

From Earth's Quakes to Soul's Shakes: Ecological Trauma of Women in the Novels of Sichuan Writers A Lai and An Changhe

Ling Wang

(Chengdu Normal University and University of Canterbury)

Abstract:

This article employs an ecological trauma theory to examine literary representations of seismic catastrophe in post-Wenchuan earthquake (2008) fiction. Focusing on two Sichuan authors who witnessed the catastrophe, it analyses the gendered dimensions of environmental devastation and recovery trajectories in A Lai's *阿来 Yun zhong ji* 云中记 (In the Clouds, 2019) and An Changhe's *安昌河 Duanlie dai* 断裂带 (Fault Zone, 2013). The study commences with a critical review of Wenchuan earthquake literature scholarship, establishing theoretical intersections between ecological trauma discourse and seismic narrative construction. Textual analysis reveals that A Lai's work embodies an animistic ecophilosophy and portrays ecological recovery through the female character's reintegration with both human community and nature. An's novel, conversely, exposes the complex socioecological environment of rural Sichuan and explores the multiple traumas shaping the female character's ecological resilience. The comparative examination posits that contemporary Sichuan writers articulate an eco-cosmological view predicated on deference to natural law and recognition of anthropo-ecological interdependence. By engaging with the ecological trauma experiences of marginalised women, the study identifies a tripartite recovery paradigm encompassing psychological reconstitution, communal reintegration, and environmental reciprocity. These insights advance theoretic-

cal discourse within disaster literary studies, simultaneously proposing innovative methodological frameworks for the analysis of ecological trauma narratives.

Keywords: ecological trauma, Wenchuan earthquake narrative, eco-recovery, female protagonist, Sichuan writers

Introduction

Chinese mythology, with tales such as “Jingwei Filling the Sea” (精卫填海),¹ “Houyi Shooting the Suns” (后羿射日), “Yu the Great Controlling the Waters” (大禹治水), and “Yugong Moving Mountains” (愚公移山), illustrates how Chinese civilisation perceived and interacted with the forces of nature. They serve as a testament to the enduring human spirit to understand, utilise, and sometimes reshape the natural world for survival and prosperity. Nevertheless, juxtaposed against these tales of mastery are the harsh realities of natural disasters, which reveal humanity’s vulnerability.

China is situated at the intersection of the Pacific Rim’s seismic belt and the Eurasian seismic belt, where seismic fault zones are highly developed. The country experiences frequent, intense, shallow, and widely distributed seismic activity, making it highly susceptible to earthquake disasters. Statistics indicate that approximately 35% of the world’s continental earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 or above occur in China. In the twentieth century, out of the 1.2 million global deaths caused by earthquakes, 590,000 occurred in China. Between 1900 and 2007, mainland China experienced 70 earthquakes of magnitude 7.0 to 7.9 and six earthquakes of magnitude 8.0 or above (Zhang 577). Behind these stark figures lie countless lives threatened by these natural disasters. Sichuan Province, located in the mountainous region of southwestern China, frequently experiences significant seismic activities due to the uplift of tectonic plates. The most impactful event was the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, which was one of the deadliest and most devastating natural disasters in recent Chinese history.

On 12 May 2008, an 8.0-magnitude earthquake struck Wenchuan County in Si-

1 My translation. Hereafter, unless otherwise stated, all translations into English are my own.

chuan Province, resulting in over 69,000 deaths, 374,176 injuries, and 18,222 people reported missing. After the Wenchuan earthquake occurred, the extensive media coverage and the deepening rescue efforts plunged the entire nation into a state of mourning. Seismic events, with their overpowering, unpredictable, and profoundly destructive impact on human material civilisation, have sparked critical reflections. In contemporary Chinese literary narratives, seismic disasters have emerged as an important focus of disaster literature and prompted a surge in the genre's popularity in literary production and study.

This article investigates the attention to and portrayal of nature-induced trauma in contemporary Chinese literature, with a particular focus on narratives and literary works related to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. Drawing on definitions and applications of ecological trauma theory, this study identifies earthquakes as a tangible and formidable type of ecological trauma. By analysing and interpreting these narratives through the lens of ecological trauma theory, the article illuminates the broader implications of these catastrophic events. To provide a detailed analysis, the article centres on two earthquake novels: *Yun zhong ji* 云中记 (In the Clouds, 2019) by Tibetan writer A Lai 阿来 and *Duanlie dai* 断裂带 (Fault Zone, 2013) by Han Chinese writer An Changhe 安昌河.

Both authors, who hail from Sichuan Province, experienced the brutal earthquake and participated in the post-disaster relief efforts. Their novels reveal the destructive impact of catastrophic events on human health and society, as well as the indirect psychological challenges these disasters pose. Their works explore different ecological concepts and paths to ecological restoration. Notably, as male writers, their works critically theorise the intersection of gender and environmental vulnerability in ethnic minority contexts. Special attention is given to the complex, enduring, and heterogeneous ecological trauma experienced by young female characters in these novels.

This study identifies three interconnected pathways of ecological recovery in these female characters: personal growth, community integration, and environmental interaction. The analysis reveals how these Sichuanese writers articulate a distinct ecological consciousness through their narratives and demonstrate both respect for natural laws and an understanding of human-environment interdependence. By examining literary representations of ecological trauma and restoration, the research highlights literature's unique role in environmental discourse and its capacity to address ecological crises through narrative means.

The Wenchuan Earthquake-Related Narrative and Study in the Chinese Context

In contemporary Chinese literature, a diverse range of works explore the theme of earthquakes, with a large proportion of focus on the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake. The Wenchuan earthquake has received “immediate” and widespread attention due to extensive news coverage, an inclusive and empathetic societal environment, and the development of social media (Zhang Xi 93). Chinese writers express their concern for the Wenchuan earthquake through various literary forms that include reportage, poetry, novels, and essays.

Poetry stands out as the most prominent form of literary expression following the Wenchuan earthquake, with its timeliness, rapid response, and fervent emotion (Xie 32). Many poets vigorously illustrate the positive aspects of human nature and portray nurturing familial relationships, mutual assistance among compatriots, and the unity of government and the masses. For instance, in the poetry collection *Gan tian dong ti: Wenchuan da dizhen shige jiyi* 感天动地: 汶川大地震诗歌记忆 (Touching Heaven and Earth: Poetry Memories of the Wenchuan Earthquake, 2008), accolades are given to mothers sacrificing for their children, teachers sacrificing for their students, soldiers risking their lives for rescue efforts, commoners donating money and supplies, and volunteers rushing to disaster areas (Dong 15). Subsequently, reportage literature and documentary works were published, including Zhu Yu's 朱玉 *Tiantang shang de yunduo* 天堂上的云朵 (Clouds in Heaven, 2008), Guan Renshan's 关仁山 *Gandong tiandi: Cong Tangshan dao Wenchuan* 感动天地: 从唐山到汶川 (Touching the Heavens: From Tangshan to Wenchuan, 2008), and He Jianming's 何建明 *Cheli Sicheng: Beichuan ji shi* 撤离死城: 北川纪事 (Evacuating the Dead City: Beichuan Chronicles, 2009). Reportage literature swiftly responds to the Wenchuan earthquake and vividly depicts the harrowing and tragic nature of the disaster with a strong sense of realism. (Peng and Zhang 249).

After the initial surge of the post-Wenchuan earthquake poetry, there was a shift towards novel writing, with over sixty novels published following a relatively long period of creative conception. For instance, Ge Dui's 歌兑 *Chelie* 坼裂 (Cracked, 2010), Qin Ling's 秦岭 *Touming de feixu* 透明的废墟 (Transparent Ruins, 2011), Zou Jin's 邹瑾 *Tian ru* 天乳 (Heaven's Milk, 2014), Li Xianyue's 李先钺 *Wo zai taohua mianqian kaifang* 我在桃花面前开放 (Peach Blooming Before Me, 2017), and Zhong Zhenglin's 钟正林 *Shan ming* 山命 (Mountain Life, 2021). Among these, A Lai's *Yun zhong ji* focuses on the living conditions of ethnic minorities in response to the development of modernisation and emphasises a strong ecological awareness of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. An Changhe's

Duanlie dai meticulously describes the developmental changes in rural Sichuan from before the Great Tangshan earthquake (1976) to after the Wenchuan earthquake. It explores human psychological struggles and social interactions in the face of disaster. Although these two works do not feature women as the main characters, they both depict the contrasting experiences of female supporting characters before and after ecological trauma. The strength and intensity of this contrast make the women in these works the primary focus of this analysis.

The above overview of literary works on the Wenchuan earthquakes highlights two distinct characteristics of the contemporary Chinese earthquake narrative. Firstly, in terms of genre, contemporary Chinese earthquake literature demonstrates a developmental pattern that begins with poetry, dominated by reportage and documentary literature, and gradually transitions to fiction. Secondly, novels related to the Wenchuan earthquake focus on themes such as individual psychological trauma and growth, the development and challenges faced by minority regions, the complex experiences and psychological trauma of vulnerable groups, and the exploration of ecological and social construction. These works provide a broader platform for detailed earthquake narratives and character development. The creation of the novels goes beyond the narrative of political preference and social responsibility to incorporate post-earthquake realities and social issues. Novels therefore provide fertile ground for examining these issues via textual analysis.

In addition to the immense creative enthusiasm and literary achievements in contemporary Chinese literature regarding the Wenchuan earthquake, research and criticism in earthquake literature are also flourishing. Scholars have increasingly concentrated on works that explore the thematic depth, narrative techniques, and cultural significance of earthquake literature. It has led to a growing field of study that highlights the importance of such literature in understanding and commemorating the human experience of natural disasters. Building on the current research on Wenchuan earthquake literature, this article categorises the study into four key aspects.

The first aspect is theme-based research on earthquakes as part of natural disasters. For instance, Gao Mingyue integrates trauma theory to illuminate emotional expressivity in narratives centred around catastrophic events (123), while Zhang Tanghui explores the psychological impacts of natural disasters like earthquakes and the SARS epidemic (167). The second aspect involves analysing the characteristics of Chinese earthquake literature and the value of specific literary works. Scholars such as Ding Liuli, Zhang Siyuan, Wu Xueli, He Shaojun, and Song Binghui provide separate interpretations of A Lai's *Yun zhong ji*. They discuss various

aspects such as spiritual healing and the reconstruction of Tibetan rural life. Additionally, Zhang Yiting, Chen Jinxing, Yang Sen, Song Binhui, Liu Chengyong, and others have explored the trauma healing process and ecological consciousness in A Lai's works from the perspective of trauma studies and national identity recognition (130). The third category summarises and synthesises the narrative discourse patterns in Wenchuan earthquake literature, with a primary focus on the compilation of literary works post-earthquake. Peng Xiuyin and Zhang Tanghui note the diversity and social redemptive function of Wenchuan earthquake literature, despite its standardisation and embellishment (248). The aesthetic perspective research on earthquake and disaster literature constitutes the fourth category. Fan Zao and Jia Fei argue for a focus on the artistic aspect of contemporary disaster literature to achieve broader aesthetic innovation (172). Zhang Siyuan analyses the aesthetics of fear, sublimity, and homecoming in *Yun zhong ji* (95). Their works indicate a shift in disaster literature research to literary qualities and the aesthetic function of literature, rather than merely social functions or theoretical constructs.

These four categories of studies have inspired and provided feasible models for the analyses in this article, particularly in applying trauma theory and conducting close textual examinations. Trauma theory, in this context, refers to the framework used to analyse the psychological and emotional impact of traumatic events on individuals and communities. Its defining characteristics include the exploration of memory, representation, and the long-term effects of trauma. By incorporating ecological aspects into trauma theory, the analysis emphasises the interconnectedness between human experiences of trauma and environmental factors, enriching the study by considering the symbiotic relationship between humans and their environment. The next chapter will provide a detailed conceptualisation of ecological trauma and its interaction with earthquake narratives. In this article, ecological trauma theory is specifically applied to understand how the selected texts depict ecocrisis and its impact on individual experiences. The two selected novels, written post-earthquake, depict individual trauma, minority survival, and human-environment symbiosis, thereby aligning with ecological trauma theory. The analyses of these novels aim to fill the gap in ecological trauma studies.

Conceptualisation of Ecological Trauma and Its Interaction With Earthquake Narratives

Ecological trauma is an interdisciplinary concept that encompasses both the tangible environmental damage and the intangible psychological effects on individuals and communities. As the world faces unprecedented environmental challenges,

more and more attention has been paid to ecological crisis and environmental damage in literary works. Understanding and using the concept of ecological trauma to analyse literary works is crucial to the development of literary trauma research and helps foster resilience, promote healing, and chart a sustainable path forward. Moreover, the psychological impact of ecological trauma, characterised by its long duration, destructive nature, and significant individual differences, affects the normal lives of survivors. Due to the randomness of natural disasters, the psychological resilience of individuals or groups varies depending on their roles, leading to different degrees of psychological trauma (Lowe et al. 2). Consequently, post-traumatic stress disorder has become a common psychological illness, with natural disasters often causing severe and complex mental health issues, especially with recurring traumatic responses (Raise-Abdullahi et al. 1).

Nevertheless, the term “ecological trauma” or “eco-trauma” is not explicitly defined in a singular manner. Scholars from different disciplines touch upon the concept of ecological trauma and its implications, particularly in the realm of psychology. American psychologist Tina Alice Amorok presents the concepts of “eco-trauma,” “eco-being,” and “eco-recovery of being” (28). From her perspective, eco-trauma refers to the deep and lasting damage inflicted upon ecosystems, often resulting from human interventions and threatening the survival of humans in return (29). This raises the question: Can seismic events be categorised under ecological trauma, given their natural origin yet profound impact on ecosystems and human societies? It is undeniable that earthquakes are a type of natural disaster. While there is no empirically established direct causal relationship between human activities and seismic events, it is imperative that research encompassing various aspects of earthquakes, including literary narratives, acknowledges the complex interplay between human beings and the natural environment. The interplay bears heightened significance following the earthquake, in which secondary calamities need mitigation and rehabilitation and reconstruction processes are required.

This perspective is in line with the findings of social scientists, such as Shannon Doocy, Maria Mavrouli, and Shuo Wang, who discuss the impacts of natural disasters on human populations and illuminate aspects in relation to mortality, injury, and displacement (Doocy et al.). These scholars’ research also explores how earthquakes affect public health and highlights their significance as ecological traumas, and examines the psychological aftermath of such events (Wang et al.). The multifaceted interplay of geographical factors, religious beliefs, cultural dynamics, historical legacies, and prevailing social norms invariably forges a symbiotic connection between earthquakes and distinct societal cohorts. Consequently, from the

aspect of both psychology and social science, the seismic occurrence emerges as an unequivocal exemplar of one of the most overt manifestations of ecological trauma. This perturbation not only leaves an enduring imprint on the collective psyche but also engenders indelible trauma within specific cultural milieus and literary representations that underscore the seismic event's profound ecological ramifications.

From trauma theory, the interpretation of contemporary Chinese earthquake narratives presents an essential issue for discussion. Many scholars have positioned trauma as a pivotal motif within contemporary Chinese literary and cultural analyses. Among these are influential scholars like David Der-Wei Wang, Ban Wang, Yomi Braester, Michael Berry, and Karen Laura Thornber. Their investigations scrutinise the reinterpretation and representation of historical trauma within the realms of Chinese literature, cinema, and mainstream culture. Some of them also express concerns about environmental issues. For instance, Karen Thornber's concept of ecoambiguity explores "the complex, contradictory interactions between humans and the environments with a significant nonhuman presence" (1). She argues that the ambiguous combination of human actions and non-human processes has altered the world's ecosystems, which makes global environmental crises inevitable (2). Her perspective provides a dialectical approach to discussing ecological awareness in contemporary Chinese literary earthquake narratives.

Ecological trauma theory effectively explains the indelible harm caused by extreme ecological events to both the Earth's ecosystem and the human psyche, thus providing theoretical insights into traumatic narratives in disaster literature. However, as a branch of trauma theory, ecological trauma theory is not sufficiently integrated with literary and cultural studies in China. This study redefines the ecological trauma narratives of Sichuan writers who experienced the Wenchuan earthquake. By analysing their works, the study reveals the complex and contradictory interplay between literature, personal ecological trauma experiences, and environmental crises. This perspective of ecological trauma theory not only aids in understanding the ecological dimensions of contemporary Chinese literature but also emphasises how it reflects and responds to trauma in the context of environmental crises.

The two novels selected for analysis differ in popularity and critical reception: one is widely acclaimed for its ecological writing about ethnic minorities, while the other, written in the Sichuan dialect and focusing on the rural ecological environment of Sichuan, has yet to receive extensive discussion in domestic and international literary circles. Both novels focus on marginalised groups, presenting different ecological viewpoints that merit comparative study.

Furthermore, this study focuses on the ecological trauma experiences of young female characters in these two novels and their paths to ecological recovery. It proposes a tripartite model of ecological trauma recovery—self, social, and environmental—emphasising the importance of self-awareness and self-redemption in the process of ecological trauma recovery. The two female characters, who have experienced complex ecological traumas, inevitably confront the relationship between ecological disasters and the maintenance of natural and social ecosystems in their healing journey. As Amorok states, ecological trauma represents collective harm experienced by eco-beings within both “a cosmological and an experiential realm” (29). Ecological trauma is related to social values, post-disaster policies, ethical and religious beliefs, and family concepts. This necessitates exploring therapeutic possibilities in the ecological domain. In the novels, women not only encounter profound fear of death and acute perception of pain during earthquakes but also endure emotional damage and social abandonment as members of vulnerable groups in Chinese patriarchal society. Therefore, a female-centred research perspective can explore the intersection of gender and environmental issues by examining the roles of women and nature as the ‘other,’ which enriches the discourse on ecological trauma.

1. Ecological Trauma in *Yun zhong ji*: The Contradictory Modernity of Ethnic Minorities

A Lai, a prominent Tibetan writer from the Gyarong Tibetan ethnic group (嘉绒藏族) that inhabits the Aba Prefecture, Sichuan Province, has established himself as a versatile and prolific figure in contemporary Chinese literature. His literary works span over three decades, encompassing diverse genres such as poetry, short fiction, novels, and essays. A Lai’s work, particularly his novel *Chen’ai luoding* 尘埃落定 (Red Poppies, 2000),² has received critical acclaim, including the prestigious Mao Dun Literature Prize (茅盾文学奖). His writing often investigates the complexities of Tibetan life and culture and offers ecological perspectives on social changes in the Tibetan region. The narrative style of A Lai blends traditional Tibetan elements with modern literary techniques and creates compelling and culturally rich stories.

Ten years after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, as a survivor who experienced the earthquake and participated in the rescue, A Lai completed the novel, *Yun zhong ji* against the background of the destructive earthquake. The story takes place in Yunzhong, which translates to “in the clouds,” a Tibetan village on the western Sichuan Plateau that has existed for thousands of years. The earthquake killed more

2 The English title of the book was translated by Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-Chun Lin.

than a hundred people in the village, while the threat of potential landslides forced villagers to move to new government housing in the plains below to mingle with Han Chinese. The novel discusses the resilience and transformation of the Tibetan villagers as they confront the realities of loss and change. It stands as a poignant reflection on the themes of survival, cultural identity, rural modernity and the human spirit in the face of adversity. Building on the discussion of A Lai's special animistic ecological perspective, the following sections will further analyse the ecological trauma experienced by the young Tibetan woman Yang Jin in the aftermath of the earthquake. By examining the profound changes in her life and the impact of modernisation on her psyche, the analysis aims to elucidate the pressures and challenges faced by ethnic minorities, particularly minority women, as a result of ecological crises. Through a close reading of *Yun zhong ji*, this article argues that the author's depiction of how environmental issues intertwine with cultural customs, beliefs, and social norms contributes to a better understanding of the complex relationship between ecological and cultural issues in Chinese society.

1.1 The Animistic Ecological Perspective in A Lai's Earthquake Narrative

The concepts of equality among all living beings and the animistic belief that all things possess a spirit are ecological principles prominently reflected in many of A Lai's works. In his literary works, A Lai consistently integrates these themes to show the interconnectedness of existence and the intrinsic value of every entity in the natural world. This philosophical stance not only enriches his narratives but also provides a profound commentary on the need for ecological balance and ethical considerations in the face of modern environmental challenges. In *Yun zhong ji*, every entity is imbued with spirit and divinity. The ancient cypress tree, sacred mountains, irises, larks, deer, and horses of Yunzhong village are depicted as remnants of natural divinity. These elements enhance the mystical beauty of the village and represent a modern legacy of nature's sacredness.

The history of Yunzhong village unfolds through the memories of the village shaman, A Ba. Over a thousand years ago, their nomadic ancestors settled in this lush, naturally bountiful area. Adherents of the Bön religion revered mountain gods and nature. Be that as it may, over centuries, some indigenous communities assimilated with other residents, altering their beliefs, abandoning traditions, and even exploiting natural resources for profit. The change led to a division in the village, with only a few remaining in their ancestral homes, albeit influenced by modern education and societal development. The earthquake shattered the last vestiges of their resistance, rendering their ecological environment unsuitable for pastoral life. They

were compelled to leave their village and fully adapt to modern life.

From the pre-earthquake impact of modernisation on this ancient Tibetan village to the catastrophic disruption of their settled lifestyle, the narrative of A Lai transitions from the sorrow and helplessness of disaster to the theme of rebirth from the ruins. Yunzhong village, having endured the earthquake, emerges under nature's sculpting hand with vibrant vitality. The transformation begins with various plants reclaiming the land. Abandoned farmlands gradually become occupied by wild grasses, chrysanthemums, and willows. Subsequently, animals manifest their presence in a miraculous manner. Notably, deer—a species typically restricted to zoos in modern China—are now observed roaming freely. Finally, the human element is embodied in A Ba, who voluntarily returns to Yunzhong village. Living in a state of contented inaction, he finds joy in this existence, where humans and nature coalesce into a harmonious ecological landscape. Having faced the merciless disaster, A Ba returns to the village with a heartfelt appreciation for its current state, free from the shadow of death, where all life flourishes (A Lai 240). In *Yun zhong ji*, the ecological perspective that all beings are spirited and equal permeates throughout. The protagonist, the priest A Ba, upon returning to the rejuvenated ruins, not only heals his own trauma but also consoles the surviving villagers through a series of religious ceremonies honouring the deceased and pacifying the spirits. Tina Amrok also agrees with innate animism. She acclaims that, 'Ecological worldviews effectively peel back the layers of modern civilization's alienation from nature and animals and from the intimate facts of both our interdependence and our natural impulse toward interspecies reverence and communion' (29). A Lai's narrative, through the story of A Ba, allows readers to witness the healing power of nature

The earthquake's destruction of Yunzhong village's ecological environment and the rapid advancement of material society posed substantial challenges for the survivors. These challenges encompassed not only the trauma of the earthquake, the loss of loved ones, and physical injuries but also the conflicting feelings of nostalgia for their old life and anticipation for their new one. A Lai investigates how commercialism has redefined urban-rural relationships and its implications on traditional values. A Lai's narrative transcends mere depictions of the Tibetan environment, culture, and history. His work not only highlights the environmental and cultural upheavals faced by ethnic minorities but also contributes to further discussions on ecological justice and cultural resilience in the face of modernisation.

The eco-traumatic experiences of Yang Jin serve as a poignant case study for examining the effects of forced rapid development on agro-pastoral ways of life. By illustrating Yang Jin's journey, A Lai underscores the tension between preserv-

ing cultural heritage and adapting to modernity. The subsequent section explores the challenge faced by ethnic minority females as they navigate the complexities of ecological disruption, eco-trauma and cultural preservation amidst the pressures of modernity.

1.2 Yang Jin's Journey: The Two Returns in Eco-Trauma Recovery

In *Yun zhong ji*, the Tibetan girl Yang Jin plays a minor role within the grand narrative of the earthquake and its unique ecological perspective. Unlike the protagonist A Ba, her narrative arc is less central, yet it serves as a poignant vehicle for exploring ecological trauma through concise and evocative portrayals. Prior to the earthquake, Yang Jin leads an idyllic existence in Yunzhong Village, residing harmoniously with her parents and younger brother. Her passion for dance, cultivated through years of training in traditional ethnic dance forms, embodies her aspirations for artistic expression and her dream of performing on a grand stage. However, the seismic catastrophe irrevocably alters her life. Her family perishes beneath the rubble, and a collapsing beam severs her leg, leaving it precariously attached by mere tissue. The simultaneous loss of her family and the destruction of her dance ambitions plunge her into profound despair, nearly extinguishing her will to survive. Trapped beneath the debris, she repeatedly implores her rescuers, "I want to die, my whole family is dead, I want to die. My leg is broken, I can never dance again, I want to die" (A Lai 330). In a harrowing act of desperation, she severs her own injured leg, only to be discovered by military personnel, airlifted to a metropolitan hospital, and subsequently treated. With societal support, she embarks on a new phase of life, albeit one marked by profound physical and emotional scars.

Despite the narrative's brevity in depicting Yang Jin's ordeal, it effectively encapsulates the multifaceted adversities faced by a young woman grappling with ecological trauma and its enduring repercussions. Although the loss of her leg renders her physically impaired, Yang Jin attracts the attention of an art management company, which seeks to transform her into a symbol of resilience—a female dancer with disability who has triumphed over the earthquake's devastation. The company imposes stringent demands on her physical appearance, exploiting her striking visual contrast of beauty and disability to garner public sympathy and commercial profit. Under the company's sponsorship, Yang Jin undergoes rehabilitation and eventually performs dances on television using a prosthetic limb. This demonstrates her determination to transcend her circumstances and achieve her artistic ambitions in an urban setting, albeit through unconventional means.

Yang Jin's post-earthquake journey includes two returns to Yunzhong village,

the site of her ecological trauma. Her initial return is organised by the company, which employs drone footage to document her performance amidst the ruins of her former home. This staged performance is designed to elicit emotional resonance and enhance her appeal in an upcoming dance competition. The text explicitly delineates the company's calculated orchestration: "At this moment, the drone is still in the sky, its camera wide open. The girl's performance in front of her home's ruins is also designed; she must stand there, desperately restrain her sorrow, and then finally lose control, collapse, and cry on the ground" (A Lai 331). Despite the meticulously planned nature of the event, Yang Jin's emotional turmoil and traumatic memories overwhelm her, which culminates in her fainting beside the ruins. In this moment, she disregards the camera's presence and finds solace in the natural environment of Yunzhong village and the comforting embrace of its villagers. Her transition from unconsciousness to a rare, peaceful sleep underscores the enduring connection between her identity, the community, and the environment. However, upon awakening, she is compelled to confront the contractual obligations imposed by the company, which necessitated her departure from the village and the instrumentalisation of her trauma for competitive gain.

Within the framework of commercial consumerism, Yang Jin's journey exemplifies a dualistic reality. On one level, the financial and material support she receives enables her to pursue her personal and artistic aspirations. On another level, her identity is commodified, with her status as a female orphan, her act of self-amputation, and the juxtaposition of her beauty and disability becoming marketable attributes. The exploitation has severe implications for her mental health, as it intensifies her trauma rather than facilitating true healing. As Arthur W. Frank observes in his analysis of illness and trauma narratives, the commercialisation of personal suffering often perpetuates cycles of relived trauma, impeding authentic recovery (101). Yang Jin's experience vividly illustrates this dynamic, underscoring the complex interplay between resilience, exploitation, and the enduring impact of ecological and personal catastrophe.

Yang Jin's second return to Yunzhong village occurs at a critical juncture in her life, marked by deteriorating health and an almost unsustainable existence. During the dance competition, Yang Jin struggles to find her rhythm in dance again as "she falls ill with a fever and nightmares, reminiscent of her difficult recovery in the rehabilitation centre. She is hospitalised, delirious, and longing for a home she no longer has" (A Lai 375). Frequently tormented by nightmares, as if trapped in ruins, "Yang Jin finds herself voiceless in her dreams, as if her throat is gripped by a giant grey hand" (A Lai 374). This state renders her daily life and competition participa-

tion nearly impossible. Eventually, Ultimately, Yang Jin returns to the newly constructed community where earthquake survivors have been resettled. Reunited with her former neighbours and those who shared the earthquake experience, they sing ancient songs together, mourning the lost Yunzhong village.

In the context of a consumer culture dominated by a commodity economy, nothing is beyond exchange. Under economic principles, even the disasters and traumas people experience can be commodified and sold as stories. Conversely, amidst her beloved ones, “She rhythmically sways her body to the song. Rhythm, rhythm, she has found the rhythm of her life’s dance” (A Lai 382). The words, “sways her body to the song” are a poignant depiction of her reconnection with her cultural roots and the collective memory of her community. This moment symbolises her gradual healing and the restoration of her identity, which has been fractured by the traumatic experience of the earthquake. From her initial return driven by commercial motives to her subsequent initiative and voluntary return to the community, Yang Jin’s experiences align with Judith Herman’s theory of trauma and recovery. The theory outlines a progression from active self-awareness and the confrontation of trauma to reintegration into the community and the formation of emotional connections. It underscores the significance of self-help efforts and community engagement (Herman 90-97). Upon her return to her familiar natural environment and social network, Yang Jin experiences a sense of inner peace and solace.

Yang Jin’s transformation also embodies A Lai’s concept of animistic ecology, a philosophical perspective that venerates the interconnectedness of all living beings. Her psychological well-being and recovery from eco-trauma are intrinsically linked to her proactive attempts to escape commercial exploitation, as well as her reintegration into the rural community inhabited by ethnic minorities and the natural environment that began to recover after the earthquake. The juxtaposition of the traumatic effects of the earthquake and the exploitation of women through commodification and objectification brought about by modern consumerism underscores a critical commentary on the disruptive forces of contemporary life. Her return highlights the unique experiences of eco-trauma from a female perspective and the attempts at ecological recovery following the awakening of self-rescue awareness.

The multifaceted nature of individual responses to ecological trauma reflects the complexity of human experiences in the face of environmental crises. Understanding these diverse responses is crucial for developing effective strategies for ecological restoration and personal healing. The upcoming section of this study focuses on An Changhe’s *Duanlie dai*, which tells the story of a girl from rural Si-

chuan experiencing an ecological crisis following an earthquake and embarking on a journey of self-redemption and resilient growth. A detailed analysis of this novel provides a profound insight into the self-redemptive power manifested by women amidst ecological crises, as well as the influence of compound ecological trauma on individual development.

2. Forged by Adversity: The Eco-Trauma and Self-Rescue of Qin Sihui

In contrast to the idyllic and pastoral life depicted in the Tibetan village of *Yun zhong ji*, an ethnic Han, An Changhe presents a starkly different portrayal of rural life. His narrative, although infused with a profound reliance on and affection for nature, reveals the bitter, indifferent, and even cruel aspects of village life in South China. In the 1970s, born in An County, Sichuan, An Changhe left school early due to poverty and became a child labourer in a Shanxi coal mine. After experiencing life-and-death situations while working, he returned to his hometown to farm, teach himself to write, and eventually work as a reporter and editor at the county television station. His literary works poignantly capture the painful experiences of his childhood in the countryside, as well as the trauma encountered during his formative years.

Unlike A Lai, An Changhe remains a relatively unfamiliar name in both Chinese and international literary circles. Currently, there is only one monograph and few articles on his novels in mainland Chinese academia. Nevertheless, An Changhe is a prolific writer who has authored over ten novels, four of which have been adapted into films, with two already released. Through his extensive oeuvre, comprising over three million characters, An Changhe has constructed a unique depiction of Sichuan's rural landscape, encapsulated in the triad of *Qin cun* 秦村 (Qin Village), *Tu zhen* 土镇 (Tu Zhen), and *Ai cheng* 爱城 (Love City). In this landscape, the enduring themes are suffering, hunger, interpersonal strife, overt and covert conflicts, and the pervasive darkness of human nature, all permeated by death (Guo and Wang, 22). Rather than expressing nostalgia for the simplicity of rural life and nature, An Changhe's narratives convey a raw aversion to rural suffering.

Scholars argue that An Changhe's earlier works discuss themes of moral ambiguity and existential turmoil, but in his more recent writings, An Changhe grapples with reconciling individual ethical dilemmas with societal questions (Guo and Wang, "Journeying through human darkness" 49-50). *Duanlie dai*, situated in the later phase of An Changhe's literary career, exemplifies this thematic evolution. It leverages the seismic metaphors of two earthquakes to unfold familial conflicts and grievances entrenched in personal ambitions and societal pressures. Through the

narrative arc of *Duanlie dai*, An Changhe not only describes the development and change process of intergenerational estrangement caused by earthquakes but also presents the impact of intergenerational trauma on the next generation. The thematic exploration ultimately culminates in themes of personal liberation, self-redemption and spiritual elevation, which reflect An Changhe's profound engagement with the human condition and the quest for a harmonious socioecological environment. Furthermore, Qin Sihui's journey of self-redemption is a central theme in the novel, which showcases the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Through Sihui's story, An Changhe explores themes of endurance, resilience, and the pursuit of meaning in a challenging and unforgiving world.

2.1 Intergenerational Trauma and Socioecological Disparities During Two Earthquakes in *Duanlie dai*

As one of An Changhe's representative works, *Duanlie dai* portrays life in Qin Village, located in the Longmen Mountain Fault Zone of Sichuan Province, southwestern China. Against the backdrop of this geographical feature, the novel describes a society rife with violence, desires, and contradictions through the experiences and emotions of its villagers. Central to the narrative are the complicated relationships among the villagers, who face various survival and moral dilemmas. These include multifaceted emotional entanglements such as family bonds, friendships, love, hatred, loyalty, and betrayal. The narrative of *Duanlie dai* focuses on the stories of two rural families, the An and Qin families. The story begins with the national frenzy and upheaval surrounding earthquake prediction following the 1976 Tangshan earthquake and traces the experiences of the An and Qin families. It continues through to the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, capturing the experiences of the second generation of these families. By linking these two major seismic events, the narrative spans over thirty years and records the life experiences of two generations. This period signifies China's shift from a relatively isolated and closed socio-political and economic environment prior to the Reform and Opening Up (from 1978) to a more inclusive and ecologically harmonious development paradigm in the new millennium.

Duanlie dai employs distinctive dialects that authentically capture the socioecological transformations within Sichuan's rural landscape. The novel vividly depicts the typical social landscape of the Sichuan countryside at the time of the Tangshan earthquake, which concentrates on aspects such as the community's response to frequent geological disasters, the collective agricultural practices, the challenges of poor material and spiritual life, and the persistence of traditional social concepts.

The first generation of the two families depicted in the novel comprises the witnesses of the Songpan Pingwu earthquake (in Sichuan) and of the following Great Tangshan earthquake in the same year. They endured the tense political environment and stringent ideological control during the Great Tangshan earthquake. Government directives on earthquake prediction, prevention, and other measures related to the Tangshan earthquake were perceived as prohibition that disrupted normal agricultural and daily activities. They faced the deaths of relatives and friends, loss of property, and the threat of secondary disasters such as mudslides and landslides after the earthquake. These experiences left indelible trauma that affected their lives for years to come, even impacting the next generation. For example, in the story, Qin Fengtai, the patriarch of the Qin family, gains status and income by building sturdy earthquake-resistant houses and becoming the local earthquake predictor in Qin Village. Yet, this also makes him many enemies, and he is eventually murdered. The ongoing threat of earthquakes and his death deal a double blow to his children. Meanwhile, the An family suffers severe consequences from living in an outdoor earthquake shelter for an extended period. The wife develops serious gynaecological issues affecting her reproductive health. After much difficulty and religious devotion, they finally conceive a child, whom they regard as a lifeline for their future and place immense family pressure on the next generation. Although the descendants of the Qin and An families did not face direct life-threatening dangers from the earthquake, their lives were overshadowed by the severe impact the earthquake had on their parents. Their experiences not only resonate with the preceding discussion in this article on whether earthquakes can be classified as ecological trauma triggers but also underscore that the psychological trauma, family environment, and social attitudes following the earthquake collectively form the root of ecological trauma. The eco-trauma experience of the second generation in the novel also provides an interpretation of intergenerational trauma.

In the science of medicine, intergenerational trauma is defined as “a discrete process and form of psychological trauma transmitted within families and communities” (Isobel, Goodyear et al. 1100). It occurs “when traumatic effects are passed across generations without exposure to the original event” (Isobel, McCloughen et al. 631). It can be passed down through attachment relationships where the parent has endured relational trauma, profoundly affecting individuals across their lifespan and making them more susceptible to additional trauma. In the novel, intergenerational trauma is conveyed through the depiction of the earthquake as a devastating ecological disaster affecting the two generations. The profound fear that the first generation experienced due to the earthquake inevitably influenced the second gen-

eration during their upbringing. This trauma is transmitted in various ways, such as psychological distress, altered family dynamics, and changes in social behaviour. The fear and anxiety of the first generation become internalised by the second generation, which leads to a pervasive sense of vulnerability and instability. The novel illustrates how trauma can transcend immediate physical and temporal boundaries, shaping the experiences and identities of subsequent generations. Through its narrative approach, the enduring legacy of natural disasters is poignantly depicted.

While the ecological environment may eventually recover, with houses being rebuilt and natural resources regenerating, the psychological wounds left by an ecological crisis are far more difficult to quantify. The physical restoration of the environment cannot erase the deep-seated trauma experienced by individuals who have lived through such disasters. Moreover, the lingering effects of such trauma can alter community dynamics, disrupt social cohesion, and influence cultural narratives. The memory of the disaster becomes a collective experience that shapes community identity and resilience. The next section will focus on the growth journey of Qin Sihui as she navigates the ecological intergenerational trauma inherited from her parents and then her own eco-trauma. The analysis of Qin Sihui's story will illustrate how an eco-traumatic experience can simultaneously hinder and fortify an individual's psychological fortitude.

2.2 The Ecological Resilience in the Transformative Journey of Qin Sihui in *Duanlie dai*

Duanlie dai provides a comparative portrayal of the second-generation rural inhabitants whose lives have undergone considerable advancements both materially and spiritually when contrasted with the relatively backward and feudal conditions prevalent in the 1970s. These individuals have gained access to better education and have grown up in more favourable environments. Despite these improvements, they remain considerably constrained by the persistent threats of natural disasters and enduringly conservative social attitudes. The dichotomy illuminates the ongoing struggles within rural communities, where progress is uneven and often hindered by entrenched social and ecological challenges. The narrative highlights the plight of women, who form a particularly vulnerable segment of this population.

The character Sihui, the fourth child in the Qin family, exemplifies the challenges faced by these women. Sihui's early life is overshadowed by an arranged marriage to An Wen, even before her birth. An Wen is perceived as a divine figure who is supposed to change the lives of both the Qin and An families. She is seduced by An Wen to engage in sex, which leads to an unintended pregnancy and severe

social stigma. The author describes the impact of this event on Sihui as follows: “She became very thin, very thin, as if she had died once” (An 150). However, to protect An Wen, she falsely claims to have been raped, resulting in her and her family’s dishonour within the village. With the support of her teacher, Sihui relocates to continue her education, only to face further abuse and exploitation by the headmaster’s mother and a local gangster. In a tragic turn, she accidentally causes the death of the headmaster’s mother during a confrontation, which the gangster helps cover up. With this “help,” she is able to sit for the university entrance examination and gain admission on one hand. On the other hand, this placed her under the long-term control of the gangster, which stripped her of her freedom. Choosing to study geology, Sihui returns to her hometown after graduation. She proposes relocating the county seat to avoid future seismic risks, but her suggestions are dismissed due to political interests. Despite her young age, she has already endured many hardships, and her future remains uncertain.

The character Qin Sihui presents a poignant life trajectory, deeply marked by various types and degrees of complex trauma. Firstly, Sihui’s upbringing is profoundly shaped by intergenerational trauma, which originates from her parents’ deep-seated fear of earthquakes. As her father is an earthquake forecaster, Sihui’s childhood is spent in makeshift shelters in the wilderness, a precautionary measure against potential seismic threats. Her father’s frequent absences further exacerbate the family’s instability, leaving them without adequate care and forcing Sihui to assume excessive household chores and farm work to support the family. This premature burden of adult responsibilities results in a childhood marred by persistent anxiety and an overwhelming fear of natural disasters. Although none of Sihui’s relatives perishes directly due to the earthquake, her father’s death shortly thereafter compounds the family’s grief. The psychological and practical pressures inflicted by the earthquake undoubtedly intensify the family’s hardships, reinforcing Sihui’s conviction that earthquakes are the root cause of her family’s misfortunes and deepening her dread of such catastrophes. Sihui is compelled to confront not only her own fears but also the unspoken and unresolved emotional burdens inherited from her parents. These specific experiences illuminate the origins of Sihui’s tragic early life and underscore the profound impact of intergenerational trauma on her development.

Furthermore, Sihui’s trauma is compounded by the oppressive gender norms perpetuated by the patriarchal society in which she lives. Her parents arrange her marriage to An Wen before she is born, believing him to be the “chosen one” who will deliver the family from post-earthquake suffering and poverty. Under this ar-

rangement, An Wen's personal preferences and reputation are prioritised over Sihui's autonomy. That leads her to endure humiliation during high school and nearly forfeit her opportunity to attend university, all to safeguard An Wen's standing. In other words, Sihui's trauma is multifaceted, yet these experiences are often eclipsed by her pervasive fear of earthquakes, which intertwines the pivotal moments of her life with seismic events. Shortly after the proposal to relocate the county was rejected, her hometown was devastated by the Wenchuan earthquake. Under the dual influence of intergenerational and gender-based trauma, Sihui experiences this ecological trauma, further entrenching her struggles within a broader context of societal and environmental upheaval.

Following the earthquake, Sihui is confronted with the overwhelming devastation of the natural disaster, which ultimately becomes a catalyst for her to defy her predetermined fate. Drawing on her professional expertise, she actively engages in the reconstruction efforts of her hometown. By the end of the novel, the immediate devastation begins to subside, a new county seat is under construction, and the local community exhibits signs of renewal. There is even a suggestion that Sihui and An Wen might reconcile and rekindle their relationship. However, in an unexpected and pivotal turn of events, Sihui chooses to confront a long-buried mistake from her youth—the accidental death of the headmaster's mother—and voluntarily surrenders herself to face legal consequences. This decisive act marks a profound moment of self-identity and redemption, as she confronts her inner scars with newfound resilience. Through this courageous act of accountability, Sihui not only seeks atonement but also achieves a sense of inner peace, symbolising her journey towards self-redemption and emotional healing.

From the perspective of eco-trauma theory, Qin Sihui's experiences illuminate the interconnectedness of environmental disasters and personal trauma. An Changhe uses the term "fault zone" (*duanlie dai* 断裂带) as a double entendre to express both the geological changes caused by the earthquake and the psychological fractures experienced by Sihui after her eco-trauma experience. As Sihui says in the novel: "I have studied the fault zone for so many years, yet I never discovered the major fault zone within my heart" (An 311). Sihui's story accentuates the compounded oppressions faced by women in a patriarchal society. She is constrained by familial, societal, and political systems, which parallels the damage inflicted on natural ecosystems by human activity. Eco-trauma, as discussed by Anil Narine, often elicits three primary responses: initially, an attempt to confront it, which may falter due to its overwhelming nature; secondly, a tendency to disavow it; and thirdly, an effort to derive meaning from it as a coping mechanism. Importantly, the meaning

derived may not align with the actual causes of the trauma (Narine 5). Sihui's experience of ecological trauma encapsulates all these reactions and underscores the complexity of responses to overwhelming stimuli.

Faced with the immediate aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake, Qin Sihui confronts her fears head-on. The novel details the female character's internal struggle and gradual realisation of her strength. This process of confronting and overcoming her trauma stresses the dual impact of ecological trauma. On one hand, it highlights the profound and lasting psychological damage such events can inflict. On the other hand, it reveals the potential for personal growth and empowerment that can arise from facing and overcoming such adversities. Influenced by inter-generational eco-trauma, she proactively studies seismology. After experiencing eco-trauma firsthand, she courageously confronts her past mistakes. Her development exemplifies a progressive understanding of eco-trauma and serves as a direct confrontation and positive response to the dual oppression of nature and society. Through Qin Sihui's story, *Duanlie dai* illustrates how the shadow of ecological trauma can loom over generations, influencing their mental and emotional well-being. Yet, it also emphasises the capacity for recovery and resilience, suggesting that individuals can find strength and courage within themselves, even in the face of overwhelming fear and uncertainty.

Compared with Yang Jin in the previously discussed novels, although both suffered misfortune due to earthquakes, Sihui's ecological trauma differs from that of Yang Jin. Yang Jin finds herself lost in the rapid process of modernisation and commercialisation following the aftermath. Sihui finds this catastrophe a source of strength for her to confront her shattered life and face the traumas of her youth. Her newfound strength can be seen as a form of ecological resilience, where the traumatic experience leads to personal growth and a reconfiguration of her identity in relation to the natural world. Sihui's journey enriches the study of young female characters dealing with eco-trauma induced by earthquakes. Her experience challenges the notion of women as passive victims of environmental catastrophe and social oppression; instead, she is portrayed as an active agent of change who reclaims her agency in the face of adversity. This duality not only enriches the narrative but also provides a positive perspective on the human capacity to endure and grow from ecological catastrophes.

The complexity and individual heterogeneity of harm caused by earthquakes, as captured by the two novels, offer a deeper understanding of ecological trauma. Ecological trauma, exemplified by Yang Jin's linkage to commercial consumerism exploitation and Qin Sihui's association with patriarchal gender discrimination, tran-

scends mere natural disaster-induced injuries and represents a tightly interwoven series of complex harms. It is a series of compounded traumas initiated by natural disasters, intertwined with social ecology and emotional ties unique to each individual (Morganstein and Ursano 1). Through the depiction of ecological trauma in the novel, it is clear that the treatment of ecological trauma also faces critical challenges. This process demands an integrated examination of multiple facets within the social ecology framework. In other words, it involves not only understanding the environmental impact but also recognising the interconnectedness of social systems and individual experiences (Metin Başoğlu et al. 396). The earthquake narratives of A Lai and An Changhe prove that addressing complex ecological trauma requires comprehensive restoration strategies encompassing psychological, natural, and social aspects to ensure holistic healing and recovery. Consequently, the tripartite approach—from the awakening of self-redemption awareness within individuals, to proactive integration into community environments, and finally to respecting and participating in natural restoration—can be seen as these Sichuan writers’ exploration of effective pathways for ecological recovery.

Conclusion

Earthquakes are often seen as hostile and alien forces that threaten lives and disrupt communities from an anthropocentric perspective. However, ecologically, they are natural geological processes that play a crucial role in the Earth’s dynamic system. This duality is powerfully illustrated in A Lai’s *Yun zhong ji*, where the author resists the urge to portray the earthquake as an apocalyptic event or to express fear and hostility towards nature. Instead, A Lai’s characters face the disaster with dignified acceptance and show empathy and a protective instinct towards the natural world as it begins to recover from the catastrophe. A Lai encapsulates this sentiment in the book’s epigraph: “The great earthquake is merely the Earth’s geological construction, not an act of enmity towards humans. The great earthquake causes suffering for people, for without the Earth, they have nowhere to turn” (1). Without the Earth, we have nowhere to turn.

The significance of earthquakes in the works of those Sichuanese writers goes beyond their depiction as ecological disasters and the existential struggles of humanity. Whether through the portrayal of earthquake scenarios, the documentation of disaster memories, or the focus on modes of resistance and post-disaster reconstruction, all these efforts converge on a fundamental question: how should humanity repair itself and its relationship with nature in the aftermath of an earthquake? Sichuanese writers, represented by A Lai and An Changhe, engage deeply with eco-

logical issues and examine the elusive dynamics between humanity and the natural environment. This engagement is evident in the literary works discussed above: the lament for the lost harmony between humans and nature in *Yun zhong ji* and the chronicling of rural transformation alongside a critique of developmental ideologies in *Duanlie dai*. These literary explorations reflect an inquiry into how to construct a harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world—a theme that has become increasingly urgent in the context of today’s ecological crises.

The research of earthquake literature naturally leads to a re-examination of the human-nature relationship. Although they experienced the apocalyptic scenes of the earthquake themselves, these two Sichuan authors do not attribute any blame to nature itself. From the perspective of ecological trauma theory, the earthquake narratives of Sichuanese writers demonstrate a profound respect for natural laws, an understanding of nature’s inherent fluctuations, and a deep appreciation of the interdependent relationship between humans and the environment. Only through such understanding can individuals find the inner strength to accept the Earth’s occurrences with objectivity and fairness. The laws of nature are influenced by human activities, which in turn constrain human development. It is important to recognise that the earthquake itself is not inherently worthy of glorification. Therefore, simply documenting the disaster and recording the collective memory of human suffering is insufficient. The true response to earthquake lies in the search for inner spiritual strength and the exploration of ways to restore both human existence and ecological balance.

Additionally, the two Sichuan authors have been particularly active in exploring pathways for ecological trauma recovery, particularly through the portrayal of marginalised women who serve as emblematic figures of this healing process. The exploration of ecological trauma recovery in their female characters reveals that effective ecological recovery calls for a threefold path: self-redemption, community integration, and interaction with the environment. Despite the diversity observed in the characters and authors, they all converge on a common theme: the spirit of self-rescue. Whether it is Yang Jin rebuilding community connections or Sihui confronting her inner conflicts, each character demonstrates efforts to rebuild relationships with themselves, others, and the natural world. As Amorok articulates, “When humans are forcibly torn from their family, culture, and land, a violent disruption and deficit in the realm of Being—individually, collectively, ecologically, and spiritually—are created” (31). Addressing this deficit requires proactive efforts to reconstruct these relationships across personal, collective, ecological, and spiritual dimensions.

As Karen Thornber asserts in her book, “Literature has the power to move us

profoundly as it exposes how people dominate, damage, and destroy one another and the natural world” (4). Contemporary Sichuan authors represented by the two writers have played a crucial role in bringing these stories to the forefront. The two authors have experienced earthquakes so they focus on them, write stories about them, and explore the possibilities of ecological restoration. Their works not only recount the personal tragedies of these young female characters but also serve as a critical lens through which broader societal issues are examined, such as gender roles, social expectations, and ecological environment. Thornber claims further: “Stories have the capacity to awaken, reinforce, and redirect environmental concern and creative thinking about environmental futures” (5). These stories created by the Sichuanese writers offer a commentary on the human condition in the face of nature’s uncontrollable forces, as well as on the societal structures that can either exacerbate or alleviate the suffering of the vulnerable. Moreover, portraying earthquakes as both natural and social phenomena highlights the intricate relationship between human societies and the ecosystems they inhabit. Their perspective challenges and broadens traditional views of the environment and humanity’s role within it and offers a deeper understanding of our interconnected world.

Works Cited:

- A Lai阿来. *In the clouds* 云中记 (Yun zhong ji). Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 2019. Print.
- Amorok, Tina Alice. “The Eco-Trauma and Eco-Recovery of Being.” *Shift: At the Frontiers of Consciousness* 15 (2007): 28-31/37. Print.
- An Changhe 安昌河. *Fault Zone* 断裂带 (Duanlie dai). Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2013. Print.
- Chaudhary, Muhammad T., and Awais Piracha. “Natural Disasters—Origins, Impacts, Management.” *Encyclopedia* 1.4 (2021): 1101-31. Print.
- Dong Baocun 董保存, ed. *Touching heaven and earth: Poetry memories of the Wenchuan earthquake* 感天动地: 汶川大地震诗歌记忆 (Gan tian dong di: Wenchuan da dizhen shige jiyi). Beijing: Jiefangjun wenyi chubanshe, 2008. Print.
- Doocy, Shannon, et al. “The Human Impact of Earthquakes: A Historical Review of Events 1980-2009 and Systematic Literature Review.” *PLOS Currents* 5 (2013). Web. 15 March 2025.
- Fan Zao 范藻, and Fei Jia 贾飞. “Disaster narratives’: From literary innovation to aesthetic creativity” “灾难叙事”: 从文学创新到美学创意 (“Zainan xushi”: Cong wenxue

- chuangxin dao meixue chuangyi). *Dangdai wentan* 3 (2020): 171-76. Print.
- Frank, Arthur W. *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. Print.
- Gao Mingyue 高明月. "On the emotional expression of trauma narratives in contemporary disaster literature in China: Focusing on *The Legend of the Clouds*, *Aftershocks*, and *Coronary Virus*" 论中国当代灾难文学创伤叙事的情感表达——以《云中记》《余震》《花冠病毒》为中心 (Lun Zhongguo dangdai zainan wenxue chuangshang xushi de qinggan biaoda: Yi Yun zhong ji, Yuzhen, Huaguan bingdu wei zhongxin). *Nanfang wentan* 3 (2022): 123-28. Print.
- Guo Minghua 郭名华, and Hui Wang 王辉. "Journeying through human darkness: Seeking reconciliation with the world: A study of An Changhe's novels" 穿越人性黑暗, 寻求同世界和解——安昌河小说论 (Chuangyue renxing hei'an, xunqiu tong shijie hejie: An Changhe xiaoshuo lun). *Dangdai wentan* 5 (2016): 76-81. Print.
- . *A century of solitude in Tuzhen: A study of An Changhe's novels* 土镇的百年孤独: 安昌河小说研究 (Tuzhen de bai nian gudu: An Changhe xiaoshuo yanjiu). Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 2016. Print.
- Herman, Judith Lewis. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: BasicBooks, 1992. Print
- Isobel, Sophie, Andrea McCloughen, et al. "Intergenerational Trauma and Its Relationship to Mental Health Care: A Qualitative Inquiry." *Community Mental Health Journal* 57.4 (2021): 631-43. Print.
- Isobel, Sophie, Melinda Goodyear, et al. "Preventing Intergenerational Trauma Transmission: A Critical Interpretive Synthesis." *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 28.7-8 (2019): 1100-13. Print.
- Liu Chengyong 刘成勇. "In the Clouds: Trauma memory and cultural identity" 《云中记》: 创伤记忆与文化认同 (Yun zhong ji: Chuangshang jiyi yu wenhua rentong). *Zhongguo minzu wenxue* 38.6 (2020): 130-38. Print.
- Lowe, Sarah R., et al. "Psychological Resilience After Hurricane Sandy: The Influence of Individual- and Community-Level Factors on Mental Health After a Large-Scale Natural Disaster." *PLOS One* 10.5 (2015): 1-15. Print.
- Metin Başoğlu, Ebru S., et al. "Advances in Our Understanding of Earthquake Trauma and Its Treatment: A Self-Help Model of Mental Health Care for Survivors." *Mental Health and Disasters*. Ed. Fran H. Norris et al. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. 396-418. Print.
- Morganstein, Joshua C., and Robert J. Ursano. "Ecological Disasters and Mental Health: Causes, Consequences, and Interventions." *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 11 (2020). Web. 15 March 2025.

- Narine, Anil, ed. *Eco-Trauma Cinema*. London: Routledge, 2018. Print.
- Peng Xiuyin 彭秀银, and Tanghui Zhang 张堂会. "Sublimation on the ruins: A study of literary representation of the Wenchuan earthquake" 废墟上的升华: 汶川地震文学书写研究 (Feixu shang de shenghua: Wenchuan dizhen wenxue shuxie yanjiu). *Jiangsu shehui kexue* 6 (2018): 248-54. Print.
- Raise-Abdullahi, Payman, et al. "Hypothalamus and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Review." *Brain Sciences* 13.7 (2023): 196-99. Print.
- Thornber, Karen Laura. *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2012. Print.
- Wang, Shuo, et al. "Earthquake Exposure and PTSD Symptoms Among Disaster-Exposed Adolescents: A Moderated Mediation Model of Sleep Problems and Resilience." *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 12 (2021). Web. 15 March 2025.
- Xie Youshun 谢有顺. "How can the writing of suffering avoid losing its weight? My view on the poetry writing boom after the Wenchuan earthquake" 苦难的书写如何才能不失重?——我看汶川大地震后的诗歌写作热潮 (Kunan de shuxie ruhe caineng bu shizhong: Wo kan Wenchuan da dizhen hou de shige xiezuo rechao). *Nanfang wentan* 5 (2008): 32-34. Print.
- Zhang Tanghui 张堂会. "Aesthetic salvation on the ruins of heart: The research on trauma narrative of contemporary disaster's literature" 心灵废墟上的审美救赎——当代灾害文学创伤叙事考察 (Xinling feixu shang de shenmei jiushu: Dangdai zaihai wenxue chuangshang xushi kaocha). *Shehui kexue* 12 (2018): 167-75. Print.
- Zhang Siyuan 张思远. "The presentation of the aesthetic dimension of disaster literature: On the disaster aesthetics in *Records in the Clouds*" 灾难文学审美维度的呈现——论《云中记》的灾难美学 (Zainan wenxue shenmei weidu de chengxian: Lun Yun zhong ji de zainan meixue). *Ha'erbin xueyuan xuebao* 41.11 (2020): 94-96. Print.
- Zhang Xi 张曦. "Anthropology of literature and earthquake poetry texts" 文学人类学与地震诗歌文本 (Wenxue renleixue yu dizhen shige wenben). *Minzu wenxue yanjiu* 39.1 (2021): 89-98. Print.
- Zhang Peizhen 张培震. "Earthquake disaster and mitigation in China" 中国地震灾害与防震减灾 (Zhongguo dizhen zhaihai yu fangzhen jianzhai). *Dizhen dizhi* 30.3 (2008): 577-83. Print.

Author's Profile:

Ling Wang 王玲 is a Lecturer at Chengdu Normal University and a PhD candidate at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand. Her research explores Chinese

ecocriticism in literature, ecological trauma theory, comparative literature, and cross-cultural literary studies.

Email address: ling.wang@pg.canterbury.ac.nz

Acknowledgements:

This article was completed under the guidance of the author's doctoral supervisors, Associate Professor Chia-rong Wu and Associate Professor Susan Bouterey, who contributed to its conceptualisation, critical revisions, and interdisciplinary framing within environmental humanities.