

The “Taiwan in the Anthropocene Network III” Research Group: Multidisciplinary Discussions on the Impacts of Human Activity on the Climate and Environment

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“Taiwan in the Anthropocene Network III” (TAN III) is an NSTC-funded research group. We are a relatively new cross-disciplinary community, including scholars from various fields such as Literature, Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology. Our research focuses on the multifaceted aspects of the Anthropocene, the geological period during which human activity has impacted the climate and environment. We aim to shed new light on the pressing issues of this impact on every aspect of human life. So far, we have gathered monthly this year, with two presenters leading a session. So far, we have held six sessions on particular themes: I. The Positionality of Taiwan in the Anthropocene; II. The Multispecies Connection and Interspecies Intimacy; III. The Indigeneity and the Alternative Modernities; IV. Resource Extraction; V. Apocalyptic imagination; VI. Trans-species Imagination in Asia.

Session One, “The Positionality of Taiwan in the Anthropocene,” was led by Dr. Courtney Work and Dr. Jean-Yves Heurtebise. Work’s presentation explored the origin of the “Royal We,” a position taken by some political-economic blocs in the Anthropocene. In this perspective, the “Royal We”—i.e. the whole of humanity—is regarded as responsible for the environmental degradation of the planet as a way to impose culpability on a universal scale. Work argues such statements and their proposed environmental solutions only serve and protect the interests of the particular groups who are in control of socioeconomic power. Heurtebise

explored the sophisticated concept of “Symphorophilia,” the phenomenon of people aroused by the spectacle of catastrophes and accidents in his presentation. He started with the social collective (un)conscious desire for mass catastrophe, such as plane crashes, oil spill and wars. Next, he discussed how during the Misanthropocene era, the leftists believe in the indigenous way of life to save us, while the rightists believe in the power of technology. Heurtebise ends his presentation with a Taiwanese twist, discussing how Taiwan survives mass catastrophes in the context of Sino-globalization.

Session Two, “The Multispecies Connection and Interspecies Intimacy,” was led by Dr. Hannes Bergthaller and Dr. Ya-Feng Wu. Bergthaller introduced Ray Nayler’s 2022 novel, *The Mountain in the Sea*, which is a sci-fi thriller that carries the theoretical agenda of communicating with other-than-human species through semiotic processes. Bergthaller also compared this novel with other posthuman semiosis, attempting to consider humans’ place in this Anthropocene era. In contrast, Wu introduced us to Kuei-Hsing Chang’s *Monkey Cup*, which investigates the risk as well as redemption entailed for inter-species intimacy. The title of the novel refers to Nepenthes, a carnivorous plant. Wu interpreted the novel from the new lens of interspecies intimacies in contrast to the earlier critical attention on the struggle between different colonial powers.

Session Three, “The Indigeneity and the Alternative Modernity” was led by Dr. Li-Hsin Hsu and Dr. Chun-Mei Chuang. Hsu focused on the decolonial potentiality by Syaman Rapongan’s littoral writings. Syaman Rapongan is a Tao writer living on Orchid Island and engaging in fighting against the colonial mentality of the Taiwanese government. As an indigenous activist writer, Rapongan employs the metaphor of the littoral zone, which is a queerized borderland filled with the potential of human-aquatic intimacy, to convey a sense of resistance and ambiguity that defeats the colonialist discourse of the mainstream culture. Chuang utilizes the line “We are all endemic species” from the documentary *Good Morning MIT* (《山椒魚來了》) to assert her agenda to speak for, of, and as the indigeneity. The purpose of rethinking and embracing indigeneity is all the more pressing for Anthropocene scholars. By linking the endemic species with Taiwanese nationalism, Chuang experiments with the possibilities of rhizomatic becomings of the Taiwan Island.

Session Four, “The Multispecies Connection and Interspecies Intimacy,”

was led by Dr. Rose Hsiu-Li Juan and Dr. I-Ping Liang. Juan's presentation was an exploration of the dream collectivity in the face of crisis such as the outbreak of COVID-19. Juan focused on the Native American dream tradition, which confronts the anthropocentric dream practice of the "Whiteman." In the former tradition, the indigenous people dream about others and about otherness, which can serve as a kind of dream agency in the Anthropocene era. Liang takes the production of Oolong tea as a prime example of transspecies becomings that incorporates humans, plants and insects. Liang adopts the theories of Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, and Scott Gilbert to map the complex and intertwined nurturing and cultivating process that form the poesis of Oolong tea.

Section Five, "Resource Extraction," was led by Dr. Paul Jobin. Jobin started from the concept of "petrochemical planet" to trace the production and pollution process of Formosa Plastics, which is key to Studies of Taiwan in the Anthropocene. Jobin investigated the Taiwanese government's discourse on the development of the high-value-added petrochemical industry as a way to place Taiwan at the center of global economics and at the margins of the (dis)United Nations.

Session Six, "Trans-species Imagination in Asia," was led by Dr. Catherine Ju-Yu Cheng and Dr. Shu-Ching Chen. Cheng focused on Shinkai Makoto's animated film, *Your Name*, to explore how the catastrophic meteorite disaster is unrepresentable and how it serves as a creative and destabilizing force. Cheng elaborates on the concept of "musubi" (non-linear time) to explicate the convergence of different durations that could break up the limitations of chronological time. Drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Deleuze, Malabou, and Blanchot, Cheng poses several questions on the possibility that ecological disasters could be reversed, though only if human beings are endowed with the ability to reverse time and change the course of history. Chen's presentation is based on a reading of an Asian immigrant's narrative in the Anthropocene era. The literary text she focused on to demonstrate the stigmatized Asian body is Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*. Chen explicates how Lai's novel mobilizes smell as a medium between humans and the environment in a posthuman context, which becomes an imagination of trans-species entanglements.

The events of TAN III have displayed the vibrancy and energy of our research group. The talks and discussions in each session have stimulated inter-disciplinary dialogues and cross-boundary thinking. The Anthropocene is a difficult and challenging field that invites ongoing

discussions and debates. Our Taiwan-based research network has and will continue to contribute to global scholarship of environmental humanities to address the various issues of the Anthropocene.