

Book Review: Tamaki Mihic, Re-imagining Japan after Fukushima (Asian Studies Series Monograph 13) Acton: Australian National University Press, 2020.

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The Great East Japan Earthquake struck the Tōhoku region on March 11, 2011, leaving an indelible mark not only on the physical landscape, but on the cultural consciousness of the Japanese people. In the years that followed, responses to the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdowns at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant gave rise to numerous discussions on Japanese identity: How was Japan represented in public discourse and literature after the disaster? How did 3.11 contribute to a re-consideration of Japanese identity? Who were the agents influencing these debates? To address these salient questions, Tamaki Mihic examines representations of Japan in a range of literary and cultural productions released within six years of the disaster in her book Re-imagining Japan after Fukushima. As the meanings associated with 3.11 resonate well beyond the national borders of Japan, the book incorporates both what the author terms ‘self-images’—representations produced by Japanese artists, and ‘hetero-images’—those produced by non-Japanese artists (p. 5). Following Leerssen (2007), the study follows an ‘imagological’ approach, with a primary focus on artistic representations and what they reveal. The scope of analysis in this study is impressive, including a wide array of materials (mass media, fiction, manga, poetry, and film) in several languages (Japanese, French, and English). The breadth of the study and its comparative approach make it a unique contribution to existing research on 3.11 literature, which, a decade after March 11, 2011, now constitutes a well-established field of scholarship.

The main body of Re-imagining Japan after Fukushima consists of an introduction, six chapters, and a conclusion. Each of the six chapters represents a significant aspect of post 3.11 Japan: ‘Japan after Fukushima’, ‘Sustainable Japan’, ‘Oppressive Japan’, ‘Heterogeneous Japan’, ‘(Still) Cool Japan’, and ‘Exotic Japan’. Chapters two and three deal with works by Japanese authors; the remaining chapters are organised thematically and bring Japanese, French, and English language cultural productions into dialogue with one another.

A key feature of the book is that analyses of works are set against the complex backdrop of the social discourses on Japanese identity that came to the fore after the disaster. The first chapter, ‘Japan after Fukushima’, explores how the disaster re-framed discourse in various contexts in Japan, including values of social cohesion (kizuna) and self-sacrifice (gaman), the nuclear debate, and aspects of ‘Cool Japan’ such as otaku culture. Mihic draws from a wellspring of sources to articulate the terms of these debates after 3.11, incorporating the voices of journalists, the mass media, public intellectuals, fiction writers, and cultural commentators. Among these voices are internationally recognised literary figures such as Ōe Kenzaburō, Murakami Haruki, and Karatani Kōjin, as well as key cultural critics such as Saitō Tamaki and Azuma Hiroki, whose commentaries and opinion pieces helped to shape the narrative of Japan after 3.11.

Chapter One outlines the terms of the nuclear debate in Japan, which understandably took on a new focus in the wake of the Fukushima incident. This chapter shows how 3.11 stirred up vociferous discussions on nuclear power and reframed discourse on the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Mihic draws our attention to the often polarized or polarizing terms of debates not only on nuclear issues, but also on social relations and identity in post 3.11 Japan; this provides a sophisticated framework for consideration of the primary texts. In the

chapters that follow, Mihic explores how writers negotiated and responded to these discourses through their literary and cultural productions, participating in the debate with their own creative visions.

Chapter Two, 'Sustainable Japan', examines literature by three representative authors of 3.11 literature, Kawakami Hiromi, Shiriagari Kotobuki, and Wagō Ryōichi. Kawakami's 'Kamisama 2011', Shiriagari's Ano hi kara no manga (Manga Since that Day), and Wagō's Shi no tsubute (Pebbles of Poetry) are essential reading in the field of 3.11 literature. Mihic argues that these three writers portrayed the disaster as a kind of 'moral wake-up call' (p. 36), highlighting the erosion of kizuna and advocating a return to community spirit and a renewed relationship with the natural world. This nuanced critique of kizuna is particularly interesting given the emphasis on the Japanese cooperative spirit after the disaster in both the domestic and international media.

Chapter Three, 'Oppressive Japan', raises the issues of censorship and freedom of information, which were brought to the fore following the extensive media coverage of 3.11. It examines dystopian portrayals of Japan after 3.11 in works by three writers, Tawada Yōko, Henmi Yō, and Yoshimura Man'ichi. The chapter also includes a lengthy analysis of Takahashi Gen'ichirō's controversial and provocative post 3.11 novel, Koisuru genpatsu (A Nuclear Reactor in Love), which addresses freedom of expression and the suppression of thought in the aftermath of the disaster. Mihic demonstrates how these four writers participated in social discourse on expression and intellectual freedom in Japan through their respective imaginings of a post disaster society.

Chapter Four, 'Heterogeneous Japan', draws together three works: Shinkai Makoto's popular animated film Kimi no na wa (Your Name), Richard Collasse's French novel L'océan dans la rizière (The Ocean in the Rice Paddy), and Gretel Ehrlich's English-language novel Facing the Wave: A Journey in the Wake of the Tsunami. This chapter shows how these works negotiated the image of a homogenous Japan in their works whether by ultimately reinforcing that image (Shinkai), or by countering it with images of heterogeneity via a Tōhoku identity (Collasse and Ehrlich). 3.11 brought about a critical re-thinking of regional identity in Tōhoku, although this topic has received relatively little critical attention in the west. Chapter Four thus offers insight into a post 3.11 Tōhoku through comparative analysis of these three works, locating them within contemporaneous discourses on homogeneity and identity in Japan.

Chapter Five, '(Still) Cool Japan', considers how certain qualities of 'Cool Japan' manifested in post 3.11 film and literature through an examination of a seemingly unlikely pair of works: the blockbuster film Shin Gojira (Shin Godzilla, 2016) and Japanese-American writer Ruth Ozeki's English-language novel A Tale for the Time Being. In an engaging analysis of Shin Godzilla as a post 3.11 film, Mihic convincingly demonstrates how the cultural characteristics of 'Japan Cool' (Japanese technological prowess, otaku culture, and corporate values) are reappropriated and repurposed, inspiring a spirit of collaboration which enables the Japanese to triumph over adversity (in the form of the radioactive monster). The analysis of Ozeki's A Tale for the Time Being is original, if slightly esoteric; it evaluates the novel as affirming Japan's continued global relevance through its representations of the philosophy of Zen Buddhism, the practice of mediation, and the Japanese concept of ikigai (one's purpose in life or reason for living). Ozeki is a renowned transnational author, and this is a thought-provoking and original reading of her 2013 novel, which emphasizes cross-cultural connections.

In Chapter Six, 'Exotic Japan', Mihic examines representations of Japan after Fukushima in French-language sources, revealing undercurrents of Orientalism and exoticism, a kind of 'néo-japonisme' redolent of the nineteenth century Western fascination with things Japanese following Japan's reopening to the West. Two works are considered in this chapter: Thomas Reverdy's 2013 novel Les évaporés (The Evaporated) and Hubert Haddad's novel of the same year, Le peintre d'éventail (The Fan-Painter). Set in post 3.11 Japan, both novels portray Japan as an exoticized Other, but simultaneously demonstrate an awareness of contemporary Japanese social issues. In the case of The Fan-Painter, Mihic finds amidst this exoticism a positive appraisal of the spirit of craftsmanship as an enduringly 'Japanese' characteristic. Arguably, a more involved discussion of nineteenth century Japonisme might have helped to better situate this brand of Orientalism within a broader historical context, and the chapter suggests that there is clearly further scope for further investigation. Chapter Six raises important questions regarding the French view of Japan both before and after 3.11: To what extent is this 'néo-japonisme' a post 3.11 phenomenon? Is it a continuation of a trajectory of Japonisme that originated after the Meiji era? Either way, this chapter opens the door for further discussion on the subject.

Original and insightful, Tamaki Mihic's Re-imagining Japan after Fukushima examines a wide range of sources, including manga, popular film, fiction, and poetry. It deftly navigates this plurality of voices – both political and cultural, mainstream and fringe – to articulate how 3.11 has shaped, and indeed, will continue to shape representations of Japan since 'that day'. It is worth mentioning that the book engages in extensive discussion of Japanese terms and concepts such as Nihonjinron (theories of Japanese culture uniqueness or exceptionalism), otaku, ikigai, shokunin (Japanese craftsmen) and shachiku (a corporate 'livestock' mentality), which the specialist reader will enjoy. The accompanying explanations generally place these terms within their appropriate contexts, so this should pose no problem for the non-specialist reader, who might consider it a crash course in Japanese society. Mihic's framing of post 3.11 literary and cultural productions within the broader narratives of Japanese identity after the disaster is both productive and illuminating, particularly with the rich variety of sources the author brings to bear in the study. The comparative and cross-cultural approach employed in Mihic's book provides a fresh perspective within the growing field of 3.11 studies, and this book will appeal to both scholars and students of Japanese studies and comparative literature alike.