a blind eye to the obvious faults of the convenient ‘safety myth’ of nuclear energy and that all citizens must now become more active in political matters to protect future generations. This leftist movement is driven, at least in some part, by the general distrust towards mainstream information regarding radiation levels and safety,<sup>11</sup> which has encouraged the formation of online groups, including the National Network of Parents to Protect Children from Radiation and the Food Business Safety Network. The state is perceived to be playing down the issue to avoid widespread panic, which has caused some of its citizens to be exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. These fears, which reached hysteric levels on many occasions—one of the most notable examples being the dangerous consumption of gargling solution containing iodine being encouraged on the internet—coupled with the relative ease of participation in the movement through the internet and in mass street protests, have caused this new left-wing movement to rapidly grow. In summary, those who were concerned with the state’s handling of the incidents at Fukushima expressed a bleak outlook for the country’s future, in the hopes that this would improve transparency and accountability in the nuclear power industry as well as citizen interest and involvement in energy policy.

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11 As Fukuda (2012, p. 117) contended, there were many problems with the official information regarding nuclear radiation levels. Not only were the government press releases highly technical and difficult for most citizens to understand, there were also differences in information disclosed by TEPCO and various governmental organisations. This discrepancy, combined with the fact that data such as the System for Prediction of Environmental Emergency Dose Information was not made widely available to citizens, were among the causes for this distrust of the authorities.

## Japan as (Still) Number One

While the anti-nuclear camp focused on the ills of Japanese society, the pro-nuclear camp continued to paint Japan's future as a technological superpower and denied the breakdown of the safety myth, which was observed by the left-wing camp. This was supported by foreign news stories such as Anne Applebaum's (2011) 'If the Japanese can't build a safe reactor, who can?' in the *Washington Post*, which claimed that the 'technological brilliance and extraordinary competence of the Japanese are on full display', or the coverage of the extensive impact the car part factory closures in northern Japan had on the rest of the world (Boudette & Bennett, 2011; White, 2011)—Japanese technology still mattered. For example, economist Ikeda Nobuo (2012) claimed that it is in fact the 'danger myth' of nuclear power that collapsed after Fukushima because no harmful radiation was produced as a result of the partial meltdown. Tamogami Toshio (2013), a former Chief of Staff of Japan's air self-defence force from Fukushima, who is known for his nationalistic political stance, commented that the nuclear incident effectively proved that Japanese nuclear power plants are safe, even during a magnitude-9 earthquake. He emphasised that no one had died from a radiation accident caused by an operating nuclear power plant in the 50 years of Japanese nuclear power, despite the fear that nuclear power is dangerous. Similarly, physicist Takada Jun (2011) argued in his award-winning essay that 'the country that stands on the vanguard of radiologic technologies in the fields of energy and medical care is becoming a laughing stock around the world' in reference to growing anti-nuclear sentiments in Japan and that what Japan should be doing is to 'take the lead in developing the world's safest nuclear energy technologies'. Takada also gave as evidence the fact that the Onagawa nuclear power plant, which was the closest plant to the epicentre, survived the tsunami. This kind of discourse has also been observed overseas. For example, it was reported in the *Sankei News* (20 April 2012) that Lady Barbara Judge, Chairperson Emeritus of the UK Atomic Energy Authority, praised Japan's technological prowess by commenting that, in the UK, even those in the anti-nuclear camp commend Japan on its nuclear technology.

Because of their belief in the safety of nuclear power, the right-wing camp expressed their concern for the reputational damage (*fūhyō higai*) inflicted by some left-wing activists, who were exaggerating the dangers of radiation in the disaster-hit areas in their argument against nuclear energy and

contributing to the prejudice against people and produce from these areas as well as Japan's national brand. An example was the *manga Oishinbo* by Kariya Tetsu and Hanasaki Akira (2013), which depicted the protagonist suffering from a nose bleed after visiting the Fukushima Dai'ichi nuclear power plant.<sup>12</sup> *Oishinbo* was criticised by various authorities, including the Ministry of the Environment and Prime Minister Abe, for spreading 'baseless rumours' (Shushō, 2014).

Another issue that received widespread attention was the rejection of ceremonial wood from Rikuzentakata, Iwate, for the annual bonfire festival in Kyoto, due to radiation fears. In an unfortunate series of events, the initial plan to burn wood from trees killed by the tsunami was cancelled due to complaints from Kyoto City residents, even though no radioactive materials were detected.<sup>13</sup> However, as the news came under the national spotlight, Kyoto City and the organisers of the festival received criticism for perpetuating reputational damage and for being disrespectful to the disaster victims, who wrote their wishes and prayers on the wood. Kyoto City (2011) eventually decided to obtain a new batch of wood (the first batch was burned at a Bon Festival in Rikuzentakata), only to find that the surface of the wood contained a level of caesium higher than what was allowed for internal consumption and decided against burning it. What began as an innocent attempt by the organisers to support the disaster-hit areas came to be an incident that symbolised the lack of *kizuna* beyond the borders of the Tōhoku region, as well as the radiation hysteria in Japan in the months following the disaster. Authorities have been active in their attempts to reverse this negative image. For example, the Fukushima Prefecture created television advertisements featuring members of the popular pop band TOKIO promoting Fukushima produce such as peaches and rice,<sup>14</sup> and Prime Minister Abe (2013) famously portrayed Tokyo as 'one of the safest cities in the world' at the 2020 Olympics Host City Elections and claimed that the situation at Fukushima was 'under control'.

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12 It is important to note that *Oishinbo* also portrayed rice farmers suffering from reputational damage (despite their rice testing negative for radiation) in Episode 110, which came just before the 'nose bleed' episode (Kariya & Hanasaki, 2013, p. 17).

13 Reported in *MSN Sankei News*, 26 November 2012.

14 There is also the catchphrase *Tabete ōen* (Support by eating), which is used by Food Action Nippon ([syokuryo.jp/tabete\\_ouen/](http://syokuryo.jp/tabete_ouen/)) as well as the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries ([www.maff.go.jp/j/shokusan/eat/index.html](http://www.maff.go.jp/j/shokusan/eat/index.html)).

At the most extreme end of the pro-nuclear movement are the radical right-wing organisations that belong to the *Kōdō suru hoshu* [Conservatives that act] movement and the *netto uyoku* [internet right-wing],<sup>15</sup> who label any opposition to their views as *han'nichi* [anti-Japanese], *hikokumin* [unpatriotic] or even *baikokudo* [traitor]. The activities of this radical right-wing movement are characterised by negative propaganda rather than positive patriotism. Since the anti-nuclear left, referred to most commonly as *sayoku* (written in *katakana* instead of *kanji* to denote foreignness), is considered to be anti-Japanese, they are grouped together with their other un-Japanese enemies—Korean and Chinese people, which also includes *zainichi*, who are Korean citizens residing in Japan. Although the radical right-wing have directed their hatred towards Korean and Chinese people since before 3.11, their actions became more visible after the disaster, with demonstrations in 2013 gathering hundreds of protesters (Hayashi, 2013).<sup>16</sup> The active organisations of extreme right-wing politics such as *Zaitokukai* (the association of citizens against the special privileges of the *zainichi*) and *Genpatsu no hi wo kesasenai demo kōshin* (the demonstration march against extinguishing the flame of nuclear power plants) took their xenophobia and hate speech to the streets, along with their pro-nuclear ideology. Conversely, *netto uyoku* spread their hate speech against those they call *shina jin* (Chinese—derogatory), *chōsen jin* (Korean—derogatory) and *tokua* (short for *tokutei ajia*, which means ‘certain countries in Asia’, namely South Korea, North Korea and China) online. The *netto uyoku* also typically associate Koreans and Chinese as well as the participants in environmentalist left-wing politics with the centre-left Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).<sup>17</sup> An example of this is their use of derogatory Korean-sounding nicknames such as *Minsutō* (for *Minshutō*, the DPJ) and *Kangansu* (for former prime minister Kan Naoto). Also observed in the aftermath of the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake and the 1995 Hanshin earthquake, this xenophobia and exclusion of foreign people (especially those from other Asian countries) seems to be an unfortunate trend associated with post-disaster Japanese nationalism. However, in post-3.11

15 The *netto uyoku* are differentiated by their anonymous nature to traditional right-wing activists, who drive big black sound trucks on the streets to yell out propaganda to passers-by (*gaisen uyoku*). For a detailed analysis of the *netto-uyoku*'s activities on 2-channeru, see Sakamoto (2011).

16 However, these protests have also been met by a counter-protest by those who believe radical right-wing groups are ‘the shame of this country’ (Kendall, 2013).

17 The DPJ was in office between 2009 and 2012, which made history by breaking the Liberal Democratic Party's long-term dominant hold of political power in Japan. The association of the new environmentalist left-wing movement with the DPJ is an oversimplified perception held by the *netto uyoku*. Many environmentalists were critical of the decisions the DPJ made with regards to the Fukushima incidents and voted against the DPJ in the 2012 elections.

discourse, perhaps due to the fact that domestic social issues, such as the living conditions of foreign residents are under stricter foreign scrutiny than in 1923 or 1995, this kind of radical right-wing movement has received both official and unofficial criticism for being un-Japanese. Prime Minister Abe commented that this kind of racist hate speech was ‘truly regrettable’ and that ‘the Japanese respect harmony and should not be people who exclude others ... The Japanese way of thinking is to behave politely and to be generous and modest at any time’ (‘Abe Criticizes Increase in Hate Speech’, 2013). Similarly, right-wing journalist Sakurai Yoshiko (2016) observed that those who participated in hate speech against Korean people were lacking in pride as Japanese citizens as well as the kindness, compassion and tolerance typical of Japanese people.

Interestingly, some commentators who are associated with conservative ideology have expressed their anti-nuclear views following 3.11, which complicated the ideological landscape.<sup>18</sup> An example is pro-royal family commentator Takeda Tsuneyasu, who published his *Kore ga ketsuron! Nihonjin to genpatsu* [This is the conclusion! The Japanese and nuclear power] in 2012.<sup>19</sup> Takeda (2012, pp. 203–205) argued that Japan, a country created by Gods according to the *kuni-umi* (birth of the country) myth, should not be using nuclear power because it is a presence that impinges the realm of the Gods. Further, Takeda (2012) claimed that conservatives should not support nuclear power because it ‘causes the Emperor anxiety’ (pp. 208–210). Another famous example is *manga* artist Kobayashi Yoshinori, who published his *Gōmanizumu sengen special: Datsu genpatsu ron* [Special manifesto of arrogant-ism: on anti-nuclear politics] in August 2012.<sup>20</sup> Kobayashi has been well known for expressing his conservative politics in his *Gōmanizumu sengen* [Manifesto of arrogant-ism] series since he wrote his *Shin gōmanizumu sengen special: Sensō ron* [Special manifesto of neo-arrogant-ism: on war], in which he praised Japan’s activities during WWII. Kobayashi’s (2012, p. 88) claim regarding nuclear power is that, as a patriot, he cannot accept the use of nuclear power, which pollutes his beloved homeland that many died to protect during the war. In a line of reasoning not too distant to that of Takeda, he observed that conservatives (*hoshu*) should protect

18 The book *Migi kara no datsu genpatsu* [The anti-nuclear right-wing] (2012) by Harigai Daisuke summarises the ideologies of the *Migi kara kangaeru datsu genpatsu* network [The anti-nuclear right-wing network], which is a citizen group that takes this ideology onto the streets of Tokyo.

19 This was a revised version, of *Genpatsu wa naze Nihon ni fusawashiku nai noka* [Why nuclear power is not suitable for Japan], which was published in June 2011.

20 For an in-depth analysis of this work, see Sakamoto (2016).

the Japanese national character (*kunigara*) and evoked ‘the origins of Japanese spirituality’—respect and fear for nature, which humans cannot completely control (Kobayashi, 2012, p. 119). In an interesting twist, Kobayashi is not against the use of nuclear *weapons*, which, in his view, are necessary for autonomy and peace in Japan (p. 129).<sup>21</sup>

Even within the right-wing camp, the discourse is thus divided in terms of what is considered most valuable for Japan’s future: a traditional form of coexistence with nature that protects its beauty, or economic and technological success that allows Japan to continue being a world superpower. How have other Japanese intellectuals responded to this conflict? The next part of the chapter outlines how Japanese authors have portrayed their visions for future Japan.

## Remembering Hiroshima and Nagasaki

In Japan, authors are as influential as politicians and other intellectuals in their role of helping the general public come to terms with traumatic events. As Gebhardt (2014) argued in her paper on 3.11 literature:

in a confusing and worrying situation, statements by writers are expected to serve as a cultural corrective ... these texts might help to capture in words that which has happened to order and clarify thoughts, suppress feelings of panic and instil in people some kind of hope for the future (p. 22).

However, following 3.11, Japanese fiction and non-fiction authors have generally expanded on criticisms of Japanese society voiced by left-wing environmentalists, rather than focusing on ‘suppress[ing] feelings of panic’. Authors have also expressed a more nuanced view of Japan’s future, compared to other public intellectuals.

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21 Kobayashi (2011) outlined his pro-nuclear armament view further in the last chapter of his *Gōmanizumu sengen special: Kokubōron* [Special manifesto of arrogant-ism: on national defense], *Genpatsu to kokubō* [Nuclear power plants and national defense] and *Gōsen dōjō: genpatsu wa yabai, kakubeiki wa anzen* [The school of arrogant-ism: nuclear power is dangerous, nuclear weapons are safe] (2012). Former Minister of Defence Ishiba Shigeru is an example of a politician who supported nuclear power precisely because of the technology’s potential to be used for the manufacturing of nuclear weapons. Ishiba stated in an interview with *News Post Seven* (5 October 2011) that having the potential to create nuclear weapons in a short amount of time would have a deterrent effect, should Japan come close to having a war.

Ogino Anna (2011), an Akutagawa prize-winning author, made positive and negative observations of post-disaster Japan in *Daishinsai: yoku to jingi* [The great earthquake: greed and honour]. Ogino (2011, pp. 55–56, 59) criticised the Japanese-style top-down organisation that she observed at the evacuation shelter, giving examples of supplies not being distributed efficiently (or sometimes, not at all) because official procedures could not be bypassed and dead bodies that were not removed as quickly as they could have been. Ogino (2011, pp. 237–240) explained these unfortunate events using her view of the Japanese national character: twenty-first-century Japanese are people who have stopped thinking or taking responsibility, living happily in a system that encourages obedience. She concluded that the Japanese tendency to be calm in the face of such disasters also has a negative side—this calmness comes from a blind, unquestioning trust towards authority. According to Ogino (2011, pp. 237–238), Japanese people do not take pride in their citizenship and are happy to obey as long as the economic conditions in their country are favourable to them. However, Ogino (2011, p. 201) also saw some hope for the future in the behaviour of certain individuals who took matters into their own hands in this time of emergency. For example, a high school principal decided to allow evacuees to find shelter at his school, even though his school was not a formally designated evacuation shelter. It is this kind of active, individual response that Ogino (2011, p. 240) saw as a force that moved Japan forward from the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

While Ogino believed that the Japanese, especially in the disaster-hit areas, needed to become more active citizens for reconstruction to occur, other authors questioned whether the Japanese can even be active participants in political discourse. For example, some have pointed out the tendency for the Japanese to jump to conclusions with regards to political affiliations, especially when it came to left-wing ideologies. Muroi Yuzuki (2013), author and Takahashi Gen'ichirō's ex-wife, condemned Japanese society in the 5 July 2013 issue of *Shūkan Asahi* for labelling any concerns about radiation levels as 'left-wing' and argued that not all Japanese citizens are cleanly divided between right-wing and left-wing politics. As *manga* artist and researcher Takekuma Kentarō (2011, p. 152) contended, in post-war Japan, being pro-nuclear has traditionally been associated with conservative politics, whereas being anti-nuclear is being a political dissident and a communist or an anarchist. Murakami Haruki

(2011) expressed a similar view, albeit in a more indirect way: ‘The label of “unrealistic dreamer” has been slapped on anyone who expresses reservations about nuclear power’ (n.p.).

This left-wing movement was also perceived to have become too extremist by some authors. Yōrō Takeshi, author of the best-seller *Baka no kabe* [The wall of fools], was one of the intellectuals who argued that the tendency to be polarised between extreme views is typical of the Japanese, quoted in a 2011 talk with Genyū Sōkyū, Akutagawa prize-winning author and Buddhist monk from Fukushima, which was published in *Voice*. He claimed that this stems from the fact that Japanese people are less interested in facts compared to Anglo-Saxon people, who wait for objective and scientific data to become available before reaching their conclusions. This leads to a situation in which participants in political debates choose their stance on a more emotional basis. In the same article, Genyū Sōkyū observed that since no scientific conclusion had been drawn on the health effects of low-level radiation, it was necessary for the Japanese to accept that they simply ‘don’t know’. He even labelled post-3.11 anti-nuclear activism as being ‘violent’. Conversely, Yōrō suggested that Japanese political structures encourage this kind of polarisation—residents in the areas surrounding nuclear power plants were able to receive the most amount of compensation when the votes ‘for’ constructing a nuclear power plant only exceed the votes ‘against’ by a small margin.

Odajima Takashi, an author and columnist, also raised alarm over this issue. Odajima (2012) drew parallels between the discourse on Fukushima and the discourse surrounding the Nanjing massacre, pointing out that in both cases, the two opposing forces refused to listen to each other, which caused discussion to become meaningless and further increased tensions. Additionally, this kind of attitude causes the topic to become shunned by the average citizen and only discussed by fanatics who fabricate facts to further their arguments. Like Yōrō, Odajima (2012) claims that this leads to a ‘typically Japanese’ lack of discussion of the truth of the matter, which becomes ‘massacred’. Odajima referred to a *Yūkan Fuji* article from nine days prior (14 March 2012) by ex-journalist Uesugi Takashi, which was widely criticised for claiming that ‘the cities of Fukushima and Kōriyama are uninhabitable’ (the two cities have an estimated population size of

287,365 and 332,176, respectively, as at 1 June 2019).<sup>22</sup> Uesugi's reasoning for this statement was that two journalists from the *Wall Street Journal* made this claim. However, it was later discovered that these journalists never made these comments and an erratum was published on *Yūkan Fuji* on 22 March.<sup>23</sup> Odajima (2012) argued that such fabrications of 'facts' directly hinder efforts to have a meaningful discussion on nuclear power.

The topic that has stirred up the most critical responses from Japanese authors is undoubtedly that of nuclear power. For example, Murakami Haruki, Ōe Kenzaburō and Karatani Kōjin—perhaps the three most internationally recognised public figures from the Japanese literary world—have all expressed their opposition to nuclear power in the wake of the disaster. These three men have been vocal on this issue on the global stage, which has had an important influence on Japan's post-3.11 image. Murakami Haruki famously commented on the disaster in his speech, 'Speaking as an Unrealistic Dreamer', delivered when he received the 23rd Premi Internacional Catalunya in Barcelona in 2011. In this speech, Murakami (2011) expressed hopes for Japan's reconstruction by linking the ability of the Japanese to deal with the frequent natural disasters to the idea of *mujō*—'a resigned worldview' and a perspective that 'all things must pass away'.<sup>24</sup> Murakami (2011) explained that this idea of *mujō* comes from the view that humans are simply renting space on this planet called Earth: 'It's not as if the earth came up and asked us, "Please come live here"'. This view, which has its roots in Buddhism, 'has been seared deeply into the Japanese spirit, forming a national mindset that has continued on almost without change since ancient times' (Murakami, 2011) and allows the Japanese people to rebuild their homes and carry on living after natural disasters. However, Murakami claimed that nuclear power does not belong in such a worldview because it is part of an intangible moral decay, a mindset of efficiency and convenience that 'cannot be so easily repaired'. This led to the author's conclusion that Japan should not possess nuclear power. Murakami (2011) strongly criticised the Japanese Government and the electricity companies that promoted nuclear power

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22 Data taken from official city council statistics: [www.city.fukushima.fukushima.jp/jouhouka-seisaku/shise/opendate/suikiejinnkou/h31suikiejinkou.html](http://www.city.fukushima.fukushima.jp/jouhouka-seisaku/shise/opendate/suikiejinnkou/h31suikiejinkou.html); [www.city.koriyama.lg.jp/soshikinogonai/seisakukaihatsubu/seisakukaihatsuka/gomu/2215.html](http://www.city.koriyama.lg.jp/soshikinogonai/seisakukaihatsubu/seisakukaihatsuka/gomu/2215.html).

23 The full details of the incident can be found here: [togetter.com/li/276770](http://togetter.com/li/276770).

24 Quotes are taken from the English translation, available at: [japanfocus.org/-Murakami-Haruki/3571](http://japanfocus.org/-Murakami-Haruki/3571).

in the interest of profitability and claimed that ‘the citizens of Japan will become really angry’ this time, even though ‘the Japanese are a people who tend not to get angry easily’.

At the same time, like Ogino and many other commentators, Murakami (2011) urged all citizens to accept responsibility—‘when it comes to rebuilding damaged morals and ethical standards, the responsibility falls on all our shoulders’. Because Japanese people have ‘a positive mind, a respect for things that have passed away and a quiet determination to go on living with vigor in this fragile world filled with dangers’ as evidenced by the idea of *mujō*, their task as Japanese citizens should have been to accept ‘collective responsibility for the many victims who perished at Hiroshima and Nagasaki’ by ‘[shouting] “no” to the atom’. Murakami (2011) thus included opposition to nuclear power as part of what it means to be Japanese. Further, Murakami outlined his vision for Japan as not only an anti-nuclear nation, but a world leader in non-nuclear energy sources. If Japan could ‘[combine] all our technological expertise, [mass] all our wisdom and know-how and [invest] all our social capital to develop effective energy sources to replace nuclear power’, it would be ‘a tremendous opportunity for us truly to contribute, as Japanese, to the world’ (Murakami, 2011). In an interview with Austrian journalist Judith Brandner, Murakami commented that the ‘strong and earnest’ nature of the Japanese people makes them particularly suitable for this monumental task:

Once national goals are set, everyone tries their best to achieve them. Once something is decided, everyone follows. If it is decided that nuclear power will be phased out, everyone will definitely work together to achieve this and happily reduce their energy consumption. It’s just that there is no one to make these decisions (in Kirishima, 2013, p. 32; trans. by author).

Murakami displays as much faith in Japanese national characteristics and technological prowess as those in the pro-nuclear camp, even though the disaster represents ‘the collapse of a myth, the belief in the power of technology that has been a source of pride to the Japanese for so many years’. The only difference is that Murakami focused on using this Japanese technological advantage for the development of alternative green

technologies,<sup>25</sup> whereas the pro-nuclear camp focused on developing a safer and greener way to produce nuclear energy, namely through the reprocessing of radioactive waste and the attainment of commercial nuclear fusion technology.

In a 2011 essay published in *The New Yorker* titled ‘History Repeats: Japan and Nuclear Power’, Ōe Kenzaburō also placed Fukushima on a continuum from Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as the hydrogen bomb testing at Bikini Atoll—three events that have come to represent the dangers of nuclear technology in recent Japanese history. Ōe (2011) described the use of nuclear power in Japan as ‘the worst possible betrayal of the memory of Hiroshima’s victims’ and expressed his hopes that Fukushima ‘will allow the Japanese to reconnect with the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to recognize the danger of nuclear power and to put an end to the illusion of the efficacy of deterrence that is advocated by nuclear powers’. Referring to Japan’s three non-nuclear principles—‘don’t possess, manufacture, or introduce into Japanese territory nuclear weapons’—Ōe suggested that both nuclear power and nuclear weapons do not belong in Japan. Although nuclear power and nuclear weapons are produced using different processes, authors such as Murakami and Ōe feel that Japan should embrace its identity as a completely nuclear-free nation and allow the legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to endure.

Karatani Kōjin (2011) was of a similar view to Murakami and Ōe, in observing that ‘the crisis at the Fukushima nuclear power plant cannot help but call forth memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki’ in his article on the US left-wing *CounterPunch* magazine on 24 March 2011. He suggested that the use of nuclear power in Japan was a result of ‘criminal deception on the part of industry and government’. However, Karatani (2011) also took the concept slightly further than Murakami and Ōe, urging Japan to undergo a ‘rebirth’ by abandoning capitalist economic development altogether—‘it is only then that people will, for the first time, truly be able to live’. This comes from a perspective held by Japanese citizens since before the disaster, that ‘acknowledges the reality and continuing prospect of low growth and that calls for the formation of a new economy and civil society’. This is similar to the observation made by political scientist

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25 This kind of discourse painting Japan’s new future as a world leader in green technologies is also observed outside the literary world. Examples include former US Vice President Walter F. Mondale (2012, p. 121) and US environmental analyst Lester R. Brown (2012, p. 167), who were both featured in the same *Kyodo News* publication.

Mikuriya Takashi (2011, p. 22), that the disaster will allow Japanese people to finally accept the ‘slow life’ (a Japanese term used in the same way as the ‘slow movement’ in English) philosophy, where importance is placed on whether citizens can live comfortably within Japan rather than the country’s position relative to the rest of the world. For Takashi (2011, p. 23), this also meant a society that embraces the rapid ageing of Japan’s population and respects the experiences and wisdom of the elderly, rather than viewing their existence as a problem. The argument for degrowth has even spread to the political world, proposed by former Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Edano Yukio as part of his ‘Edanomics’ policy (Satō & Kawaguchi, 2012) and is an important part of the analysis presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

## The End of ‘Cool Japan’?

The aforementioned three authors observed that the disaster revealed outdated post-war values in Japanese society, such as an obsession with economic growth fuelled by nuclear power and that this post-disaster period was a good opportunity to rethink these values. To borrow from Mikuriya Takashi’s (2011) book title, the ‘post-war’ period has ended and the ‘post-disaster’ period has begun. For Takashi (2011, p. 7), the disaster represented a shared national experience comparable to Japan’s defeat in WWII, which finally marked the beginning of a break from the post-war, post-economic miracle model. However, this post-war society, with its long period of uninterrupted peace and prosperity, gave birth to some of the most important cultural expressions in modern Japan—popular culture, namely that of *manga*, *anime* and *otaku* (here I am using the term *otaku* as a convenient way to refer to consumers of *manga* and *anime*; however, the term is much more complex in meaning, as examined in Chapter 5). Just nine days after the earthquake, academic and *otaku* researcher Morikawa Kaichirō (2011a, 2011b) tweeted that since ‘*otaku* culture had been built on the foundation of the stable yet suffocating everydayness’ of Japanese society,<sup>26</sup> the crisis of 3.11 may ‘cause cracks to form in this foundation’. He gave the simple example of the ubiquitous 24-hour convenience stores, which had been a symbol of this everlasting

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26 The idea of the ‘endless everyday’ was proposed by sociologist Miyadai Shinji in his 1995 book *Owari naki nichijō wo ikiro* [Living in ‘the endless everyday’]. Miyadai (1995) argued that it was this boredom that led to the rise of the Aum Shinrikyō cult in Japan.

‘everydayness’ and argued that such symbolism was likely to change following the experience of inconvenience during the disaster, which extended to rolling blackouts in the Kantō region.<sup>27</sup> Since Morikawa’s tweets, several *otaku* culture experts have expanded on the view that 3.11 represented a rupture from the everydayness of the post-war period, which may cause a fundamental shift in future Japanese cultural expressions.

Azuma Hiroki, known for his philosophical work on *otaku* culture, is an example of an author and a public intellectual whose recent work embodies this concern. Since 3.11, Azuma has published controversial works and philosophical essays as the editor of his *Shisō chizu beta* magazine, hosted debates on the Japanese video sharing website *Niconico* as part of the activities of his publishing company, *Genron*, and been the creator and proponent of the idea of turning the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into a ‘dark tourism’ destination. Referring to the tweets by Morikawa, Azuma (2011c) suggested that this sudden break in the everydayness caused by the disaster was likely to become a turning point for the culture of ‘Moe’ and ‘Cool Japan’.<sup>28</sup> Azuma (2012, p. 44) observed that the 1985 animation *Megazōn tsū surī* [Megazone 23] captured the essence of the foundation of pre-3.11 Japanese popular culture—the setting of this cult film is a simulated reality modelled on 1980s Tokyo, ‘when people were most happy’. Pre-3.11 mainstream Japanese popular culture had been focused on preserving this happiness, whether imagined or real, by avoiding the question of what it is to be Japanese in this day and age—what should be done about nuclear power, Okinawa, or the issue of intergenerational inequity, just to name a few examples. In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, Azuma (2012, pp. 43–45) viewed his role as helping to create a new mindset to create a new country, by assisting his readers to think about these issues.

Takekuma Kentarō (2011, p. 154) also predicted a shift in *otaku* culture in his article titled ‘The day the “endless everyday” ended’. In Kentarō’s (2011) view, pre-3.11 *otaku* was characterised by a cynical attitude to life and a reliance on apocalyptic fantasies to deal with the suffocating boredom of prosperous and seemingly endless ‘everyday’ (p. 155). Since the events of 3.11 exceeded this *otaku* imagination by their sheer scale

27 The rolling blackout (*keikaku teiden*) were a measure adopted by TEPCO from 14 March 2011, when electricity delivery was intentionally stopped for three-hour periods in selected regions (TEPCO, 2011).

28 ‘Cool Japan’ is a slogan used by the Japanese Government to promote the country as a cultural superpower.

and proximity, he believed that it was likely that future works with apocalyptic themes would not be able to compete with this reality. Kentarō (2011, p. 151) provided the example of his experience walking through the streets of Shinjuku on the day of the earthquake, when the ordinary and everyday scenery of the city co-existed with the extraordinary sight of the paralysis of transport systems and people spending the night on the streets. He claimed that this looked eerily similar to a scene from the 1993 anime film *Mobile Police PATLABOR 2*, in which men and women in business attire commute to work by walking past tanks parked on the street, in a city on full alert in preparation for a terrorist attack. He suggested that one of the preoccupations of the director of the film, Oshii Mamoru, was to portray the fear caused by our trusted everyday falling apart. Now that this has happened in reality, these apocalyptic portrayals may not appeal as much, or evoke as much fear in the Japanese audience, as they previously did.

The pendulum could also swing in the opposite direction for some, in which such apocalyptic portrayals remind them of the horrors of 3.11 and contribute to issues such as PTSD. Due to this, these apocalyptic works may be considered inappropriate and inconsiderate towards disaster victims (*fukinshin*; imprudent). Many pre-3.11 film, *anime* and *manga* works had their releases postponed or cancelled due to the disaster.<sup>29</sup> This also presented an issue for popular culture responses to subsequent disasters in Japan, such as the Kumamoto Earthquake in 2016. Following the Kumamoto Earthquake, there were many internet users (the so-called *fukinshinchū*, or ‘*fukinshin* maniacs’) who patrolled social media platforms for any mention of *anime* viewing (among other forms of consumption of entertainment) to label these activities as *fukinshin* during a time when many were still suffering. It has become increasingly difficult to publicly portray or consume the apocalyptic scenes typical of *seikaikei* anime and manga, such as *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, which formed the foundations of ‘Cool Japan’.<sup>30</sup>

29 Some examples of major films that had their releases postponed include Feng Xiaogang’s 2010 *Aftershock*, Alister Grierson’s 2011 *Sanctum* and Lucy Walker’s 2010 *Countdown to Zero*.

30 *Seikaikei* fiction consists of stories in which the romantic relationship between male protagonists and heroines are directly related to the fate of the entire world, usually a global crisis or an apocalypse (Azuma, 2007, p. 96). However, *Seikaikei* is not dead: *Kimi no na wa* [Your Name], a 2016 *anime* film explored in Chapter 4, is a post-3.11 example of an extremely popular *seikaikei* work.

Is *otaku* culture really so fragile that it can be destroyed by a seismic movement? And if so, should we make an effort to artificially preserve it? Art critic Sawaragi Noi claimed that the ‘post-war’ period was nothing more than a period of absence of major earthquakes, which allowed the safe development of *otaku* culture as well as Japan’s economic growth up to 1995 (Kurose, Sawaragi & Azuma, 2012, pp. 351–352). If Sawaragi’s theory is true, then it follows that *otaku* culture is in danger of extinction. The future of *otaku* culture seems bleak—even contemporary artist Murakami Takashi (2012, pp. 86, 88), whose lifework has been based around ‘communicat[ing] to foreigners the sensibility of the Japanese *otaku*’, believes that ‘the age of *otaku* has ended’.<sup>31</sup> However, contrary to his own comments, Murakami’s recent work shows new hope: *The 500 Arhats* (2012), which was exhibited in Doha, Qatar, seemed to be Takashi’s artistic statement that Japan was still capable of producing and exporting unique cultural products. As if to mark the beginning of a new cultural era, Takashi’s work focuses on a grand fusion between East and West—a departure from his traditional theme of post-war Japan–US relations and its influence on *otaku* culture (Takashi, 2012, p. 355). Whether post-3.11 *otaku* expression will be able to grow out of the formula of ‘creating something new out of imported American culture’, an active effort will be required if the prosperous and peaceful mindset of the *otaku* is to be preserved. In Takashi’s (2012, p. 98) words, *amae* [dependence]<sup>32</sup> can no longer be tolerated—*otaku* must also move beyond the traditional idea of amateurs offering art for free over the internet and begin aggressively marketing their work as professional art to survive.

If the *otaku* is seen to be incapable of nurturing their culture in the face of global competition and crises, the same may apply to the Japanese Government. It was only after American author Douglas McGray spelled out the potential of the country’s soft power in 2002 that the Japanese Government began officially promoting Japanese popular culture exports such as ‘idol’ music, *manga* and *anime*, under the ‘Cool Japan’ policy. This recent increased visibility of Japanese popular culture on the global stage, whether caused by government policy or not, may be partly responsible for the enormous amount of donations and support that

31 English references are taken from John Person’s translation at the end of *Shisō chizu beta*, vol. 3.

32 *Amae* is a term known for its difficulty of translating into English, which was explored extensively in Doi Takeo’s (1971) *Amae no kōzō* [The Anatomy of Dependence]. It was described by Doi (1971) as a uniquely Japanese desire to be liked by others, so that you can depend on them; much like the behaviour of children towards their parents.

poured into Japan from overseas following the earthquake. However, it is not certain what kind of long-term effects the disaster will have on this national brand. As Ian Condry and Yuiko Fujita (2011, p. 2) ask in their introduction to the ‘Cool Japan’ special issue of the *International Journal of Japanese Sociology*: ‘Does the idea of “Cool Japan” have a place in a post-3.11 world? ... In the wake of the “triple disaster,” could it be that Japan would go from *kakkoi* (cool) to *yabai* (dangerous)?’ Although *otaku* culture is alive and well following 3.11, it is noteworthy that so many well-known authors and *otaku* critics felt that the disaster would introduce a fundamental shift in these cultural expressions.

From the image of a Japan uniting its social and technological forces in the face of a disaster to rise again as a world superpower, to a Japanese system failing to cope with an un-Japanese technology or even a nation being punished for its capitalist sins, Japanese intellectuals and authors have portrayed post-3.11 Japan in various and often contradictory ways. Regardless of these contradictions, one thing is clear: disasters continue to be catalysts that stimulate debates on Japan. The Japanese viewed Fukushima as an opportunity to change or to reinforce and revisit values that were thought to be taken for granted in everyday life.

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