

# Eco-psychological Analysis of Literary Descriptions of Catastrophe.

The case of the Fukushima  
tragedy in *2:46 aftershocks*,  
*stories of Japan earthquake*

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History of psychoanalysis in Japan and its cultural applicability

When we mention the term “psychoanalysis”, the first person that comes to mind is apparently Sigmund Freud and its clinical or medical applications. Conceivably few people would associate psychoanalysis with culture or literary fields. However, for a better integration of psychoanalysis and literature, by 1907, Freud was already expanding the area of psychoanalytic literary criticism that he had begun in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) with his investigation of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* (425 B.C.) and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1603) for their oedipal aspects and the effects the plays had on their audiences. Robert N. Mollinger<sup>1</sup> in his book *Psychoanalysis and Literature: An introduction* (1981) argued “Creative Writers and Day-dreaming,” contained Freud’s first theory on the structure of the literary work and began the psychoanalytic enquiry into what literature is.

<sup>1</sup> Robert N Mollinger, *Psychoanalysis and Literature* (Burnham Incorporated Pub, 1981).

Besides, shifting our perspective from Europe to Asia, Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent suggested in their monograph<sup>2</sup> that utilizing psychoanalytical perspectives can lead to advantageous and captivating discoveries while studying Japan within the Western Japan studies framework. Additionally, they argued the psychoanalytic approach requires self-reflection that forms an essential part of the analysis. And this self-reflective dimension of psychoanalytic interpretation bears considerable significance for scholars whose focus lies in Japanese studies. According to *Perversion and Modern Japan: Psychoanalysis, Literature and Culture* (2010), psychoanalysis was introduced to Japan in 1912 through a series of articles, which emerged just seventeen years after Freud introduced the term “psychoanalysis” to describe his method of psychological interpretation. In the following year, Morooka Son, a psychiatrist, published three articles in the literary journal *Eniguma*. One of these articles, “Concerning the volume of Nowaki of the *Tale of Genji*,” utilized Freudian theory to interpret *The Tale of Genji*, a classic piece of Japanese literature.

Morooka’s introduction of psychoanalysis as an analytic methodology with intrinsic theoretical worth, rather than solely as a medical or psychological therapy for treating neuroses, contrasts starkly with the history of psychoanalysis’ reception in the United States, where its medicalization stripped it of its broader cultural applicability. Conversely, in Japan, four men, specifically Marui Kiyoyasu, Kosawa Heisaku, Ohtsuki Kenji, and Yabe Yaekichi, three of whom studied abroad with Freud’s followers, made Japanese translations of Freud’s writings available, with some even receiving Freud’s enthusiastic endorsement of their endeavors. However, it was an arduous task to spearhead a psychoanalytic movement in Japan, as it was widely disparaged as irrational and insufficiently scientific, while culturalist theories of Japanese uniqueness critiqued psychoanalysis from the opposite perspective, claiming it needed to be nuanced by Buddhism or other Eastern sensibilities to suit Japanese temperament. For instance, Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent<sup>3</sup> indicated that Morita Masatake believed that Zen Buddhism is the basis of a “Japanese” therapy. Later, Doi Takeo emphasized the necessity of adapting psychoanalysis to suit the model of “indulgence” (*amae*) in Japanese culture. Kosawa, who was a strong supporter of the Freudian psychoanalytic movement, coined the term “Ajase Complex” to diminish the significance of the Oedipal Complex in Japan and give more importance to the relationship with the mother. Interestingly, Kosawa drew inspiration from Buddhist legend to explain the origins of the Ajase Complex<sup>4</sup>, which primarily depicts Ajase’s enduring attachment to his mother, from initially harboring hostility towards her to eventually developing an endless emotional dependence on her. It is similar to how Freud used Greek mythology to describe the Oedipal Complex. This implies psychoanalysis is closely associated with literary narratives.

In 1953, James Clark Moloney<sup>5</sup>, an American psychoanalyst, authored a scathing article criticizing Japanese psychoanalysis. He argued that unlike occidental psychoanalysis which aims to liberate the individual, the concept of individual freedom is not present in Japan. Moloney’s remarks implied that psychoanalysis may not be suitable for implementation in Japan. However, it is crucial to evaluate the practicality of psychoanalysis by taking into account Japan’s position as a recipient.

<sup>2</sup> Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent, *Perversion and Modern Japan* (Routledge, 2010), 1–2.

<sup>3</sup> Nina Cornyetz and J. Keith Vincent, *Perversion and Modern Japan* (Routledge, 2010), 5–6

<sup>4</sup> Keigo Okonogi, “Japanese Psychoanalysis and the Ajase Complex (Kosawa),” *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 31, no. 1–4 (1979): 350–56.

<sup>5</sup> Moloney Jc, “Understanding the Paradox of Japanese Psychoanalysis,” *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 34, no. 4 (1953): 291–303.

This means that we must adapt a foreign culture and infuse it with a distinctly “Japanese” essence. When discussing “Japanese culture,” it is important to acknowledge the influence of Chinese culture, which Japan absorbed during the Heian period and through its interaction with the Tang Dynasty. As a result, Japan has a fundamental connection to “Chinese culture” that is expressed through its language, architecture, artworks, literature, and religion. On the other hand, Following the Meiji Restoration that occurred in 1868, the nation was confronted with the decline of China’s national power and the ascent of Western countries, leading Japan to reevaluate its cultural standing in Asia. Japan initiated a cultural assimilation of Western values, which gradually became integrated into Japanese culture. As a consequence, present-day “Japanese culture” is perceived as a composite of both Eastern and Western cultural elements. This amalgamation provides insight into the absence of individual freedom within the psychoanalytic context of Japan. In other words, Japan, which once advocated for the slogan of “*Datsua Nyuo* (breaking away from Asia and joining Europe)” at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, still cannot shake off the core of traditional collectivism in East Asian culture. In this collectivist society, the Japanese people prioritize the individual’s role within the group and emphasize a strong hierarchy. As a result, individuals may frequently experience feelings of inferiority. It can be said that Adler’s individual psychology is a more accurate reflection of the cultural acceptance in modern Japan compared to the psychology of Jung and Freud. This can also explain why the widespread popularity of the book *The Courage to be Disliked* (2019) written by Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga<sup>6</sup> in Japan as a social phenomenon.

According to J. Carlson and M. Englar-Carlson<sup>7</sup> in their volume *Adlerian Psychotherapy* (2017), the introduction elaborated that Adler’s theories appear to have endured, and they are key components of most current approaches to psychotherapy. For instance, in order to help people reach their full potential, Adler engaged in cutting-edge research on a variety of topics, including his belief in the equality of all people, encouragement, the pursuit of what is good or right, an emphasis on relationships and mental health, the idea of social interest, and the necessity of taking cultural and contextual considerations into account. Adler envisioned a psychology of growth, where people could strive to overcome low self-esteem and actually change their lives. Moreover, Adlerians are concerned with holism and how each individual goes through life, recognizing that one cannot comprehend an individual by examining their components, but that all elements of the person must be understood in relation to the overall pattern and in relation to social systems. In other words, Adler stressed the significance of connections and being linked to others, especially the greater community in which individuals live. People are considered as always attempting to belong and fit into the social surroundings. The outside world molds their awareness, as does the world of the family. The emphasis on social interest, or a sense of belonging to and contributing in the common good, is a hallmark of Adlerian thinking.

## Development of ecocriticism in Japan and harmony with nature

Since the start of the 21st century, the study of literature with an environmental focus has become highly comparative. It is no longer limited to just Britain and the United States. Ecocriticism now

<sup>6</sup> Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Jon Carlson and Matt Englar-Carlson, *Adlerian Psychotherapy* (American Psychological Association, 2017), 3–9.

encompasses research on the literature and cultures of numerous countries. Meanwhile, scholars from various institutions around the world are actively involved in this field of study. For instance, Ursula K. Heise<sup>8</sup> mentioned in the book *Ecocriticism in Japan* (2018) that German ecocriticism originated from Germanist scholars who were based in England and the United States. It later gained interest from Americanists in Germany before spreading to German departments within Germany itself. Furthermore, As Yuki Masami<sup>9</sup> has highlighted, the development of ecocriticism in Japan can be divided into three stages: the first phase focusing on translation, the second stage introducing comparative approaches, and the third involving ecocritical interventions in Japanese literature, where Americanists and Japanologists have played significant roles at different times over the past two decades. In the introduction part of volume *Ecocriticism in Japan* (2018), Yuki Masami stated that the earliest scholarly attempt to define Japanese ecocriticism is most likely the joint essay by David Bialock and Ursula Heise. They identify three themes as characteristic of Japanese ecocriticism: perceived harmony with nature, response to major environmental crisis, and attention to “slow” injustice, which is an important milestone in defining Japanese ecocriticism.

The expansion of ecocriticism on a global scale has prompted the examination of how environmental issues, noteworthy events, and approaches studied by ecocritics vary across different regions, countries, and languages. Karen Thornber<sup>10</sup>, a scholar specializing in Japan studies, has put forth the viewpoint that global crises like climate change, ocean acidification, and biodiversity loss are increasingly reducing the importance of regional and national distinctions. Especially, the two most prominent environmental catastrophes in Japan are the Minamata Bay mercury poisoning caused by the Chisso Corporation from the 1940s to the 1960s and the Great Tōhoku Earthquake in 2011, which resulted in devastating technological failures and nuclear radiation. These large-scale environmental accidents and disasters have deeply impacted the cultural imagination of the nation. It is worth noting that Bialock and Heise<sup>11</sup> recognized the perspective that the idea of being in harmony with nature is more of a cultural and ideological construct rather than an actual practice. They also believe that this perceived harmony is not solely rooted in Japanese culture, but is also influenced by the enduring fascination that Westerners have with Japan. As a result, this perception of harmony can sometimes be contradictory to the social reality in Japan. Thus, we can deduce that the term *kyōsei* employed in the Japanese language signifies not just the harmony with nature itself, but also the alignment with the surrounding components of the human-created living environment. In other words, in Japan, there is a strong belief in the concept of harmony, which is seen as a distinct cultural characteristic. Nakazawa Shinichi<sup>12</sup>, a prominent anthropologist and thinker, emphasized this Japanese view of harmony in contrast to the Western perspective that focuses on conquering nature. Nakazawa’s argument is rooted in his deep understanding of Buddhism, and he explored how the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature has influenced the unique mindset and attitude found in Japanese culture.

<sup>8</sup> Hisaaki Wake, Keijirō Suga, and Masami Yūki, *Ecocriticism in Japan* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> Yuki Masami, *The Oxford Handbook of Ecocriticism*, ed. Greg Garrard (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 519–26.

<sup>10</sup> Karen Laura Thornber, *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures* (Ann Arbor: University Of Michigan Press, 2012).

<sup>11</sup> Hisaaki Wake, Keijirō Suga, and Masami Yūki, *Ecocriticism in Japan* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2018). 4

<sup>12</sup> Nakazawa, Shinichi. “Futatsu no ‘shizen’” [Dual nature]. *Gendai shiso* 43. no.1 (2015): 35–41.

## The intersection between psychoanalysis and ecocriticism

Sigmund Freud gave a well-known series of lectures titled “The Psychopathology of Everyday Life” in 1901. His goal was to introduce the public to the nascent and somewhat enigmatic discipline of psychoanalysis. Likewise, a comparable series of lectures today may be inspired by findings on ozone depletion, toxic waste, and the greenhouse effect. These shared environmental issues have evolved into the psychopathology of our daily lives. They show a state of the soul that Freud would not have named. Theodore Roszak<sup>13</sup> mentioned in the preface of *The voice of the Earth* (2001) that we have learnt a sobering lesson in the century since psychology was officially recognized as a branch of medical research. The human values that bind us to one another in society, involving honor, decency, and compassion, are not generally the same virtues that bind us companionably to the species we share the Earth with. The agony of what Theodore Roszak terms the “ecological unconscious” has risen in our time as a deeper imbalance.

Many terms these days have the prefix “eco” attached to them. Eco-politics, eco-philosophy, eco-feminism, and eco-consumerism are all topics of discussion. This small, unique, and specialized flag floats over our language as a sign of the times, intended to signify our tardy concern about the destiny of the earth. Therefore, the perspective of ecopsychology seeks to reconcile our culture’s long-standing, historical divide between the psychological and the ecological and to understand the demands of both the world and the individual as a continuum. According to Theodore Roszak<sup>14</sup>, Previously, all “psychologies” were “ecopsychologies.” Those who attempted to cure the soul assumed that human nature is intimately connected to the universe we share with animals, plants, minerals, and all the invisible forces of the cosmos. It is particularly contemporary Western psychology that has separated the “inner” life from the “outside” world, as if what was inside of us was something real, important, and inextricably linked to our study of the natural world. We shall attempt to bridge the gap between the two worlds of existence—huge and small, lofty and negligible, outward and inward. Theodore Roszak believed that such a rational and emotional conversation would develop along the ecological line, and he discussed and reviewed two significant concepts mentioned in his work: the Anthropoc principle and the Gaia hypothesis<sup>15</sup>. From the perspective of ecopsychology, we must confront the larger implications of the universe’s organized and developing complexity sooner or later. It is possible that the underlying systems of nature, from which our psychology, culture, and science eventually arise.

Therefore, in this paper, we explore and examine Japanese literary works through the lens of Adlerian psychology, with the Great East Japan Earthquake serving as a societal backdrop. Meanwhile, combining with environmental issues, we intend to uncover the diverse possibilities of the eco-psychological aspect of contemporary writing within the realm of world literature.

<sup>13</sup>Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology; with a New Afterword* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Phanes Press, Cop, 2001).

<sup>14</sup>Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology; with a New Afterword* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Phanes Press, Cop, 2001).

<sup>15</sup>Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth: An Exploration of Ecopsychology; with a New Afterword* (Grand Rapids, Mi: Phanes Press, Cop, 2001), 17.

## Japan's response to the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster through literature

It has been over a decade since March 11, 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster occurred in Japan's Tohoku region. Even now, the vivid memories of the disaster and the emotional accounts of its consequences continue to be deeply ingrained in the collective cultural awareness of people in Japan. The combination of the earthquake, tsunami, and meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, commonly known as the 'triple disaster' or '3.11', has resulted in significant and enduring impacts. The events of 3.11 brought nuclear power and its associated concerns into even greater focus. For instance, the challenges related to decontaminating areas exposed to radiation are still unresolved. According to McCurry<sup>16</sup> stated in the Guardian, over 40,000 Fukushima refugees remain unable to return to their homes as of 2022. Furthermore, the nuclear power plant is expected to release over a million tons of contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean once the tanks reach their maximum capacity in summer or autumn 2023<sup>17</sup>. This will have severe impacts on the local fisheries, agriculture, and the surrounding environment.

The triple disaster has not only had a significant effect on Japan, but it has also had a profound influence on Japanese literature, art, and film. Literature produced in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster focuses on maintaining the ongoing dimensions and global implications of the event as central topics in public and scholarly discussions. Over the past decade, the literary community has gradually created works that respond to the catastrophic series of events. However, Linda Flores and Barbara Geihorn<sup>18</sup> claimed in their edited volume that some authors have felt a strong urge to write, but often faced the challenge of not knowing the most effective way to address a crisis of such magnitude. These reactions bear similarities to those of authors of *genbaku bungaku* (atomic bomb literature) who grappled with the unprecedented experience of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. For numerous authors, the occurrence of 3.11 marked a momentous shift; the sequence of catastrophic incidents announced a fresh age, a post-3.11 existence that indicated, primarily, essential changes in the structure of society after 'that day' (*ano hi*), as March 11, 2011, is often mentioned in both the media and the arts. Tragedies offer the opportunity for renewal and progress.

Various cultural and creative influencers have contributed to political and intellectual conversations about tragedy. Literature, in particular, has played a significant role in this context. Following the events of 3.11, many writers felt compelled to write about the process of recovery. They describe how the Japanese people mourn, cope with the tragedy, and confront the challenges that have been exposed after years of being hidden beneath society's surface. Mentioned by Jordi Serrano-Muñoz<sup>19</sup> in his article that there is a wide range of literary works that explore the disaster, including poetry, short stories, novels, and creative essays. We can view the literature of 3.11 as a way

<sup>16</sup>Justin McCurry, "Japan Marks 10 Years since Triple Disaster Killed 18,500 People," The Guardian, March 11, 2021, sec. World news.

<sup>17</sup>"IAEA Finds Japan's Plans to Release Treated Water into the Sea at Fukushima Consistent with International Safety Standards," [www.iaea.org](http://www.iaea.org), July 4, 2023.

<sup>18</sup>Linda Flores and Barbara Geihorn, *Literature after Fukushima* (Taylor & Francis, 2023), 2–3.

<sup>19</sup>Jordi Serrano-Muñoz, "Reading after the Disaster: Japan's Reaction to the 3/11 Events through Literature," *Association for Asian Studies*, 2019.

to comprehend a society that may be at a pivotal moment in its history. For example, Novelist Furukawa Hideo<sup>20</sup>, a native of Tōhoku, penned the short story “Horses, Horses, Despite Everything the Light Is Still Pure” in the aftermath of the disaster. Rather than seeking refuge in shelters or leaving the evacuation zone, Furukawa and a companion chose to go against the flow of displaced individuals and documented their expedition through the ravaged region. Wagō Ryōchi<sup>21</sup>, another resident of Fukushima, chronicled his thoughts and experiences in a poetic manner through his Twitter account in the immediate aftermath of the events. His posts garnered a significant following and he eventually published his writings under the title “Pebbles of Poetry.” In 1993, Kawakami Hiromi<sup>22</sup> authored a short story titled “Kamisama.” This story revolves around a highly courteous and traditional bear who relocates to an apartment neighboring the protagonist. In light of the Fukushima incident, she chose to revisit this story and created “Kamisama 2011.” In this revised version, she delves deeper into the difficulties and outcomes of seclusion for both individuals and communities, with a specific emphasis on those impacted by the catastrophe.

The triple disaster in Fukushima was exceptional, but it’s crucial to understand that it occurred in the broader global context of our world, which is prone to disasters. According to the introduction part of the book *Literature after Fukushima* (2023), Kimura Saeko and Anne Bayard-Sakai’s collaborative collection of essays titled *Post-disaster Fiction as World Literature*<sup>23</sup> (2021) demonstrates the international scope of research on literary works inspired by the events of 3.11, positioning it within the broader context of world literature. That is to say the events of 3.11 not only sparked creativity in the arts, but also led to the emergence of new terminology and new perspectives on the world after 3.11. Literature after the Fukushima disaster serves as evidence of this significant shift, indicating how the aftermath of the disaster has reshaped social reality and discourse in several fields, such as trauma studies, disaster studies, ecocriticism, regional identity, food safety, and civil society.

## The reception of 2:46 aftershocks, stories of Japan earthquake (2011)

*2:46 Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake*<sup>24</sup> (2011) is an anthology written by bloggers as well as a few famous people, including Yoko Ono and William Gibson, that encompasses reflections, personal accounts, artwork, and short stories from renowned and unknown artists, whether they are Japanese or not, and whether they are situated near or far from Fukushima.

The book titled “2:46” is named after the exact time when the earthquake occurred. Furthermore, the accounts in the book are real-time narratives that offer small reflections. These reflections serve to highlight the realization of human insignificance in the face of natural disasters. While we may feel powerless, it is crucial that we do not lose hope. Those who have experienced such extreme events often describe it as a rebirth, similar to the phoenix’s nirvana, where the

<sup>20</sup>Hideo Furukawa, *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure a Tale That Begins with Fukushima* (Columbia University Press, 2016).

<sup>21</sup>Ryōichi Wagō, “Pebbles of Poetry: The Tōhoku Earthquake and Tsunami--,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, July 19, 2011

<sup>22</sup>Hiromi Kawakami, “God Bless You, 2011,” *Granta*, March 20, 2012.

<sup>23</sup>Saeko Kimura, and Anne Bayard-Sakai, *Sekai bungaku toshite no ‘shinsaigo bungaku’* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2021).

<sup>24</sup>Patrick Sherriff, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011).

focus shifts from suffering to a renewed sense of hope. The collection provides insight into how people were affected both during and after the events of that fateful Friday afternoon in March.

Jake Adelstein<sup>25</sup> once mentioned in his review of this book that a British teacher who blogs under the name Our Man in Abiko was searching for a way to assist the survivors of the Great Tōhoku Pacific Earthquake and Tsunami and overcome his own feeling of helplessness. Eventually, while washing up one evening a week after the earthquake, he had an idea. The British teacher realized that although he lacked medical skills or the ability to fly a helicopter, he had the ability to edit. He decided to compile a book featuring voices from various individuals. He said, “I am utilizing my editing skills to contribute in any way I can.” Another novelist Barry Eisler<sup>26</sup>, one of the contributors to the book, authored the foreword section. According to his account, when he arrived in Tokyo in 1992, his initial impression of the city was that it was metropolitan. He struggled to articulate his affection for Tokyo while also recognizing that its rapid development had caused it to be cruelly impersonal. However, following the 3.11 disaster, the collective aid and solidarity among the city’s inhabitants became an oasis in the desert, enabling him to witness and experience the innate compassion of humanity.

## Application of Adlerian psychology and the ecocriticism in Anthology

Human’s powerlessness in the presence of nature

At 2:46 pm, on March 11, 2011, a powerful earthquake with a magnitude 9.0 struck the northeast coast of Japan. This devastating event resulted in a tsunami that claimed the lives of over 18,000 individuals<sup>27</sup> and also led to a nuclear meltdown in Fukushima. Simultaneously, the shocking calamity also profoundly impacted the adjacent community. Numerous individuals residing in regions impacted by the seismic event were compelled to make the decision to relocate to more secure areas. Experiencing anguish, apprehension, and a feeling of helplessness in the presence of formidable natural forces, many residents chose to temporarily avoid and depart from the affected areas. Throughout the short story *forget* written by Michiko Segawa in the book, we encounter depictions as the following:

Every time we face a horrible natural disaster, it makes me think that the land, sky, seas, and mountains are exploding in anger. Tsunamis swallowed houses, cars, electric poles, schools, buildings, parents, grandparents, and children so quickly. More than ten thousand people’s lives were taken. Can’t the super technologies we created in this modern world prevent a disaster?<sup>28</sup>

Countless lives have been tragically taken by the devastating forces of earthquake and tsunami. Humankind’s once firm belief that “man can conquer nature” has been shattered in the face of these natural disasters. Despite our efforts to harness advanced technology, such as nuclear power plants, in an attempt to control nature and benefit humanity, we are sometimes confronted with outcomes that surpass our imagination. Our pursuit of dominance

<sup>25</sup>Jack Adelstein, “#2:46 Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake Published. Give a Little, Learn a Lot, Help Some People.,” Japan Subculture Research Center, April 12, 2011.

<sup>26</sup>Barry Eisler, “#2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake,” Truthout, April 22, 2011.

<sup>27</sup>Justin McCurry, “Japan Marks 10 Years since Triple Disaster Killed 18,500 People,” the Guardian, March 11, 2021.

<sup>28</sup>Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 68-69

over nature can sometimes be seen as a manifestation of our own feelings of inferiority. More often than that, we find ourselves powerless and humbled by the overwhelming power of nature. Alfred Adler and Colin Brett mentioned in their monograph that the feeling of superiority is the opposite of feeling inferior and the two are closely connected. It is not surprising to find a hidden motion of inferiority in individuals who exhibit a superiority complex<sup>29</sup>. Hence, through the establishment of human civilization and our desire to demonstrate our remarkable achievements and superiority over nature, we have inadvertently demonstrated that we still possess an underlying sense of inadequacy when confronted with the forces of nature.

On the other hand, we cannot discount the role of catastrophic description and aftershock in the work. In the stories *evacuated* and *help* written by Takanori Hayao and Shizue Nonaka, we encounter a narrative where numerous residents who were directly impacted by the earthquake catastrophe sought to flee the areas that were severely affected. However, they were confronted with the unexpected disruption and destruction of communication systems and public transportation, which they had previously taken for granted. This sudden realization came as a major surprise to them and left them feeling shocked.

When the first explosion happened at the Fukushima Plant, we decided to leave within a week at the most while monitoring the situation. However, Sendai is in complete isolation, with no prospect of reinstatement of the train service at Sendai Station, the airport is completely destroyed, and access to highways is restricted to emergency vehicles only.<sup>30</sup>

I switched the TV on to find out what was happening. There were lots of aftershocks and a second big one. I was so scared and didn't know what to do. I rang and rang and tried to email, but didn't work for some time.<sup>31</sup>

It becomes apparent that the aforementioned descriptions appear to be disconnected from everyday experiences and leave us feeling amazed. Rita Felski<sup>32</sup> advocated for this literature of shock slips through our frameworks of legitimation and resists our most heartfelt values. She even argued that when experiencing shock, it can lead to a noticeable absence of emotion, creating a state of numbness or blankness that is often discussed by trauma theorists. Shock represents a sudden and forceful collision or encounter. It forcefully enters consciousness and challenges the reader's or viewer's defenses. Meanwhile, like a blunt instrument, it enters the mind and disrupts our usual ways of organizing and comprehending the world. Thus, in the context of this case, the portrayal of shock serves as a catalyst for illustrating the devastating events caused by nature. It leads us to reflect on our respect for the natural world and also prompts us to reconsider the dynamic between humans and nature.

<sup>29</sup>Alfred Adler and Colin Brett, *Understanding Life* (Center City, Minn.: Hazelden, 1998), 32-33

<sup>30</sup>Patrick Sherriff, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 52-53

<sup>31</sup>Patrick Sherriff, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 84

<sup>32</sup>Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 110-113

Embrace the reality, confront the disaster with composure and courage

In response to the unforeseen catastrophe, certain individuals made the decision to promptly evacuate the hazardous area in order to mitigate the potential threat of subsequent events such as aftershocks and tsunamis. Conversely, a significant number of Tohoku residents opted to remain in their respective hometowns and demonstrate their unwavering support. The remarkable poise and serenity exhibited in their reaction to the catastrophe were truly astounding, as if they were prepared to confront it head-on and adapt to its presence. The account in story *care* written by Yuki Watanabe as following provides evidence of this.

When people living towards the coast were confronted with the threat of radiation, the whole town decided to evacuate without waiting for government instructions. Nobody in my hometown will evacuate. Why? What's more, they took in people evacuating from the town next door, so now they feel they can't evacuate themselves and leave those people behind.

People of the Tohoku region are stoic, compassionate, calm and humble. They have always just dealt with the situation without complaining. Of course, they have questions and fears, but they hesitate to show them as they know other people are experiencing far worse.<sup>33</sup>

When a calamity occurs, the individuals in the Tohoku region do not voice their grievances, but rather embrace the reality and display resilience and fortitude. They are even willing to forgo their own comfort to assist refugees from nearby regions. This demonstrates immense bravery and an optimistic outlook on life. Ichiro Kishimi and Fumitake Koga<sup>34</sup> emphasized in their best-seller that in Adlerian psychology, trauma is completely dismissed, which was pointed out as a groundbreaking and revolutionary idea. The perspective on trauma in Freudian psychology is certainly intriguing. Freud believed that a person's psychological wounds (traumas) are responsible for their current unhappiness. However, Adler, in opposition to the concept of trauma, asserts no experience in itself is the cause of our success or failure. We do not suffer from the impact of our experiences, also known as trauma, but rather we shape them to serve our own purposes. Our experiences do not determine us, but the meaning we ascribe to them is what determines our actions. In other words, Adler highlights that our self is not solely shaped by our experiences, but rather by the meaning we give them. Traumatic events and difficult experiences like disaster can influence our personality, but they do not have ultimate control over our lives. Therefore, for those individuals in the Tohoku region who have shown resilience and who have courageously accepted the harsh reality of the disaster, they are now contemplating strategies to utilize it as an opportunity to help others in their community. Instead of dwelling on what they have lost, they are directing their attention towards how they can bring about positive changes within their own capacities. They are absorbing the profound impact of the extreme experience, all while holding onto a firm belief in facing challenges with sincerity and composure.

The "living in the present moment and starting from now" lifestyle in Adlerian psychology is similar to the Stoic school of philosophy in Western philosophy. In the book *Reasons Not to*

<sup>33</sup>Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 17-18

<sup>34</sup>Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 11-14

*Worry: How to be a Stoic in chaotic times* (2022), the author Brigid Delaney<sup>35</sup> offers a contemporary interpretation of the ancient philosophy of Stoicism. She reminds us that the word “stoic” has been distorted from its original meaning. We often use it casually to describe individuals who suppress their emotions, but the true Stoics were not like that. Their goal was to reduce unnecessary suffering by cultivating the mind to acknowledge several truths, including the awareness of one’s own mortality and that of others. Furthermore, she points out that another principle of Stoicism is to evaluate what is within our control and what is not, and direct our attention towards the things we can control. We can only have control over our own character, actions, reactions, and how we treat others. Everything else is beyond our personal sphere of influence. Hence, she claims the reason for striving to develop indifference towards our health, wealth, and reputation is because ultimately, these aspects are outside of our control.<sup>36</sup>

Based on the analysis provided, it is evident that Adlerian psychology and Stoic philosophy both advocate for the concept of “embracing the present moment.” They share a mutual ideology, which is not only widespread in Western countries, but also in Eastern countries such as Japan, where it is highly valued and acknowledged. Building upon this belief, the Japanese people have embraced the principles of accepting reality while remaining hopeful, and responding calmly to situations by taking appropriate actions within their control. As Kosuke Ishihara mentions in his story *experience* as following:

This disaster has made us appreciate the importance of life, of things, the bonds of family, the things we take for granted in our daily routines. To the victims—I know you’re in dire straits, but keep your hopes up!<sup>37</sup>

Collaborating within a horizontal social network community

During the occurrence of the triple disaster involving an earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear power plant meltdown, there was a significant disruption in communication and transportation. As a result, many individuals were filled with anxiety and possessed an urgent desire to ascertain the safety of their families. They turned to various social media platforms like phone calls, emails, and Twitter to seek information. This remains the utmost priority for anyone who witnesses or experiences the devastating impact of a disaster. In response to such crisis situations, individuals in unaffected areas of Japan have been working tirelessly, racing against time, to ensure their personal safety and the safety of their loved ones. Simultaneously, they are additionally providing assistance to those in need to the best of their abilities.

For example, Yumiko Takemoto shares her personal account of the events that transpired between her and her neighbors in the aftermath of the earthquake. After the earthquake, she lost all her means of communication and could not even watch TV. It was too scary to stay inside, she spent the night in her car, constantly feeling the aftershocks. Two days later, the

<sup>35</sup>Brigid Delaney, *Reasons Not to Worry: How to be a Stoic in chaotic times* (Allen & Unwin, 2022).

<sup>36</sup>Brigid Delaney, “Inject That Stoicism into My Veins!': 10 Tools of Ancient Philosophy That Improved My Life,” *The Guardian*, September 19, 2022.

<sup>37</sup>Patrick Sherriff, *2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 61

electricity and gas in her house came back on, and she and her family were relieved to have warm food and bright lights. Although they still do not have running water after ten days, they feel grateful to still have their house, especially considering the people in Ibaraki who cannot contact their families in Fukushima Prefecture.

While there was no running water, she relied on her neighbors for water from their garden well. The neighbors not only provided drinking water but also offered instant noodles and dishes for her meals. Their help was invaluable, and words cannot adequately express her gratitude. She and her family are extremely grateful for the kindness they received, from her neighbors who provided well water and even strangers who shared water to fill their bathtub. At the end of story, Yumiko Takemoto utters the following statement:

My neighbors' kindness reminded me that it is very important to stay connected with our neighbors, and to help each other. I would like to urge everybody to be more actively involved in their local community in their everyday life. Because nobody can survive without the support from others.<sup>38</sup>

Here, the author emphasizes the significant impact that neighbors and communities have on the mutual collaboration link after a disaster. It is indisputable that in times of dire circumstances, we must depend on our local communities and neighborhoods for assistance. This is particularly evident in Asian countries like China, Japan, and Korea, where collectivism is deeply ingrained in society. In China and Japan, for instance, there exist age-old proverbs like "A close neighbor is better than a distant relative," which serve as a testament to the significance of community and neighborhood support.

Additionally, assisting one another within our community and neighborhood allow a transformation of our relationships from a hierarchical structure to one of the equalities. In settings such as schools and companies, we often find ourselves in small groups where there are individuals who hold positions of authority, such as teachers, managers or proprietors. Occasionally, these relationships can make us feel oppressed. However, the bonds within a neighborhood tend to be much simpler, characterized by a horizontal equality. This type of relationship is more likely to foster mutual assistance without any profitable motives. It can be seen as a positive and healthy affinity between equals. Therefore, during times of disaster, this equal and mutual support, cooperation, and management of neighborhood relationships become even more significant. Adler's Individual Psychology Claims the Goal of interpersonal relationships is a feeling of community.<sup>39</sup> In other words, if we consider others as our comrades and recognize that we are constantly surrounded by them, it becomes important for us to find our own "refuge" within this life. Additionally, this process should also cultivate a desire within us to share and contribute to the community to understand others as comrades and the realization of having our own refuge is referred to as "community feeling." Meanwhile, "Community feeling" is also referred to as "social interest," that is to say, "interest in

<sup>38</sup>Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 116

<sup>39</sup>Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 160

society.” It represents making the switch from attachment to self (self-interest) to concern for others (social interest).<sup>40</sup>

We should shift our perspective and recognize that we are not the focal point of the world. Instead of constantly seeking what others can provide for us, we should consider what we can offer them in return. During times of significant calamity, the concept of equality becomes prominent as it liberates us from the societal divisions and biases that exist in a hierarchical structure. It allows us to view our surroundings without any distorted perceptions. Instead, it fosters a stronger sense of identity as part of a collective and a feeling of belonging. This in turn encourages collaboration and motivates us to make meaningful contributions to those around us.

### Conquest or coexistence, revisiting the relationship between human and nature

The tsunami overcame the sea wall and hit the plant and caused the damage, which led to nuclear meltdowns and a number of hydrogen explosions. The initial measures taken to protect the public included implementing evacuation plans, providing shelter, imposing restrictions on food and water consumption, relocating individuals, and disseminating information. It was the worst emergency at a nuclear power plant since the Chernobyl disaster in 1986. If we classify the massive earthquake and tsunami as natural calamities, then we can view the meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant as a subsequent catastrophe resulting from perceived factors.

The primary concern we need to address seems to be the reason behind the nuclear power plant’s inability to withstand the forces of the tsunami and earthquake. It appears that one possible explanation, based on scattered reports, is that the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant did not consistently and thoroughly assess its susceptibility to external threats throughout its operational lifetime.<sup>41</sup> Putting aside the technical details, it is crucial to examine how to evaluate and interpret such human-induced disasters from a human standpoint.

In the anthology, we discover a short story called “*expectations*” authored by Miho Nishihiro. In her hometown of Abiko, Chiba prefecture, there was a low-5 grade earthquake recorded, which was smaller than the epicenter. Since she is inland, she did not experience any tsunami effects. However, it was the largest earthquake she has ever experienced, and she has suffered greatly. As a mother of two small children, she is also concerned about the numerous aftershocks. But her greatest worry is the radiation leak from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Based on her narrative, she holds the belief that the issue stems from excessive self-assurance and a deficiency in openly sharing information about nuclear leaks.

<sup>40</sup>Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 163

<sup>41</sup>Hideki Nariai, “The Fukushima Daiichi Accident—Summary of Comments and Lessons from the Report by the Director General,” *Journal of the Atomic Energy Society of Japan* 58, no. 3 (2016): 184–89.

What I really want to know is, if the situation worsens, what happens? How is the condition of the nuclear plant going to affect us, how far is the risk going to spread, and what is the possibility of this happening? We need to know this kind of information but almost nobody has told us anything. If we had that info, everyone could consider all the options and be prepared for action, and public panic could be avoided if a worst-case scenario happened. But because we lack information, people evacuated the capital unnecessarily.<sup>42</sup>

It is evident from the original quote that there is a lack of sufficient accurate information available to the general public regarding nuclear power plants. This deficiency leads to a situation where the public is unaware and unable to adequately protect themselves. If we delve further into the underlying causes, it becomes apparent that we constructed nuclear power plants with the aim of harnessing nature for the benefit of humanity, and we attempted to employ human intellect to triumph over nature. However, our endeavors did not yield the desired outcomes. It was only in the wake of a catastrophe that we came to the realization that our understanding of nature was inadequate, and we emerged from the illusion that nuclear power plants were entirely secure. The appreciation for the inherent worth of nature has been received differently on a global scale. The Stockholm Declaration of 1972 and the World Conservation Strategy of 1980 both took a human-centered approach. This Anthropocentric perspective is dominant in societies worldwide and is also prevalent in academia as well as domestic and international governance.<sup>43</sup> Hence, the initial development of nuclear power plants can be said to have been influenced by our inchoate interpretation of the natural world.

As the story unfolds, the author realizes we have had overly naive expectations for the safety standards of nuclear power plants. Constantly measuring the power of nature with a self-righteous understanding, it ultimately leads to dire consequences. At the end of the story, the author lodges the following appeal.

My wish is that all the electric power companies will learn from this accident and do their utmost to prevent future risks. This accident has given us a good opportunity to take stock of the expansion of the nuclear power plants we Japanese have embraced as a solution to global warming. I hope that, in the future, renewable power sources will supply the bulk of our electricity and we won't depend on nuclear power.<sup>44</sup>

From the original text, it is evident that the author has a strong desire for all electric power companies to gain insights from this incident and implement appropriate measures to mitigate future hazards. Simultaneously, the author expresses a hopeful aspiration for renewable power sources to assume the role of the principal electricity provider in the future, thereby diminishing reliance on nuclear power. In other words, she advocates for a change in how we view nature, moving away from dominating it to coexisting with it. Most people propose abandoning nuclear power plants as a means of generating electricity and instead embracing

<sup>42</sup>Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 60

<sup>43</sup>Paul Cryer et al., "Why Ecocentrism Is the Key Pathway to Sustainability | MAHB," MAHB, July 3, 2017.

<sup>44</sup>Patrick Sherriff, 2:46: Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (London: Enhanced Editions, 2011), 61

lighter energy sources like wind and tidal power. Even exploring more sustainable and recyclable approaches to bring humans and nature closer together.

Japan has long experienced frequent disasters, which has instilled a sense of mental preparedness in most Japanese people. They believe that they are interconnected with nature and are part of a more sizable community that includes not only humans, but also plants, animals, and the environment. This biocentric belief aligns with Adler's Individual Psychology, which emphasizes the importance of belonging and achieving a beneficial impact on our surroundings through the first and foremost principle that says, "Listen to the voice of the larger community."<sup>45</sup> By living in harmony with nature and contributing to its sustainable development, tragic events like the Fukushima 50 could be prevented, and the number of individuals sacrificing their lives for societal progress could be significantly reduced as well.

By applying the principles of Adlerian psychology and ecocriticism to the analysis and interpretation of the stories in this work, it becomes evident that the mass media and government officials played a significant role in promoting the idea of public solidarity. In public discussions, the concepts of "*kizuna*" (emotional bonds between people) and "*gaman*" (endurance and perseverance) have been used to characterize Japan's historical stance in the face of difficulties. This sense of social cohesion and collective spirit not only motivates efforts to provide assistance, but also offers solace to victims by making them feel that their suffering is shared. However, Jordi Serrano-Muñoz<sup>46</sup> suggests that Japan is a society where individuals are expected to sacrifice their personal identity for the greater good, while also relieving authorities of their responsibilities. Besides, the Fukushima nuclear accident served as a wake-up call for the Japanese people, highlighting the dangers of overconfidence and underestimating the forces of nature. It also prompted a reevaluation of the relationship between humans and nature, as the Japanese people embarked on the challenging task of rebuilding the afflicted areas.

translated by Gerard Ronge

<sup>45</sup>Ichiro Kishimi and Koga Fumitake, *The Courage to Be Disliked: How to Free Yourself, Change Your Life and Achieve Real Happiness* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 175

<sup>46</sup>Jordi Serrano-Muñoz, "Reading after the Disaster: Japan's Reaction to the 3/11 Events through Literature," *Association for Asian Studies*, 2019.

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# KEYWORDS

## Great East Japan Earthquake

*eco-psychological analysis*

### **ABSTRACT:**

This research paper attempts to explore an intersection between psychoanalysis and ecocriticism in Japan. Specifically, applied to the literary descriptions in the work “2:46 Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake (2011)” from the eco-psychological viewpoint. The study focuses on interpreting and discussing four aspects of how individuals who experienced the Great East Japan Earthquake dealt with feelings of inferiority, acceptance of reality, human-nature relationships, and equality in a horizontally structured society. Furthermore, the paper emphasizes the potential of using eco-psychology to address environmental issues in world literature, which aims to enhance readers’ understanding of both Eastern and Western perspectives on the environment and underscore the significance and necessity of living in harmony with nature.

# THE TRIPLE DISASTER

*harmony with nature*

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