

Emerging from the Rubble

Asian/American Writings
on Disasters

Edited by

Yasuko Kase

University of the Ryukyus

and

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Series in Literary Studies



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Emerging from the Rubble: Asian/American Writings on Disasters is the product of over two dedicated years of preparation. The impetus for this book came from a panel of presentations on the theme of Asian/American literary engagement of natural and manmade disasters at the 2023 MLA conference and a fortuitous contact by an editor from Vernon Press. The idea of creating a multi-work volume that explores the depictions of Asian/American involvement and engagement with disasters crystallized over multiple chat sessions via Zoom, email exchanges, and many hours of brainstorming, rumination, and research.

The momentum for this project was also propelled by the mutual trust and respect cultivated from a friendship that was forged over a decade ago at an Asian American Literary Association (AALA) Forum held in Kyoto, Japan, in 2014. Yasuko Kase, having freshly returned to Japan after spending several years in the US, had received her doctorate degree from SUNY Buffalo and a tenured position at the University of the Ryukyus and was newly embarking on her teaching career. Meanwhile, Eliko Kosaka, a New England bumpkin from Rhode Island who had, up until that point, been slow poking it along in Tokyo for an undisclosed number of years was still in the throes of her dissertation woes as an ABD at the University of Tokyo.

Our chance encounter marked the beginning of a connection that would blossom into an enduring bond and has been a calming beacon of light for us both. Amidst the swirling daily stresses of life, we have witnessed the saddening reports of global conflict, the widespread damage caused by ensuing calamities, the ever-present threat of COVID-19, and experienced the feeling of uncertainty upon learning of the 2024 results of the U.S. presidential election. Our transnational perspectives and the shared sense of urgency for the welfare of our planet we call home have propelled us to push this project forward.

This, of course, would not have been possible without the other nine contributors of this anthology, whose rich and thought-provoking chapters bring to light and examine the intricate and complex entanglements of Asian/Americans with capitalism, imperialism, neocolonialism, global catastrophe, and the natural environment. We would like to thank them for their kind patience and their prompt responses to email exchanges and cooperation in the coalescing of this project, which helped to make this a truly enjoyable experience. We have had the pleasure of meeting some in person, but for those we have yet to meet, we hope to have that opportunity sometime in the near future.

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We are also grateful for the generous permissions granted for the use of various materials throughout this work: the photograph of the Manzanar National Historic Site taken by Mr. John Schrantz in Chapter 2; the reprinting of Quan Barry's poems from *Asylum* and *Water Puppets*, courtesy of the University of Pittsburgh Press, in Chapter 5; and Dr. Sunaura Taylor's artwork *Downed Dairy Cow* in Chapter 9.

No project reaches completion in a vacuum of self. We gratefully acknowledge the support—financial assistance, course release, and encouragement—we have received from our colleagues, department chairs, deans, and provosts. Importantly, we further express gratitude to our family members and dearest friends, who have supplied us with countless expressions of support and patience. To those women in academia who have laid the path before us, we owe a special debt of gratitude; it is our hope that the offerings in this volume help to repay your efforts in some small way. Very especially, we acknowledge the sisterhood of the *Ages and Stages* contributors, a sisterhood that continues to sustain.

Introduction

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and

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The Anthropocene, Disasters, and Asian America

At the 2023 United Nations General Assembly Climate Ambition Summit, UN Secretary-General António Guterres declared, “Humanity has opened the gates of hell,”¹ enumerating the list of disastrous crises we are facing, including the rising numbers of floods causing agricultural damage and the increasing temperatures spawning diseases and wildfires. Guterres accused wealthy countries and fossil fuel industries of sluggish responses to climate change, warning, “If nothing changes, we are heading towards a 2.8-degree temperature rise—towards a dangerous and unstable world” and emphasized the continuous sufferings of unwealthy countries, whose greenhouse gas emissions are much lower by comparison but are inflicted with serious climate predicaments.² While Guterres emphasizes the persistent tension between the accumulation of capital versus ecology, his speech did not illustrate how the accumulation of capital has been enabled by imperialism, neo/colonialism, and wars, and how these factors have brought about disastrous damages around the globe.

With an emphasis on Asian/American perspectives, *Emerging from the Rubble: Asian/American Writings on Disasters* explores how Asian/Americans have been involved in various disasters that Guterres would call the signs of the opening of the gate to hell. The term “Asian/American” in the title of this anthology is used for two purposes. The first purpose is to designate that our volume includes analyses of literary and cinematic texts on disasters created by Asian Americans and Asians. Another reason is to express our homage to

¹ António Guterres, “Secretary-General’s Opening Remarks at the Climate Ambition Summit” (Opening Remarks, the Climate Ambition Summit, New York, September 20, 2023). <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-09-20/secretary-generals-opening-remarks-the-climate-ambition-summit>.

² Ibid.

David Palumbo-Liu, who invented the term in his seminal text *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*. The term Asian/American, according to Palumbo-Liu, denotes the ever-shifting reformulation of the “split” and liaison that constitute “Americans.”³ Inspired by his insight, we employ the term in our title to emphasize transpacific and transnational tensions, affiliations, and literary imagination produced through the dynamism between Asian countries and North America.

With a focus on Asian/American literary and cinematic narratives on disasters, this anthology aims to shed light on the concrete socio-historical backgrounds encompassing the transpacific and transnational relationship between North America and Asia, which we signify with the term “Asian America,” also following Palumbo-Liu’s use of the term.⁴ Although the aesthetic depiction of the brutal reality of disastrous events entails the challenges and limits of representation, literary and cinematic expressions can contribute to registering the events with the authors’ subjective and affective responses. Engaging with such artistic affective archives of Asian/Americans is crucial to conveying their lived experiences to the audience. The authors of this anthology focus on Asian/Americans’ lived experiences of disasters comprising not only their current exposure to ongoing damages and threats of climate change but also their involvement in imperialism, neo/colonialism, wars, and these historical components’ entanglement with capitalism that have generated both spontaneous and slow and/or prolonged violent effects.

While this anthology focuses on Asian/Americans’ involvement in disastrous events, it does not intend to claim that all Asian/Americans are equally involved in such disastrous events as victims; some of them have undergone tremendous losses, but some of them were and have been—often contingently—implicated in the acts of inducing violence with or without knowledge or acknowledgment of the facts. This anthology aims to show the complex and nuanced involvement of Asian/Americans in disastrous events—we understand that it is difficult to clearly differentiate natural and human-made disasters considering the reciprocal influence between nature and civilization and that the entanglements of natural and human-made disasters accelerate and expand damages—acknowledging their internal diversity, which does not generate a monolithic narrative or perspective. Ethically engaged with Asian/American literary and cinematic narratives that depict crises of various disasters, scholars who contribute to this volume present how Asian Americans’ connections with their ancestral origins and their particular racial position, social classes, and

³ David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1.

⁴ Ibid.

socio-historical backgrounds in North American societies force them to experience and witness disastrous events differently from the mainstream discourse on eco-crises.

Referring to Paul Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer's notion of the epoch of "the Anthropocene,"⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty notes, "Humans now wield a geographical force" as "biological agents, both collectively and as individuals" ⁶ to create a chaotic impact on the earth. Yet, as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing points out, the heavy impact of the Anthropocene becomes prominent not because of human species biology, although it may be difficult to clearly delineate biology and culture, but because of the advent of modern capitalism.⁷ Unlike Guterres, Tsing suggests human activities through capitalism are not to be placed in a binary with nature but rather understood as complicatedly intertwined with it, leading to unpredictable outcomes, tracing the wild mushroom "Matsutake" trade. Acknowledging how the notion of the Anthropocene has offered a useful theoretical vantage point to illuminate the impacts of human activities on the biosphere and geosphere, Jason W. Moore, Donna J. Haraway, and other scholars propose an alternative way of understanding the relationship between nature and society through the term "Capitalocene," the state in which nature and society are not discreetly separated and humans are intricately interwoven into the web of life.⁸ (Haraway also coined the term "Plantationocene,"⁹ the system of colonial plantation agriculture that exploited humans and non-humans and disrupted the ecosystem). As such, we should acknowledge the mutual and reciprocal impacts created by the interaction between humans and environments. Their notion of "Capitalocene" is a useful theoretical tool that enables us to ponder the destructive effects of human activities on the environment based upon the capitalistic premise that persistently drives linear "progress" and the push to accumulate wealth that has led humans to face the repercussions of countless disastrous events. Furthermore, the notion calls for bearing not only the accountability of humans for creating the current crises

⁵ Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, "The 'Anthropocene,'" *Global Change Newsletter*, International Geosphere-Biosphere Program Newsletter, no. 41 (May 2000): 17–18.

⁶ Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no.2 (Winter 2009): 206.

⁷ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 19.

⁸ Jason W. Moore, introduction to *Anthropocene or Capitalocene?: Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland: PM Press, 2016), Kindle; Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 99–100.

⁹ Dona J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 99–100.

but also the state of human precarity and vulnerability by emphasizing the interconnected relationship between society/nature and capitalism/nature.

Yet, the revision of the study of the Anthropocene and ecological studies should not stop here. It should be further expanded to scrutinize the capitalistic appropriation of “nature” or “raw materials” in the sense that cheap labor provided by the Global South was not regarded as a service provided by “humans” but rather was approximated with “natural materials,” and thus seen as justifiably exploitable and expendable. The focus on the abstract notion of “human” embedded in “anthropo”—whose etymology is traced to the Greek word *“ánthōropos,”* meaning human—inside the term “Anthropocene” can lead to the discussion on the problematic Enlightenment of humanity that obscures the violent process of how the notion of (European) humanity was employed to differentiate non-Europeans as “non-humans” through its pathologization. Destabilization of the term “human,” by employing posthumanistic critical approaches, thus, enables a non-hierarchical view that can divest from and deconstruct Western dualistic thought.¹⁰ Thus, Guterres’ words “humanity has opened the gates to hell” can be imbued with meaning that transcends the intended context tied to his concerns on climate change; it can be extended to the ethical consideration of the residual divide that is left as a legacy of humanity’s colonial history. The post-dualistic perspective in posthumanism can be further extended to the criticism of the Anthropocentric view, thus enabling inquiry into trans-species interactions and kinship. It questions the border between the animate/inanimate, destabilizing conventional delineations that perpetuate the hierarchization of life,¹¹ which are also intertwined with the notion of racial division and hierarchy and colonial powers’ exploitation of human and non-human species.

Postcolonial Critique on Imperial Disasters

As Lisa Lowe notes in her seminal text, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, the division of humanity as a result of colonialism took place through the various localized, differential, and yet linked spaces in the world to propel and justify colonialism.¹² The prolonged effects of such division continue. The asymmetrical and uneven “development” of current nation-states, which has heavily affected current debates on climate change and strategic practices to tackle various disasters, is foreshadowed by colonialism, imperialism, and wars. The term

¹⁰ Francesca Ferrando, *Philosophical Posthumanism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 110.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110–11.

¹² Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 6–7.

global capitalism sounds very abstract, and yet it can be traced back to competitive colonial trades aimed at monopolizing and profiting by accessing various “natural” resources and colonial commodities in European colonies. The guise of “free trade” and entitled access to the colonized space and resources were justified by dividing up humanity and relegating those who were colonized as being less than humans, lacking agency and the ability of self-governance.¹³ Thus, the rights of “humans” were not extended to the colonized, who were treated as replaceable and disposable “natural” labor resources.

The influences of colonialism and imperialism have often been ignored in major scholarly debates on the Anthropocene. Max Liboiron acutely points out that those who are involved in environmentalism often fail to address the damages created by colonialism but also tend to reproduce its violence.¹⁴ According to Liboiron, the Global North’s entitled access to the Indigenous Land in the Global South to contain their waste plays the same scenario of colonial power imbalance.¹⁵ As Rob Nixon suggests, the allied perspective between postcolonial studies and environmental studies can illuminate how imperial practices by the Global North on the Global South have contributed to environmental damage.¹⁶ Nixon’s valuable notion of “slow violence,” or “a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all”¹⁷ sheds light on the heavy impacts of imperial militarism that have polluted the lands and oceans and the prolonging effects of settler colonialism that radically changed indigenous environments. In a similar manner, drawing from Erin Suzuki’s criticism of the generalization of the impact of human activity on the earth in the scholarship of the Anthropocene, editors of *Empire and Environment: Ecological Ruin in the Transpacific* scrutinize the destructive consequences of the historical force of imperialism, settler colonialism, and global capitalism.¹⁸ The allied perspective between Asian-descent and Pacific Islander writers and activists offers an approach to decolonizing the Anthropocene.

¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴ Max Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021), 11–12.

¹⁵ Ibid., 11.

¹⁶ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (London: Harvard University Press, 2013), loc.737–861 of 7857, Kindle.

¹⁷ Nixon, introduction to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Santa Ana, Heidi Amin-Hong, Rina Garcia Chua, and Zhou Xiaojing, “Confronting Ecological Ruination in the Transpacific,” introduction to *Empire and Environment: Ecological Ruin in the Transpacific*, ed. Jeffrey Santa Ana, Heidi Amin-Hong, Rina Garcia Chua, and Zhou Xiaojing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022).

Our anthology, *Emerging from the Rubble: Asian/American Writings on Disasters*, follows such scholarly insights illuminating the influence of colonialism and imperialism to explore further Asian/Americans' complicated involvement in the current various disastrous crises. We will examine Asian/American writings on both the direct and spontaneous outcomes of devastating human activities and events and the returned results of prolonged and accumulated human activities of "slow violence," focusing on the conjoined link of natural/human-made disasters. Most of the time, the term "disaster" connotes sudden, abrupt, catastrophic events that overturn the ordinary to the extraordinary. Thus, in our common usage, it can be associated with the notion of trauma, especially what Alan Gibbs calls "punctual" trauma based on the PTSD model¹⁹—the result of a sudden and overwhelming event followed by a certain period of amnesic latency before the traumatic memory returns in the "precise" form of a repetitive onslaught—which became the basis of traditional trauma studies in humanities created in the early 1990s by Cathy Caruth and her followers, whose major focus was trauma's altering effect on subjectivity and memory.²⁰ Yet, discussions on Asian/American issues in disastrous events require not only the direct impact of the events but also the consideration of long-term exposure to racism and its effect on their subjectivities, and physical, economic, and socio-historical material reality. Furthermore, the effects of disasters can bring long-term threats and continuous serious outcomes. For instance, while disastrous events of wars direct our attention to the immediacy of strikingly ruined landscapes, the toxic chemicals used by military weapons, including the radiation damages caused by atomic bombs and chemical weapons, could appear later and cause gradual and unpredictable poisonous effects on human bodies/minds and the landscapes. In addition, unlike traditional trauma studies, which claim the universal affective impact of trauma, the focus on disastrous events in which Asian/Americans have been involved necessitates consideration of how various lines of difference play a significant role in placing a certain group of people in more precarious conditions than others, thus making them more susceptible to disasters. Therefore, while acknowledging the contributions of traditional trauma studies, this anthology has more extended engagement in the concrete socio-historical condition and prolonged effects of disasters that have distributed the state of precarity unevenly in the world, and thus

¹⁹ Alan Gibbs, introduction to *Contemporary American Trauma Narratives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 15–18.

²⁰ See Cathy Caruth ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

resonates more with the revisioning movement of trauma studies since early 2000,²¹ which has intervened in the universal model.

Imperial Ruination and Asian America

Asian/American history is deeply involved in colonialism, imperialism, and wars. As Lowe traces, the large flows of the population from Asia in the nineteenth century were initiated as a consequence of the abolition of the slave trade; Asian laborers were required as a replacement for slavery. While the abolition of slavery could propagate the discourse of “progress” and the promise of “liberty,” Asian laborers were just alternative cheap “non-human” labor resources, which became accessible through European colonial expansion to Asia. As Iyko Day discusses, Asian North Americans’ position vis-à-vis settler colonialism in the nineteenth century provokes the discussion on their ambiguous status as “aliens” whose deportability and excludability placed them in a vulnerable position in settler colonial racialization.²² Unlike Candace Fujikane, who defines Asian migrants in Hawai‘i as “settlers of color” who participate in U.S. settler colonialism and thus acknowledges Asian descendants’ dominant position over Hawai‘i’s indigenous people²³, Day places Asian migrants in a triangulated form among settlers, racialized aliens, and Natives in North American contexts. Although Day’s cautions against geopolitical differences between Hawai‘i and North America and against equating Asian migrants as settlers are understandable, the nuanced position assigned to Asian/Americans and their privilege also should not be ignored. Asian migrants in the nineteenth century were placed in the contexts of European and American colonial expansion in Asia, which enabled imperial access to the Asian population. However, the alternation of immigration laws after World War II, especially the landmark Immigration and Nationality Act that was passed during the Cold War era of the mid-1960s, enabled the new population flows of Asian professionals and Asian people with monetary resources. The post-war promotion of Asian/Americans’ status—especially in the U.S. context—as a model minority garnered certain people of Asian descent social

²¹ For instance, Stef Craps’s “Beyond Eurocentrism: Trauma Theory in the Global Age,” in *The Future of Trauma Theory: Contemporary Literary and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Gert Buelens, Sam Durrant, and Robert Eaglestone (London: Routledge, 2014), 45–61 strongly criticizes Eurocentricity in traditional trauma studies.

²² Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), Kindle.

²³ Candace Fujikane, “Asian Settler Colonialism in the US Colony of Hawai‘i,” introduction to *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai‘i*, ed. Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008).

mobility approximating them to Whites. When considering how Asian migrants, including refugees from Southeast Asia who had little option but to seek asylum in the U.S., and Asian/Americans who have pursued their “happiness” under U.S. capitalism’s premise of constant progress, protection of “human rights,” and freedom of “choice,” it is important to note that Asian migrants and Asian *Americans* have become simultaneously active players and exploited individuals within the context of U.S. racial capitalism.

The contributors of this anthology are engaged with such complicated entanglement of Asian Americans with the Capitalocene by focusing on their transnational and transpacific tie with Asian countries that were heavily affected by the imperialism of Europe, the U.S, and Japan, and thus left with tremendous damages in the environments and grave deep wounds in people’s bodies and minds. The scars of imperial traumas are still left unhealed since global capitalism, a transmuted system with residual imperial influences, persists in exploitative configuration, inflicting continuous damages. Although pointing out the impossibility of a simple reduction of the complex histories of capitalism into a single imperial genealogy of exploitation, Ann Laura Stoler notes “the evasive history of empire... disappears so easily into other appellations and other, more available, contemporary terms.”²⁴ In such a process, what Stoler calls “imperial formations”²⁵ unfold by mutating the form of sovereignty, which is elusive but tangible in the damaged environments of “imperial debris” where the affected people are left to pick up the pieces. Stoler’s insight on capitalism as a mutated imperial formation offers a critical tool for scrutinizing Asian countries’ complex entanglement in the imbrication of negative impacts of imperial legacies, decolonizing processes, and the strong drive to restore their ruined societies and minds/bodies through modernization. The urgent and desperate desire for restoration often sustains problematic, unbreakable ties with neocolonial affluent countries, which paternalistically promise monetary and technological support. Such complicated circumstances have backdropped Asian diasporic movements and the formation of Asian America, the frontier of both the projection of American desire for Asia and the ambivalent introjection/expulsion of Asian migrants to and out of the U.S. national body.²⁶

In the nineteenth century, European and American imperial interests necessitated that Asia and the Pacific islands deal with colonial powers through

²⁴ Ann Laura Stoler, “‘The Rot Remains’: From Ruins to Ruination,” introduction to *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), loc. 581 of 8941, Kindle.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. 234 of 8941.

²⁶ Palumbo-Liu, 1.

efforts to minimize their damages through negotiation, confrontation, and submission. With a very brief overview, in the nineteenth century, the British Empire spread its colonial domination in India, Burma and Singapore; France put Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos under control; and the Netherlands possessed the regions of current Indonesia. The U.S. imposed “Manifest Destiny” on the Pacific, gained the Philippines and Guam from Spain, and annexed Hawai‘i. China was semi-colonized by Britain, France, Germany and Russia, being forced to open its ports. Japan, which was also forced to open its ports by the U.S., mimicked Western modernization and imperial domination and later attempted to create “the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” on the pretext of expelling European and American colonial power from Asia and the Pacific to help Asian countries’ secure their sovereignty, but its real purpose was to attain its own imperial domination of the regions.

As a result, the Asia-Pacific War, or the Pacific theater of World War II, left Asia and the Pacific region in ruination through the use of modern military weapons that deformed and contaminated the landscapes, and disabled, poisoned, and murdered humans and other species. Since tracing the U.S. and Japan’s imbricated imperial formations can offer a concrete instance of the rhizomic mutation of their colonial domination in Asia or the transformation of the frontier of Asian America, which has been linked to disastrous outcomes, we will offer a brief overview. Japan continues to deny accountability for the damages on Asia as a result of its entitled access to the regions’ landscapes and the people to gain imperial resources, resulting in them dominating social environments and inflicting numerous atrocities on civilians and POWs, including massacres, rapes (such as military sexual slavery), and human experimentation for developing bioweapons. U.S. Cold War ideological and military intervention in Asia, including Korea and Vietnam, assigned Japan the position of U.S. junior partner. Due to the strategic importance of expediting Japan’s post-war recovery to use the islands as a defense point to contain communism, Japan’s responsibilities for numerous war crimes and inflicted damages on Asian countries were not fully specified. In the San Francisco Peace Treaty of 1951 and other official agreements signed over the Cold War decades, Japan’s compensation to Asian countries was not sufficient.²⁷ With minimum monetary compensation and U.S. protection, Japan gained momentum to develop into a highly industrialized capitalist country in the late twentieth century and thus became one of the heaviest emitters of carbon dioxide on the planet. The Japanese economy’s recovery, which of course was possible through the growth of fossil-fuel dependent heavy industries, was supported by aiding

²⁷ As for critique on Japan’s insufficient compensation for numerous Japanese war crimes, see Lisa Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins: Transpacific Critique of American Justice and Japanese War Crimes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016).

U.S. military intervention in Vietnam and Korea. For instance, from 1950 to 1951, Toyota received several orders from the U.S. to produce a total of 4,679 military trucks (Toyota profited 36,006 million yen) for the U.S. military²⁸ during the Korean War that devastated and polluted their lands, decimated lives, led to severe health issues, and generated numerous war refugees. Even Japan's compensation in the form of economic and technical support in Asian countries for developing agriculture and building infrastructures could contribute to Japan's capitalistic gain by cultivating economically beneficial ties with them to strengthen its export-driven strategy.²⁹ The ironic and contradictory state of Japan, which suffered two atomic bomb detonations and radiation contamination and yet has been heavily dependent on nuclear power plants—initiated under the U.S. “Atoms for Peace” campaign³⁰—and which has been protected under the U.S. nuclear umbrella,³¹ epitomizes the ruining and rhizomatic effects of the “imperial formations.”³² As authors of Chapters 3 and 4 explore in their reading of Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale For Time Being*, the disaster of the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant caused by the Great Eastern Japan Earthquakes on March 11, 2011, is one of the culminating events of the long-time effect of the U.S. (with aid from Canada) and Japan's imperial ruination, which made the region uninhabitable and polluted the oceans caused by discharging water contaminated with radioactivity. Surely, the colonial sovereign powers continuously induce violent disasters through their elusive and mutating form of violence and manipulation.

²⁸ See the website of “75 Years of Toyota: Ever Better Cars” http://www.toyota-global.com/company/history_of_toyota/75years/data/overall_chronological_table/1941.html and http://www.toyotaglobal.com/company/history_or_toyota/75years/overall_chronological_table/1951.html.

²⁹ As for the history of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Asian countries, see the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/Overview_index.html.

³⁰ Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins*, 196.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

³² Another example worth raising is the twenty-five young Hiroshima bomb victims that were brought over from Japan in 1955 to receive reconstructive plastic surgery and became famously known as the “Hiroshima maidens” (*Hiroshima otome*). They served as another mechanism of obfuscation of U.S. war responsibility through publicity and media attention in an effort to repave U.S. and Japan postwar relations in the midst of nuclear proliferation. For more information, please refer to Rodney Barker, *The Hiroshima Maidens: A Story of Courage, Compassion, and Survival*. (New York: Viking, 1985).” Robert Jacobs, “Reconstructing the Perpetrator's Soul by Reconstructing the Victim's Body: The Portrayal of the ‘Hiroshima Maidens’ by the Mainstream Media in the United States,” *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 24 (June 2010), <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue24/jacobs.htm>.

“Staying with the Trouble” in Asian America

At the 2023 United Nations General Assembly Climate Ambition Summit, which we mentioned at the opening of the Introduction, countries like Japan, China, India, and the U.S., which are the heaviest emitters of greenhouse gases, were not invited to speak at the summit due to their failures to provide highly ambitious and concrete plans to reduce greenhouse gases. In their decolonizing process after World War II and the recoveries from the Cold War—although its negative impacts continue—and further pursuit of economic development and stability, Asia needed to depend heavily on fossil fuels. The implication of Asia in the acts of inducing climate disasters necessitates deep consideration of Asia’s embeddedness in imperial formations, whose long-lasting and muted exploitations continue in the form of neocolonial global capitalism.

Asian migrants and Asian/Americans carry with them the effects, memories, and material conditions induced by such imperial formations, which govern their lived experiences. The authors of this anthology are critically engaged with complicated issues surrounding disastrous events that reveal various power imbalances embedded in imperial formations and their lasting environmental effects found in the contamination of landscapes and people’s body/mind, endangering of non-human species, capitalistic exploitation of people and resources, and unpredictable outcomes created by transspecies interactions in food industries and communicable diseases. In considering such disastrous outcome of the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene, authors in this anthology employ and combine relevant theoretical views with Asian American literary and film studies: Trauma studies and memory studies, postcolonial studies, ecocriticism, disability and illness studies, posthumanism, and animal studies are used to unravel a multitude of imbricated issues manifested in and through disasters. This anthology presents such scholarly efforts for what Haraway would call “staying with the trouble”³³ or full engagement in current, ongoing disastrous crises.

Asian American Literary Studies and Environmental Humanities

Emerging from the Rubble builds upon existing interdisciplinary scholarship in the fields of Asian American literary studies and the environmental humanities. Adding its voice to environmental humanities in recent years, Asian American literary studies that focus on depictions of environmental concerns have been gaining momentum. This ecological turn reflects the growing collective concern for the welfare of the planet but also alludes more specifically to the need to illuminate what underpins the phenomenon: the inextricable interlinkages with

³³ Haraway, introduction to *Staying in the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*.

imperialism, colonial legacy, catastrophe and also the complex positionalities of Asian American subjects that are entrenched in the complex web of human culpability.

Literary studies that have been contributory to the field of environmental humanities and have particularly informed this project include, *Climate Change, Ecological Catastrophe, and the Contemporary Postcolonial Novel*,³⁴ which looks at South Asian and South Pacific literature that grapple with climate change and catastrophe, environmental exploitation and instability, and human-non-human relationships in degraded environments. Another significant contribution is *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, and Environments*,³⁵ which examines a diverse range of postcolonial writings; works in the pastoral genre; depictions of animality and spirituality; and aspects of posthumanism through a multitude of approaches, such as applications of queer ecology, disability theory, the environmental and zoocritical perspective, and interlinking their analyses with issues pertaining to global warming, food security, human over-population and animal extinction, it considers the transverse relations between human, animals, and the environment. *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of Environment*³⁶ examines African, Caribbean, Pacific Island, and South Asian literature and how they depict the relationship between humans and nature from deforestation and lost landscapes, cetacean communication, solar ecologies, Pacific radiations, and the impact of disaster and ecology on post-tsunami tourism development in Sri Lanka. Highlighting the variegated spectrum of colonial influences that have globally impacted both human and non-human life, these studies show the clear connections between the legacies of the colonial past and our current environmental crisis. While these studies are significant, they do not necessarily reflect the involvement of Asian/Americans that is explored more extensively through Asian American literary perspectives.

As for contributions of Asian American literary studies into environmental humanities, the co-edited anthology, *Asian American Literature and the Environment*, published in 2014, set a precedent for its pioneering collection of ecocritical studies of Asian American literature. In its introduction, John Gamber brings attention to the customary reluctance of ecocritics to address Asian American literature, but also the reluctance being mirrored by Asian

³⁴ Justyna Poray-Wybranowska, *Climate Change, Ecological Catastrophe, and the Contemporary Postcolonial Novel* (London: Routledge, 2020).

³⁵ Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals Environment* (London: Routledge, 2009).

³⁶ Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, eds., *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literature of the Environment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

American literary scholars to adopt ecocritical approaches, which the anthology attempts to overturn.³⁷ Joni Adamson explains in the anthology's "Forward" how Asian literary studies and Asian studies on ecocriticism were also integral in informing the anthology, which speaks to the growing transnational engagement of scholarly studies in ecocriticism and the intertwining studies of Asian American literature with Asian literary studies. This underscores the interdisciplinary and "rhizomatic" nature of Asian American literary studies, taking from the metaphor used by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to describe non-hierarchical entry and exit points for representation and interpretation,³⁸ that utilize both transnational and ecocritical approaches in their analyses. Studies range from examining early texts such as Carlos Bulosan's *America Is in the Heart* to more recent works with environmental themes such as Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats* and Karen Tei Yamashita's *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* and serve as pioneering works that primarily shed light on neglected terrain within the field of ecocriticism by examining Asian American writers' responses to the environment in relation to labor, racism, immigration, relocation, and political violence.

*Ecocriticism and Asian American Literature: Gold Mountains, Weedflowers and Murky Globes*³⁹ by Begoña Simal-González is a book published out of a Palgrave Macmillan series called *Literatures, Cultures, and the Environment*, edited by Ursula Heise and Gisela Heffes, that focuses upon new research in the Environmental Humanities. In her book, Simal-González begins with a compelling story of happenstance that unfolds with the ecological devastation of an oil spill caused by American ocean tanker, MV *Prestige*, which sank some miles off the Galician Coast in 2002, which led Carmen Flys, a Spanish scholar who is a pioneer in ecocriticism, to reach out to Simal-González giving her the impetus and momentum to begin scholarly work on ecocritical readings of Asian American literature. Gonzales's work aims to offer an ecocritical reading of Asian American literature as an integrated appraisal of the Asian American literary tradition, from the pioneering fiction of Edith Eaton to more recent works, such as Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013).⁴⁰ She unhesitatingly acknowledges, however, the limitations of her study's focus on primarily Chinese American and Japanese American works, which reflects her intent to conduct an integrated appraisal of the Asian American literary tradition by emphasizing its contextual history. Moreover, though, her endeavor to undertake the

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

³⁸ Ibid., xiii.

³⁹ Begoña Simal-González, *Ecocriticism and Asian American Literature: Gold Mountains, Weedflowers and Murky Globes* (Cham: Palgrave, 2020).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 12.

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