

INTRODUCTION

The Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan on 11 March 2011 (3.11) was an event of unforeseen proportions. A magnitude 9.0 earthquake was followed by 9.3-metre-high tsunami waves over the coast of north-eastern Japan, which claimed the lives of nearly 20,000 people and obliterated communities. The earthquake began at 2.46 pm, which meant that most children were at school and were guided to higher ground in anticipation of a tsunami. Over 240 children were orphaned as a result. Numerous medical and administrative institutions were destroyed when they were most needed and 160,000 people were forced to move to temporary shelters.¹ However, the disaster did not end there—nearly 700 aftershocks of magnitude 5 or greater were recorded within a year of 3.11 (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2012). Further, 3.11 developed into a triple disaster, with the subsequent meltdown of three nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, which caused 344,000 people to evacuate from the affected areas (Reconstruction Agency, 2012). Many continue to suffer, especially from the effects of the nuclear disaster, while the rest of the nation attempts to move on. There is no doubt that 3.11 has left a permanent scar on the lives of many—even if they did not lose their friends and loved ones, they lost their livelihood, their homes and their lifestyles.

In the foreign media, perhaps the most memorable images from the disaster were Japanese people calmly lining up to receive supplies or waiting for the public transport system to resume without any outward display of stress or anguish, despite the shock of the disaster. Perhaps they were the pictures of the widescale debris removal that was accomplished one year on, which has often been compared to the state of reconstruction in post-quake Haiti. These images reinforced age-old foreign stereotypes of

¹ All figures taken from Samuels (2013, p. 3).

the hardworking, resilient and orderly Japanese and were widely accepted by Western audiences. However, did the Japanese feel the same way? Some Japanese were inspired by these foreign images to live up to this ideal and restore their pride in a country that had been ageing and slowly dwindling in global economic and technological influence, while their Asian neighbours seemed to prosper. Conversely, many Japanese felt that this portrayal masked the real issues of the disaster: the ongoing nuclear disaster and radiation damage, the discrimination against Fukushima residents, fishermen and farmers that resulted from it, the socioeconomic gap between the disaster-hit northern areas versus Tokyo and the insularity and secrecy of the nuclear power industry.

For optimists, the disaster resulted in a *Nihon raisan*, or ‘Japan-praising’ boom, in which the Japanese consumed cultural products to regain confidence in their identity. Books containing positive portrayals of Japan experienced a surge in popularity. For example, a book that explained ‘why Japanese people are the most popular in the world’ by pro-royal family commentator Takeda Tsuneyasu was fortuitously published a few months before 3.11 and sold 47,000 copies. Takeda published two other books in the same vein and the series sold 81,000 copies in total (Oguni, 2013). Television programs featuring Japanophile foreigners gushing over the country and its culture became the norm. However, the fact that these cultural products were in high demand illustrated how much the triple disaster shook the Japanese to their core.

The Fukushima disaster and the response of the authorities forced many Japanese to question fundamental post-war Japanese values: the country’s heavy dependence on nuclear power, despite its history of being a victim of nuclear bombings and its status as a technologically advanced nation that achieved the economic miracle of the 1960s–1980s, despite having virtually no resources of its own. A desire to reconstruct Japanese identity rather than to praise it can be observed in the birth of an anti-nuclear environmentalist movement that blames the Japanese system for the ongoing nuclear incident. Those in this movement criticise the ‘typically Japanese’ lack of transparency on the part of authorities in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear disasters and their attempt to suppress dissenting voices through a uniting official discourse. Whether change comes in the form of reactionary nationalism or a reconsideration of post-war values, 3.11 may be a major historical turning point for Japan, akin to the Meiji Restoration of 1868 or the end of World War II (WWII). In David Pilling’s (2014) words:

It has become a cliché of Japanese scholarship that big external shocks have produced decisive changes in direction. The threat of being colonized in the nineteenth century led Japan to jettison feudalism almost overnight in the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Defeat in the Second World War caused it to pursue ‘greatness’ by economic, rather than military, means (p. 303).

If the Meiji Restoration was the catalyst for Japan’s economic and military development and the end of WWII led the country to abandon the latter and exclusively focus on the former, then the result of 3.11 could be considered to be a more complex mix, polarised between the complete abandonment of any ambition, as observed in the debates arguing for ‘degrowth’ in an ageing Japan, and, at the other extreme, enthusiastic support for a ‘re-militarised’ and stronger Japan, which has been encouraged by the policies of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō.

What can be relied upon to find new directions in such situations of national confusion? A major source of inspiration in Japan is literature; through their works, authors and intellectuals of the Meiji period prepared readers for a new Japan that accepted Western influence but still stood on its own two feet. They did this by introducing the West to Japanese readers through mass translations of foreign works and by endeavouring to create a new, modern Japanese literature using these influences. Similarly, contemporary Japanese writing offers a glimpse into potential forms that the country may take following the disaster. Despite the physical and emotional turmoil caused by the disaster, many Japanese authors chose to immediately respond to the disaster and its impact in their writing. Important works that reflect on future directions for the country have been published by some of Japan’s best-known authors, such as Kawakami Hiromi, Tawada Yōko and Takahashi Gen’ichirō.

These works provided a refreshingly different and imaginative way of representing Japan at a time when television programs repeated the same information on every channel day after day in their focus on the devastation of the disaster-hit areas. Many Japanese who did not have any direct experience of the disaster suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following 3.11 because they were constantly exposed to these shocking images in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. A study funded by the Japan Science and Technology Agency (Nishi et al., 2012) found that those who watched TV a month following the disaster for more than four hours a day were at significantly higher risk of developing PTSD. In this situation, in which the mainstream media were a constant

source of fear and suffering, cultural responses provided those who were ready with a more forward-looking way of re-imagining their country. It was often said following 3.11 that nuclear power experts lacked the imagination to foresee and prepare for large disasters and were only able to provide the excuse that such an event was *sôteigai* [unforeseeable; beyond imagination].² The freedom for imaginative visions in post-3.11 fiction allows it to contribute to the debate regarding how Japan should move forward from the disaster in ways that are not possible in factual discourse.

Following 3.11, literary critic Saitō Minako (2011) claimed that there was an attitude that authors should concentrate on purely literary activities and should not be influenced by the earthquake. She argued that this attitude was created by a group of influential Japanese literary figures, which she termed *bungaku mura* (literature village) for its similarity to *genshiryoku mura* (nuclear village, which refers to the lack of transparency and groupism in the Japanese nuclear energy industry). Published immediately following 3.11 on 27 April 2011, her article was a call for authors to pluck up their courage to stand up to the *bungaku mura* and express their 3.11 experiences through literature. Authors responded to this call, producing literary works and exploring the role and purpose of literature in post-3.11 society. For example, Tanikawa Shuntarō's (2012) poem, *Words*, which opens the 3.11 anthology *March Was Made of Yarn*, evokes the resilience and power of literary expression: 'Losing everything/ We even lost our words/But words did not break/Were not washed from the depths/Of our individual hearts' (Tanikawa, 2012, p. 7, trans. Jeffrey Angles). Meanwhile, other authors and poets sought to disseminate social messages through their words (e.g. Henmi Yō and Genyū Sōkyū), in their paper publications and online platforms.

These cultural responses went far beyond the scope of the kind of memoirs that are typically produced after a disaster. Unlike memoirs, which are typically written by direct victims of the disaster (although the concept of victim is difficult to define following a nuclear incident like 3.11),³ fictional responses to disaster are not always created by insiders. Most of the authors selected for this study did not experience the event in the most affected areas and responses were not limited to those by Japanese authors. There is a significant body of responses to the disaster in languages other

2 See Yanagida (2013, pp. 150–151).

3 See Chapter 1 in DiNitto (2019) for an in-depth exploration of who the 'victims' are in 3.11 and for nuclear disasters in general.

than Japanese, which is testament to the fact that, as a national and international disaster, 3.11 influenced not only how the Japanese view themselves (what I call ‘self-images’), but also how non-Japanese view the Japanese (I use the term ‘hetero-images’).

Due to the scale of the disaster and that the world was able to watch as it unfolded through extensive coverage on television and the internet, the response to 3.11 has been global. There were large-scale anti-nuclear protests in France and Germany and there was an overwhelming response from overseas governments in the form of donations and disaster relief operations, such as the US *Operation Tomodachi* and the Australian *Operation Pacific Assist*. Artists and authors worldwide organised charity publications, such as *March was Made of Yarn* (an anthology of 17 works, all written within three months from the quake by both Japanese and non-Japanese authors and published simultaneously in Japan, the UK and the US) and *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (a collection of various written pieces and artworks, including contributions from William Gibson and Ono Yōko). As Anderson (2012, p. 211) argued, ‘there is a growing sense that 3.11 was not an isolated incident ... people saw the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and thought about the natural disaster that would impact them in their respective countries’ (p. 211). Jimenez (2018) also noted that ‘the event has received attention on such a worldwide scale ... that it in fact constitutes a global trauma’ and that ‘the implications of the disaster itself ... also extend beyond the scale of the national and have influenced global public opinion to the extent that we cannot consider 3.11 to be isolable to Japan’ (p. 276).

Foreign interest in Japan has historically had a tendency to increase when the country enjoyed a relatively successful political and socioeconomic period or when it suffered through a crisis, which was the case for 3.11. Following 3.11, many foreign publications attempted to describe the country and capitalised on increased reader interest in Japan. Examples include British author David Pilling’s (2014) *Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival*, as well as French publications, such as *Japon: d’Hiroshima à Fukushima* [Japan: from Hiroshima to Fukushima] by Philippe Pons (2013) and *Atlas du Japon: après Fukushima, une société fragilisée* [An Atlas of Japan: After Fukushima, a Weakened Society] by Philippe Pelletier (2012). Cultures are often studied when they are going through crises because it is believed that emergency situations tend to reveal psychological and behavioural characteristics that do not otherwise surface in everyday life. In French historian Bloch’s (1961) words, ‘just

as the progress of a disease shows a doctor the secret life of a body, the progress of a great calamity yields valuable information about the nature of a society' (p. 152). Given that 'disasters unmask the nature of a society's social structure, including ties of resilience and kinship and other alliances' (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002, p. 9), it is natural that post-3.11 media attention on Japan has focused on these areas.

Disasters are also highly televised and broadcast occasions in which heightened foreign interest in the country leads to an increase in the circulation of national images, in which new images may be produced or existing ones reinforced. Moreover, many of these foreign images have made their way back into domestic discourse and influenced Japanese self-images. The present study examined post-3.11 texts written in English, French and Japanese, to gain an understanding of how they represented post-3.11 Japan. Below, I explain why English-language and French-language texts were important to analyse.

The disaster raised unusually high public interest in the US because some parts of the US were affected by the earthquake. For example, one man died after being swept out to sea in northern California, where 8.1-foot tsunami waves were observed and 6-foot waves reached the Hawaiian islands.⁴ A survey conducted in the US found that more than half of the population was following the story 'very closely' in the few days following the initial earthquake and the media devoted more than half of news coverage to the disaster on the first day (Pew Research Center, 2011).

A notable characteristic of US news stories regarding the earthquake in Japan was that there was high interest in the lack of 'looting' following the disaster, especially in comparison to the perceived breakdown of law and order in Haiti following the 2010 earthquake or New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina in 2005.⁵ American news media also reported extensively on the Fukushima nuclear incident. The US had reason to be interested, having the largest number of nuclear reactors in the world and a vivid memory of the Three Mile Island incident, as well as a long history of anti-nuclear activism. This was also evidenced by the press conference held by President Obama on 17 March 2011 (Bo, 2011, p. 53), following

4 'As U.S. damage measured, emergency declared in California counties' (2011).

5 See James and Goldman (2011) and Flax (2011). I use quotation marks for 'looting' here because it is debatable whether the act of taking bare necessities during a disaster situation can be classified as being illegal.

the multiple explosions at the Fukushima Daiichi power plant, which updated the American people on ‘what we’re doing to support American citizens and the safety of our own nuclear energy’.

Perhaps due to this heightened interest, English-language authors began to produce cultural responses to the disaster simultaneously to their Japanese counterparts. For example, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake*—a publication containing essays, artwork and photographs, by both Japanese and non-Japanese authors—was created within a week of the disaster through collaboration on Twitter. This was followed by responses by North American-based authors with extensive knowledge of Japanese culture, such as Ruth Ozeki, Gretel Ehrlich and Marie Mutsuki Mockett, whose works are explored in this book.

The main difference between US and French reporting on the triple disaster was that initial media stories in France were mostly focused on the nuclear incident and not the earthquake or the tsunami. This is not surprising, given that while the US has the largest number of nuclear reactors in the world, France has the highest dependence on nuclear power, with 75 per cent of its energy coming from 58 active nuclear power plants (Bo, 2011, p. 52). The French interest in the nuclear disasters was brought to the attention of the Japanese audience when satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné* notoriously published a cartoon by Cabu, which portrayed sumo wrestlers with extra limbs fighting in the 2020 Olympics, with the ruins of the Fukushima nuclear power plant in the background.⁶ Because of this high level of interest in the nuclear aspect of the disaster, French texts may provide a different perspective to English-language texts.

The French were also unique in their active cultural response to the disaster. Artists and authors in particular have been quick to respond. For example, Michaël Ferrier (2012) published his essay *Fukushima: Récit d'un désastre* [Fukushima: The tale of a disaster] and a collection of essays by Japanese authors translated into French, *L'Archipel des séismes* [The archipelago of earthquakes], was published in February 2012. Emmanuel Lepage, a comic artist known for his *Un printemps à Tchernobyl* [A spring in Chernobyl], produced his *Les Plaies de Fukushima* [The wounds of Fukushima] for the Winter 2013–2014 edition of *La Revue dessinée* [The illustrated review] and it was also French comic

6 ‘Japan to protest Fukushima-Olympics cartoons in French weekly’ (2013).

creators Jean-David Morvan and Sylvain Runberg who edited the volume *Magnitude 9—Des images pour le Japon* [Magnitude 9—images for Japan], which gathered 250 artworks by comic artists from all over the world in response to the disaster. Additionally, Japan was the guest country at the 2012 *Salon du Livre* in Paris, for the second time since 1997, with 21 authors (including Ōe Kenzaburō, Azuma Hiroki and Hagio Moto) invited from Japan.⁷ Takahashi Gen'ichirō's (2011a) *Koisuru genpatsu* [A nuclear reactor in love], one of the main works of 3.11 literature that is examined in Chapter 4, has been translated into French but not into English at the time of writing, which is a testament to the high level of cultural interest in the disaster from the French public.

As a manifestation of collective consciousness, these cultural responses to the disaster, which I have tentatively named '3.11 literature',⁸ provide useful insight into how Japan and the rest of the world responded to 3.11. These responses are rich sources of creative future visions for the country. However, if such a literary subgenre exists post-3.11, what are its boundaries? Should any text produced in the current Japanese post-disaster climate be treated as 3.11 literature? Does 3.11 literature need to explicitly mention 3.11? Is it possible for an author to completely ignore a mega-disaster like 3.11 and carry on writing in the same style, unaffected by the events? There are no clear answers to these questions—even if an author does not intend to write about the disaster, its influences can subconsciously creep into the text. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to decide whether to read any piece of writing as 3.11 literature. For example, it is possible to read influences of the disaster in Murakami Haruki's *Colourless Tsukuru Tazaki and His Years of Pilgrimage*, even though the novel itself makes no explicit mention of 3.11 because the events of the novel unfold between 1995 and 2011.⁹ There are also authors, such as Hirano Kei'ichirō (2013), who have publicly spoken about the disaster being an inspiration for their post-3.11 works, even though they do not directly explore the disaster.

7 The full list of authors is available in the 'Press release official announcement of Japanese authors', dated 18 January 2012, on the *Salon du Livre* website (www.salondulivreparis.com/GB/HomePro/Press/Press-Agency--Releases.htm).

8 Although the term *shinsai bungaku* [earthquake literature] has gained currency in Japan as a term to describe these works, which specifically represent the 3.11 disaster, the term '3.11 literature' is proposed in English for this literary subgenre, due to the potential association of the term 'earthquake literature', with an apocalyptic depiction of earthquakes designed for entertainment, in a similar way to 'disaster novels' or 'disaster film'. Further, 3.11 literature is not only about the earthquake, as the term *shinsai bungaku* would imply. Most of the works selected for this study also deal with the nuclear incident.

9 For an exploration of how writing introspective stories of individuals such as *Shikisai* is Murakami's way of engaging with society, see Suter (2016).

Defining this genre at this moment in time is made difficult by the fact that the genre still has the potential to develop in many different ways. However, 3.11 literature has been characterised by extremely efficient publication processes, rapid responses on the part of authors, as well as the use of new technologies. Some examples of this phenomenon that are covered in this study include Kawakami Hiromi's (2011) *Kamisama 2011*, which was published six months after 3.11, and the Twitter poetry of Wagō Ryōichi, who started writing and publishing his works online six days after the quake.

This book focuses on such early literary reactions to the disaster, by examining a corpus of texts published within a six-year period following 3.11, while keeping in mind that future responses to the disaster may be different to these immediate responses. The present work is not an exhaustive study of 3.11 literature, even within the time period examined.¹⁰ Instead, the selected texts are designed to provide a small sample of the wide range of texts available, from a variety of different genres.

This monograph examines imaginative responses to the 2011 triple disaster to gain an understanding of how authors, both in Japan and abroad, imagined the future of Japan in the aftermath of the disaster. By focusing on cultural responses, I bring to light the creative discourse surrounding the disaster, beyond hard facts and numbers. The texts analysed include two blockbuster films, *Shin Gojira* [*Shin Godzilla*] and *Kimi no na wa* [*Your Name*], which were released in 2016, Twitter poetry, manga and a wide range of novels and short stories, written by Japanese and non-Japanese authors.

It is important to note here that my approach to these responses is inspired by the imagological method, proposed by Leerksen (2007), who defined imagology as 'a critical study of national characterization' (p. 21) in literary texts (e.g. a study of how the Japanese were portrayed in American literature in the post-war period). Imagologists take as their starting point the presupposition that these characterisations are a valuable object of study in themselves and that it is not the imagologist's task to verify them. The imagologist does not focus on how 'true' these characterisations are, but rather on how they were formed and how they compare to characterisations in other texts (e.g. from different time periods, authors or cultures). In this book, I do not make any claims regarding real-life Japan and how it may or may not have changed following the triple disaster.

10 For a more comprehensive exploration of 3.11 literature, see Kimura (2013, 2018), who prefers to use the term *shinsaigo bungaku* (post-earthquake literature).

In talking about images of Japan, it is inevitable to touch upon the concept of *Nihonjinron* (discussions about the Japanese), which makes Japan a particularly interesting case for imagological study. Most scholars agree that *Nihonjinron* is the discourse within a corpus of literary texts that portrays Japanese identity as being homogenous, unique and static, such as Ruth Benedict's (1946) *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* or Ezra Vogel's (1979) *Japan as Number One*. *Nihonjinron* is produced by both Japanese and foreign writers and typically reiterates preconceived notions relating to the Japanese, such as harmony, sympathy and an emphasis on the group rather than the individual (portrayed as a positive or negative characteristic depending on the author) and attempts to find historical, geographical and even genetic explanations for how these national characteristics came about. *Nihonjinron* is also characterised by dichotomous comparisons with Western culture, in which the Japanese are said to be group-oriented and driven by shame, whereas Westerners are considered to be individualistic and driven by guilt. I refer to the concept of *Nihonjinron* occasionally because many of the future visions for the country that are explored in this book are based upon these preconceived images of the Japanese.

This book is divided into five parts. This first chapter has established the background for the literary analysis to follow by examining the post-3.11 discourse surrounding Japanese identity created by various authors and intellectuals. Chapters 2 to 5 present analyses of 3.11 literature, which are divided thematically. The first two chapters contain works by Japanese authors only. Chapter 2, 'Sustainable Japan', deals with how traditional values, especially with regards to relationships with nature, were brought to the forefront by authors in the vision for a new Japan, whereas Chapter 3, 'Oppressive Japan', examines the ways in which authors imagined a potential future Japan that was lacking in intellectual freedom. The last three chapters contain a mix of both Japanese and non-Japanese authors and film-makers. Chapter 4, 'Heterogenous Japan', examines the disaster as a catalyst for destroying the myth of a homogenous Japan and explores the future of rural Japan. Chapter 5, '(Still) Cool Japan', focuses on those responses that portrayed the continuing appeal of the Japanese brand on the global stage. Chapter 6, 'Exotic Japan', considers the writings of foreign authors, who focused on Japan's exotic beauty as the unwavering core of its culture, although with some unexpected twists. What is clear from the large variety of images produced is that the Fukushima disaster was an opportunity for many to reimagine Japan, for reasons that I clarify in the next chapter.

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