

Daughter of the Wind: The Travel Writing of Han Bi-ya*

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This article considers the early works of travel writer Han Bi-ya [Han Piya] as a set of texts that provide valuable insight into Korean society in the final years of the twentieth century. Writing under the nickname “Daughter of the Wind” (*param ūi ttal*), Han first caught the attention of the South Korean public in the mid-1990s, and her best-selling books combined exuberant accounts of backpacking around the globe with engaging reflections inspired by her travel experiences. Most importantly here, her four-volume opus *Param ūi ttal: kōrōsō chigu sebak’wiban* (Daughter of the Wind: Three and a Half Times Around the World on Foot) articulates a discourse of knowledge about the world and Korea’s evolving place within it. In her writings Han established a persona that, in capturing the imagination of many, has led to her status as both an important role model and a prominent public intellectual in Korea. As this essay argues, however, although Han broke ground in both her methods of acquiring and disseminating knowledge and her frequently fresh viewpoints, she maintains continuity with nationalist Korean discourse. Indeed, her regular emphasis upon her subjectivity as a Korean woman reflects both a productive tension and growing complementarity between cosmopolitan outlook and nationalist sentiment, a phenomenon that has become increasingly salient throughout Korean society in recent years.

Keywords: Han Bi-ya, travel writing, gender, nation, cosmopolitanism

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Introduction

During the 1990s, the academy experienced markedly increased interest in travel writing. In the wake of Foucault's influence, Edward Said's seminal *Orientalism*, and the concomitant self-reflexive turn in the social sciences more generally and ethnography in particular, a critical glance was cast on the role that narratives of travel played in furthering European imperial projects. Works of postcolonial scholarship such as Mary Louise Pratt's important 1992 study *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* sought to uncover how Victorian writers fostered a colonial mindset in disseminating knowledge of the exotic uncivilized Other for those "at home" and created "a sense of curiosity, excitement, adventure and even moral fervor about European expansionism" (2nd edition, 2008, 3). In another key work, David Spurr (1993) looked closely at how travel writing, among other genres, developed specific discursive tropes that established a "rhetoric of empire." In conjunction with these works that considered the literature of travel more broadly, various scholars began to consider in detail the narratives of Western female travel writers specifically, many of whom were likewise engaged in this colonial project, but in gendered fashion. The analysis of these heterogeneous texts revealed occasional contradictions between imperialism and the feminine voice, and the consequent production of, at times, counter-hegemonic discourses (see esp. Mills 1991; cf. Donaldson 1992; Lawrence 1994; Smith 2001).

What happens, however, when a country long regarded as a member of the global subaltern experiences a sudden rise in potential for its citizens, especially female citizens, to contribute in turn to discourses of knowledge of the less developed Other through their own narratives of travel? South Korea's compressed modernity and the speed of its economic growth, the rapidity of its transition from authoritarian dictatorship to vibrant democracy, and the liberalization of passport requirements in the late 1980s have meant that opportunities mushroomed for Koreans to experience themselves as cosmopolitan subjects inhabiting the same temporal and geographical spaces as other members of the privileged developed world. By the first decade of the new millennium, a perusal of bookstores in South Korea (henceforth Korea) revealed a host of travel narratives by authors travelling throughout the world, as package tourists, as religious pilgrims, and as lone backpackers in unusual destinations, and one could readily find local television programs such as KBS' *Sesang ūn nŏlpta* (It's a Big World), which features average members of the public who appear and provide commentary on self-shot videos of their trips

overseas.

Thus far, however, almost no scholarly attention has been paid to contemporary Korean travel texts. In part this gap reflects the recent nature of the phenomenon, but scholarship on travel writing emanating from Asia has in general been lacking. Even Japan, with its relatively long-standing reputation as a country of frequent travelers and a large body of travel narrative, has yet to see much scholarship engage with its contemporary travel writing critically. As Mark Meli (2008, 205) notes, “travel, especially overseas travel, is a major element in contemporary Japanese culture, and yet the question of its cultural significance has largely been ignored by researchers.” Indeed, with the exception of attention to classical poets such as Basho and the like, he continues, “even Japanese travel writing has been pretty much ignored by scholars inside as well as outside Japan.” The situation is exacerbated in the case of Korea. Tellingly, one of the few scholarly volumes on Asian travel writing more broadly, Clark and Smethurst’s *Asian Crossings* (2008) carries the subtitle “Travel Writing on China, Japan and Southeast Asia,” despite three chapters on different works by Isabella Bird Bishop, author of perhaps the most well-known early Western travel text on Korea, *Korea and Her Neighbours*. Likewise, *Journeys*, a scholarly journal on travel literature, had a special issue in 2004 on East Asia but overlooks Korea. Although a modicum of attention has been paid to the rich tradition of travel narratives from the Chosŏn period by Koreanists (see, e.g., Eggert 1998; Kim 2006), contemporary travel and travel writing has been essentially disregarded by scholars both inside and outside the country, despite interest in texts from diaspora Koreans and in longer-term overseas sojourners.

Almost contemporaneously with Korea’s own rise as a country of travelers, backpacking has exploded as a crucial subset of the global tourism industry. Conversely, however, backpacking itself as a phenomenon has been the subject of a significant body of scholarly work (e.g. Richards and Wilson 2004; Hannam and Ateljevic 2008; Hannam and Diekmann 2010). More general studies of tourism lore and guidebooks, such as those of Hutnyk (1996), show that views of backpacker destinations in Asia remain very Western-centric, but, unwittingly, in their criticism of Western ethnocentrism, many of these studies perpetuate the very Western bias that they hope to deconstruct: by not taking into account guidebooks and travel writing that originate in East Asia, which themselves spawn considerable tourism flows elsewhere on the continent, the academic representation of global discourse on Asian travel destinations has been skewed. Indeed, in the now considerable research on backpacking one is regularly struck, even astonished, at how the linguistic parameters of studies conducted by Western scholars take for granted that Westerners are the primary

backpackers in Asia. Had surveys that form the basis of many of the studies in, e.g., the Channel View Publications series on Tourism and Cultural Change been made available simultaneously in Japanese, Chinese and Korean and put on offer in hostels that target Asian travelers within popular backpacker enclaves, one imagines that the results researchers uncovered might have differed. Teo and Leong (2005) offer a rare, and welcome, non-Western critical perspective on the backpacking experience but, as scholars from Singapore who focus on Thailand, they themselves emphasize a Chinese diaspora viewpoint. In short, Korea-related contributions to the literature on travel writing and backpacking tourism have been strikingly lacking.

In one of the few studies in English to treat contemporary manifestations of travel in Korea, Robert Oppenheim (2011) has written of the growth in popularity of “off the beaten track travel” in Korea in the 1990s, a decade during which new forms of consumer culture took root broadly throughout Korean society, as the nation emerged in earnest from the shadow of years of authoritarian rule. Focusing on *tapsa yōhaeng* (“field study travel”), and *paenang yōhaeng* (“backpacker travel”), Oppenheim argues that both practices serve “as sites for the *performance* of class *distinction* from both the authoritarian structures of older forms of mass tourism and the perceived immoral excess of elite consumption” (Oppenheim 2011, 106). These modes of travel respond to and reflect, moreover, a growing confidence for both middle-class individuals within the fabric of Korean society and Koreans collectively as proud participants in a global community.

While it may be true that *paenang yōhaeng* more generally “had no singular dominant representation or charter text on the order of Yu [Hong-jun]’s series of *tapsa* books” (Oppenheim 2011, 110), *Na ūi munhwa yusan tapsagi* (Chronicle of My Field Study of Cultural Remains), one would not go amiss in assigning travel writer Han Bi-ya [Han Piya] pride of place as a figure who encouraged Koreans to strap on a backpack and see the world. But even Kim T’aejun (2006), in a rare full-length study of Korean travel writing, gives little attention to Han Bi-ya, providing little more than a brief summary of her work, two of its five pages being simply a reproduction of the map of the countries to which she travelled. This is unfortunate, for Han stands out as remarkable, not just among her fellow Koreans, but among backpacking authors generally, and the body of work that she created in the 1990s offers insight into the multifaceted nature of those for whom globetrotting on a low budget becomes a lifestyle for a significant period of time (Cohen 2010). Although her writing has yet (and is unlikely) to be translated into English, Han is an important figure in understanding sociocultural developments in Korea at the turn of the millennium

in the way she explicitly reclaims epistemological space within a global discourse of travel as a Korean and as a woman.

In this article, then, I hope to aid in filling this lacuna of research on Korean travel narratives by considering the early works of Han Bi-ya as a set of texts that not only provide insight into Korean society in the final years of the twentieth century but engage with, and show culturally specific twists, on larger traditions of travel writing. Writing under the nickname “Daughter of the Wind” (*param ūi ttal*) Han first caught the attention of the Korean public in the mid-1990s, and her best-selling books combine exuberant accounts of individual travel with engaging reflections inspired by her experience. Eschewing accounts of backpacking in developed nations, which offers a readier target as consumerist self-indulgence, Han instead focused in her writing on travel to the world’s hinterlands (*oji yōhaeng*). She likewise steered clear of literary pretension and in a straightforward, conversational style established a persona that captured the popular imagination and has led to her status as both an important role model and a prominent public intellectual in Korea (cf. Pak 2008). Han’s works, accordingly, nurtured an increase in the number of those who took to the road and elevated the symbolic status of backpacking as a worthwhile activity within Korea. Admiration for Han further rose as she underwent a career change in the early 2000s and, as a team leader for emergency relief with NGO World Vision Korea, became a committed spokesperson on refugee issues (Han 2005 and 2009), a career choice that she attributes entirely to her travel experience in the peripheral areas of today’s globalized society.¹

Most importantly for my purposes here, however, Han’s four-volume work *Param ūi ttal: kōrōsō chigu sebak’wiban* (Daughter of the Wind: Three and a Half Times Around the World on Foot, 1996a and b; 1998a and b) articulates a discourse of knowledge about the world and Korea’s evolving place within it. In this opus, together with its more focused sequels *Param ūi ttal, uri ttang e sōda* (The Daughter of the Wind Stands in Our Land, 2000), *Chungguk kyōnmullok* (Record of a Trip to China, 2001), Han breaks new ground in both her methods of acquiring and disseminating knowledge and the frequently fresh viewpoint she puts forth. As I will argue, however, she nonetheless maintains continuity with nationalist Korean discourse in her application of this knowledge.² Indeed, her

1. More recently, Han has come in for harsh criticism from Korea’s contentious netizen community, which regularly produces “anti-fans” for virtually every figure who has fans. See, e.g. <http://gyunny.tistory.com/85#rp>, accessed 11 Feb. 2011.

2. I specifically exclude here examination of Han’s *Param ūi ttal, uri ttang e sōda*, for although that work offers intriguing material on the representation of Korea and Korean-ness, I am interested specifically in how knowledge of the nation is (re)enacted through Han’s encounters outside of

regular emphasis upon her subjectivity as a Korean woman reflects not merely a productive tension but a growing complementarity between cosmopolitan outlook and nationalist sentiment, a phenomenon that has become increasingly salient throughout Korean society in recent years (cf. e.g. Abelmann and So 2004; Shin 2003, 2006; Cho 2008). Furthermore, for Han, heightened awareness of the relativity of values fostered by her travels proves complex, simultaneously encouraging insight into the socially constructed nature of gender and sexuality, and confirmation of essentialist visions of masculinity and femininity. As I will discuss, the multivalent, and at times contradictory, reflections that she offers also bear witness to ferment surrounding discourses of gender in Korea at the turn of the millennium (cf. Kendall 2002).

“Make the World Your Stage, Korea Your Base Camp”

I begin my analysis with two contrasting passages, the first from the late fiction writer Pak Wansö: in that author’s “*Kǔ salbörhaettön nal ūi halmikkot*” (A Pasque Flower on That Bleak Day, 1973), set during the Korean War, American soldiers encamp near a village. When they roam about seeking prostitutes, the village matriarch, determined to protect the chastity of the younger women, disguises her wrinkles as best she can and presents herself in the dark to the soldiers. They soon discover her ruse, of course, but after stripping her amidst uproarious laughter, they dress her and return her with substantial gifts of food. The *halmöni* interprets her experience as follows:

“It was thanks to their being Yankees that I returned alive and even received presents. If they had been Japanese, they’d have shot me dead the moment they found out they were deceived. Oh, yes, they’d have killed me a hundred times over. And if they had been Russians they’d have raped me nonetheless, regardless of my age. Oh, yes, I’d have died crushed under their weight, and there’d have been no need for them to shoot me with a gun.”

All the women gathered there completely agreed with her and shuddered.

Of course, neither the old woman nor any other woman in the village had ever set foot outside of this country, and none of them had ever seen or become acquainted with any foreigners, whether Yankees or Russians. This was their first contact with any foreigner at all.

Nevertheless, the old woman pronounced such a confident dictum with a hundred per cent certainty, and all the other women were unanimously of the same opinion. That much intuition into national characters is simply basic knowledge to

Korea. Neither, in order to focus the 1990s, do I treat Han’s works written in this decade in detail.

anyone born in this land. (Pak, in Suh 1998, 212)

Let us now fast forward to a scene set a half-century later. Early on in Han Bi-ya's *Chungguk kyönmullok*, the author gives a world map to a friend's daughter as a gift and then instructs her to locate Korea on it (2001, 23-24).³ After the child searches in vain, Han hints to first seek out the Pacific Ocean. When she locates it, Han then has her look for China. Finding that easily as well, the child at last discovers Korea and exclaims, "Yikes! Is Korea (*uri nara*) that tiny?" Han then seizes the opportunity for an important lesson: "Small, isn't it? So you have to make the world your stage.⁴ Korea's not your main stage, just your base camp. Isn't it really important to have somewhere to comfort you and let you get your energy back?"

Several points deserve comment: in both passages older women convey knowledge about the globe to younger females. With her usual ironic touch, Pak posits a Korea whose inhabitants, while confined within the peninsula, remain secure in their knowledge of the world outside and, implicitly, Korea's place within it.⁵ A shared epistemological system, needing no critical examination, offers her characters a pre-existing framework for understanding the universe in which they dwell. In this essentialist worldview, Americans, Russians and Japanese possess differentiable identities that are a given to be discovered, or, rather, rediscovered.

Han, on the other hand, sets out to destabilize untested assumptions. Important facts about Korea and its relation to the rest of the world await discovery, and as one who has travelled beyond Korea's borders, she guides those within to enlightenment. For Han, the nation is small, and South Korea's citizens can, and should, regard the entire world as the backdrop for their lives. While in Pak's world, women are subject to sexually aggressive behaviour from foreigners who penetrate the nation's borders, Han encourages an active crossing of boundaries towards the outside on the part of young Koreans, and young Korean females, in particular. Nevertheless, a basic tenet remains in place: no matter how far Koreans may roam, Korea will naturally remain the site where they experience the greatest sense of belonging.

As should be immediately clear, then, Han's books function not simply as

3. Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to the work of Han Bi-ya. Translations are my own.

4. This metaphor is recapitulated in the title of An (2005).

5. For more on this passage and other examples of representations of South Korea's relationship with the outside world in late 20th century fiction, see Epstein 2000. It is worth noting that Han and Pak were good friends and that Han guided Pak on a trip in rural areas of Yunnan Province in China (Han 2001, 76-81).

escapist literature, but rather may be situated within a larger didactic tradition of writing in Korea, and the author's tone often suggests an elder sibling or teacher. In this regard, Han stands apart from many Western women travel writers who, as Smith (2001, xvi) notes, "often figure themselves not as members of a collectivity or community of identity but as exceptional loners, sometimes even as misfits." Han, despite her solo travel, is very much part of a national and nationalist collectivity. Her approach to the acquisition and propagation of knowledge about Korea and its place in the world, and her books' tremendous success itself,⁶ suggest significant evolution in Korean self-conception as globalization (*segzehwa*) was championed by the Kim Young Sam administration (1993-1998). The mandate that globalization be not merely accompanied by, but achieved through, Koreanization manifests itself at a personal level in Han's encouragement to young Koreans to travel beyond the nation's borders and make their mark on behalf of Korea by establishing positive contact with outsiders.

As a whole, then, Han's work constitutes an argument that travel serves as a means for Koreans to know not only the world, but themselves as individuals, national subjects, and global citizens, an argument made explicit in a blurb on the cover of the second volume of *Param ūi ttal*, which reads: "Travel, the fastest shortcut to learning about life." The blurb goes on to say that the greatest benefits of Han's journey lay in her realizations about human existence. Most importantly, "she came to know (*al su issötta*) broadly and deeply that human beings, while differing enormously at a cultural level, are ultimately the same, and that the most important thing for a human being is love for humanity." Han reiterates these benefits in more detail at the end of this volume (1996b, 349-351): travel allows the discovery of the relativity of values and of the self. In her case, travel taught that fulfillment means following one's preferred path, living simply and approaching the world with compassion.

Han thus offers not only a romantic view of backpacker life that encourages taking to the road, but an ethical defense of its value in the face of conservative forces in Korea that have often regarded travel as conspicuous consumption; travel, she argues, is neither luxury (*sach'i*) nor hedonistic extravagance (1998a, 43), but (in the best neo-Confucian tradition, although she never makes this point) a means of self-cultivation. Similarly, Oppenheim (2011, 112-113) notes

6. The first volume of *Param ūi ttal: kōrōsō chigu sebak'wiban* rose to the top of the non-fiction bestseller list within a month of publication in 1996, and all Han's books since have done well. In the introduction to the second volume, Han describes how the media attention and her newfound celebrity astonished her, as she found herself interviewed by newspapers, women's magazines and other journals, and in numerous radio and television appearances.

how other backpack travelers justified their activity as offering education that would strengthen Korea amidst global competition, thus domesticating themselves “within an older heroism of the productive national citizen.” Although Han’s travels began before the IMF crisis, that she grew as an iconic figure in its wake presents intriguing parallels and contrasts with Younghan Cho’s analysis (2008) of Park Chan Ho [Pak Ch’anho] and Pak Se Ri [Pak Seri], who came to represent a new national citizen, one marked by self-governance, the ability to succeed economically in an internationally competitive environment, and demonstrated responsibility to the nation-state. Han, as we shall see, while similarly marked by a high degree of self-actualization and responsibility to the nation, challenged notions of how a committed national subject need function in relation to neoliberal imperatives. Indeed, as her later career has demonstrated, the larger goal of serving humanity outstrips in her estimation obedience to the nation’s economic interests, even as she represented a specifically Korean altruism that serves national expressions of soft power.

For Han, travel and moral reflection become inseparable, and she feels obligated to share what she has discovered. Particularly striking is an encounter she has with an Englishman in Malawi (1996a, 185) who, after his 48-year-old wife and two friends pass away in the same year, gives up his position as an executive to become a travel guide. As he explains: “We only live once and we can’t predict how long we’ll be here. Best not to waste this precious life worrying what others think (*nunch’i ponda*) or about keeping face (*ch’emyŏn*), but to do what you enjoy most as long as you’re not hurting others.” Han, having resigned from a successful job to pursue her travel dreams, approves and questions whether any Korean executive would become a travel guide for the sake of freedom (*chayu*). Her encouragement to her audience not to cave into normative social expectations becomes the more forceful for her rendering the Englishman’s comments into specifically Korean concepts such as *nunch’i* and *ch’emyŏn*.

While the didacticism here may be familiar, the larger message imports an individualism that breaks in striking fashion from pressures to conform within Korean society. Nor should one take the power of this message lightly. Han’s charmingly personal mode of writing allowed identification: in one noteworthy example, a department head at an electronics company writes the author (1996b: 13) to say that her work emboldened him to change careers and open a video store, as he’d always dreamed. Han’s books, in short, have changed lives. As Kang Chunman (2007) notes, in one of the few even quasi-scholarly pieces on Han, the secret of her writing has been to impart to her readers a longing for freedom (*chayu*) and escape from the cocoon in which they have been enclosed. Largely missing in Han’s work, however, is reflection on how Korea’s economic

growth had made her journey possible, and an attempt to contextualize her chosen path within the larger framework of national success. Cognitive dissonance arises when she declares that we are masters of our own destiny (1996a, 29) after acknowledging that the situations of many prevent them from attending school. Although Han's account of how she pulled herself up by her own bootstraps is inspirational, and her continued espousal of freedom especially in the wake of the 1997 IMF crisis presents a courageous stance, her work also yields a paradoxical conservatism in many ways.

Not all the knowledge Han shares proves so life-changing or abstract, of course. Her lengthy trips and effervescence in sharing information made her a minor sensation on the traveler circuit and she tells us that she came to be revered as a teacher/master (*sabunim*) of backpackers (1996a, 129).⁷ At one point a traveler from another guest house who hears rumours about her expressly seeks her out for tips ("Excuse me, are you the woman from Korea?"). As studies of backpackers have argued, the culture of independent globetrotters is hierarchically structured (Anderskov 2002, cited in Paris 2010, 45), and the most valuable element in acquiring status is the ability to exchange information. Han, however, claims to relate this anecdote not out of personal pride, but because she has enhanced national prestige (*min'gan ch'awŏn ūi kukwi sŏnyang*). Furthermore, each volume of *Param ūi ttal* ends with a section of personally acquired practical hints (*Han Piya pallo t'ŏdŭkhan segye yŏhaeng chŏngbo*), preceded by the epigraph, *segye paenang yŏhaengja ūi sabu* ("Teacher to Global Backpackers"). The crucial point made by the epigraph (whether Han's own or foisted upon her by her editors) is that the nation, through Han, could now take proud part in an activity largely monopolized by the First World: reproduction and diffusion of knowledge about the undeveloped Other, as I will discuss in further detail below.

Nonetheless, it is too facile to say that Han's knowledge becomes merely a form of cultural capital that displays South Korea's economic and geopolitical maturation as the millennium came to a close, for Han's experience as a female traveller from a nation at the global periphery during her childhood causes her to regularly challenge the Tourist-Other binary. In her self-presentation as a respectful guest among her hosts, and in her gendered experience of travel, Han consistently attempts to demonstrate how the Tourist-Other dichotomy can be "minimized through meaningful equal and long-lasting relationships" (Wilson

7. Cf. also Han 1996a: 353-356, where Han tells of meeting in Cairo some British travelers who relate that they found useful information that she had recorded in a guest house notebook in Ethiopia; more astonishingly, in Turkey she encounters a German traveler who heard about her from a friend Han had met in Honduras.

and Ateljevic 2008, 102).

Daughter of the Wind

As I have argued above, Han often writes with a didactic purpose in mind, especially to other females, and her experience as a woman traveler colors her perception and narrative of a lifestyle that places mobility at its core. Although statistics on the breakdown of her readership are unavailable, anecdotal evidence suggests that her audience has been, if not overwhelmingly, at least predominantly, female. The success of her books thus provides another manifestation of ongoing changes in traditional Korean gender dichotomies that had destined women for a wedded role as the *chipsaram* (literally, “house person”) while the husband worked outside the home. It is no accident that Han’s work appeared in the years immediately preceding such popular films that played on the reversal of normative gender expectations like 2002’s *My Sassy Girl* (*Yöpkijögin künyö*) and *My Wife is a Gangster* (*Chop’ok manura*). Han’s message became liberating for all Koreans who suffered under rigid social constraints, but especially so for younger women, who with increased disposable income and a loosening of social constraints, began travelling independently in far greater numbers during the 1990s.⁸ Han’s work, then, was a response to, and later, a driver of larger social phenomena: in this sense, although undeniably an extraordinary individual, she is both a product and symbol of the times.

In the section of travel hints at the end of her final volume the question of solo travel as a woman attracts her detailed attention (1998b, 335), and Han makes a strong case for the benefits and empowerment that accrue in independent travel. She writes that although one might feel lonely, the advantages of solo travel offer ample compensation: one has time for self-reflection and acquires confidence (cf. Myers and Hannam 2008). Furthermore, she adds, female travelers have ready entrance into the world of women and children and can stay more easily in people’s homes, especially in the Middle East. Han recognizes that solo female travelers may encounter problems in dealing with men (1998b, 336; cf. 1996b, 360) and advises women to avoid creating mistaken impressions of interest. She expresses disdain for those whose behavior equates womanhood with vanity or weakness (1998b, 336): even worse than those who wear heavy

8. This phenomenon is well-documented for Japan, where women travel overseas in greater numbers than young men. One should note that in Korea compulsory military service for young men creates a further discrepancy in travel numbers among males and females.

makeup are those who give men heavy items to carry.

Han's books thus regularly raise implicit questions about the natural and the culturally constructed. Such questions arise most frequently in the realm of gender, where she challenges her readers to reconsider tacit assumptions, not least in expanding the cultural possibilities of what is acceptable for a Korean woman through her own example. Much like Herodotus, the Greek historian who also merits the title of world's first anthropologist, Han's ethnographic interests ultimately reflect deep concern with the human condition. Han has much to say about patriarchy and gender inequities in her work, but she also provides surprising reflections: the idleness of the men and industriousness of the women encountered during her stay in a Tanzanian village arouses her ire (1996a, 227), but she also notes that the women, despite their hard work, in fact seem far happier (1996a, 149).

Furthermore, like Herodotus, and Western travel writers who have followed in his footsteps to this day, Han's depiction of the "Other" often revolves around a series of inversions (cf. Hartog 1988; Spurr 1993). Han finds the matrilineal Tai minority in Yunnan especially fascinating because their social practices reverse customs taken for granted within Korea (1998b, 233-36): Tai women generate income, while men perform the domestic chores. Women there openly make risqué comments, Han notes, and she claims, correctly or not, that the Tai language contains no word for father, because a woman has many boyfriends and actual paternity is unknown. Observations of their lives lead her to compare Korean men's disdain for household work unfavorably with Tai men, and she goes so far as to call Korean men unable to cook for themselves "emotional infants" (*chöngsikchögin yua*, 1998b, 201). Accordingly, Han here suggests that it is Korea's "unnatural" patriarchy that has artificially stunted human capabilities.

Despite such reassessment of masculine and feminine behaviors, however, Han can maintain essentializing views and wavers between treating gender as culturally constructed and the result of "natural" difference. After staying several days with a family in Egypt, for example, she takes a set of farewell pictures with the women of the house, who wear ordinarily impermissible attire – tight jeans, t-shirts and make-up (1996a, 281). Their appearance leads her to a rhetorical question: Egyptian women may not have much opportunity to dress up fashionably because of religion and custom, but what nation's women don't enjoy the opportunity to display their beauty?

Remarks that rely upon essentialist notions of gender in Korean popular discourse become most prominent when Han deals with male sexuality, and her text conveys mixed messages. On one hand, she urges Korean women to explore the outside world, but tension arises in a narrative pull to make her travels

remarkable, and she upholds the idea that dangers lurk everywhere for women. While in Argentina, for example, she hitches a ride with a truck driver, but when he stops during the night for a nap, she becomes concerned that this roadside pause along the lonely pampas is prelude to rape. Later, however, as he returns to the steering wheel without incident and gives her his sister's contact details so she may have somewhere to stay in Buenos Aires, she regrets her suspicions. Nevertheless, at chapter's end (1996b, 26) Han justifies her mistrust with the final comment that "East or West, in modern or ancient times, all men are wolves" (*tongsö gogŭm ŭl mangnon hago namjadŭr ūn ta nŭktae ranikka*).⁹ While Han's caution need not represent a reinscription of traditional gender roles, her mode of expression relies on long-standing tropes of Korean discourse.¹⁰ Han's regular discursive practice, then, returns her to self-representation as not merely gendered, but to a framework that posits her within larger global relationships. It is to this position as a Korean within an international community that I now turn in greater detail.

Knowing the "Other"

Different sexual mores can stun her. Han's astonishment continually rises to the

9. In another anecdote that Han tells at her own expense, she describes arriving in a small Peruvian town only to find that the sole hotel room available is a double, which she must share with a pleasant young American doctor whom she has met that day. Although he sleeps on the floor, Han, clearly unnerved, keeps her mace by her side and tells how she prepares herself mentally against a rape attempt by planning to lie about HIV positive status. When Han relates to the doctor the next day how she felt, he bursts into laughter and tells her she is very innocent (1996b, 87).

10. During her travels Han, in fact, does indeed encounter cases of harassment from men that run a gamut of seriousness. She warns about Turkish men in her travel hints (1996a, 374) and relates how the dashing manager of one local hotel is notorious for attempting to seduce women generally and Asian women in particular. More troubling incidents become the title of chapter subheadings that testify to the threat of male sexual aggressiveness the world over: e.g. "The Dirty Behavior of An Inn Owner" (*Yömsuk chibaeinnim ūi töröun chit*, 1996a, 86-87); "On the Mexican Subway, 'Watch Your Hands!' Slap!" (*Meksik'o chibach'öl, "ödi manjyö?" ttagwi ch'ölssök*, 1996b, 215); "A Man Pleasuring Himself Beneath Palm Trees in Broad Daylight" (*Taenat yajisu mit'esö jawihaengwi hanŭn namja*, 1996b, 344). In these incidents Han shows her resourcefulness, however. When groped on the subway in Mexico City, she turns the tables on her assailant (1996b, 229-230) with a fierce slap that forces him to dash out of the train, mortified, zipper down and the eyes of all upon him. Han's self-representation as feisty, one suspects, is intended to inspire and to present an empowering attempt to address harassment. She ends her account of the incident with further strong words about a global masculine wolfishness: "East or West, these bastards should all have their 'peppers' plucked" (*Tongsöyang ŭl mangnon hago irön mangbal nyösök ūn koch'u rül ttaböryöya handanikka*, 1996b, 230). Han, later, in an account of a serial rapist in Bangladesh, goes further and advocates castration in such cases (1998a, 231-32).

fore in Africa; the overt sexuality and precocity of Africans becomes a leitmotif in her account of travels there. This theme is given prominence through eye-catching titles: thus we find that the chapter “Malawi’s Youth: ‘Do You Carry Condoms When You Travel, Sister?’” (*Mallawi sonyöndül ‘nuna k’ondom kajigo tanyöyo?*, 1996a, 189) itself contains a subsection “There’s Nothing that Middle School Students in Mountain Villages Don’t Know About Sex” (*Sandongne chunghaksaeng i seksü e taeae morünüm ke öpsö*, 1996a, 192); another chapter bears the heading “‘Why Constrict Yourself by Covering Your ‘Pepper?’” (*Taptaphage koch’u rül öttök’e karigo tanyö?*, 1996a, 231). Han tells of her distaste for the continual turn to sex in conversations with the Malawi youth who accompany her on a walk and their forward questions about whether her travel accoutrements include condoms and whether she has had a black boyfriend. Even more shocking to her is a youth who accosts her in Ethiopia with “Hello, foreigner, would you like to sleep with me tonight?” (1996a, 255); Han notes that she would happily have sprayed him with mace if she had had it with her. Han’s account of Africa emphasizes both male sexual aggressiveness and the nakedness of women she encounters (see e.g. the subsection “The Beautiful Breasts of the Maidens of Konso Village,” *Chötkasüm yeppün k’onsomaül ch’önyödül*, 1996a, 237-240).

For Han, African sexuality implicitly marks the primitive, and recurrent motifs in her descriptions create a picture of a continent closer to a primordial human state, with a resultant mixture of romanticism and distanced superiority. In her view Africa, “the birthplace of humanity,” has avoided being swept up in the waves of modernity (1996a, 272) and retains the appearance it has held for millennia. At the other end of the spectrum, European sexual mores suggest dissolute decadence, and Han describes astonishment (1996a, 297-298; cf. 1996b, 152-53) at the bed-hopping that goes on among young backpackers with whom she travels. Amazed that for such youth sex is a leisure activity, rather than an expression of love, she adds that although she might seem old-fashioned, she believes they have lost something precious. Similarly, on the streets of Santiago (1996b, 55), her attention is drawn to the explicit magazines sold at every kiosk, magazines that, in her words, would only be sold in adult bookstores even in the United States. More importantly, however, comparison leads back to Korea and description through inversion once more: these are items that one would never see in a hundred years in Korea. The open sexuality of Chileans shocks her, as she witnesses public displays of affection that seem to be “live broadcasts of the magazines” she has seen.

Much like Herodotus, Han shows interest in the sexual habits of other cultures but wavers between open-mindedness and normative disapproval.

Although finding it difficult to understand traditional Eskimo or Mongol society, among whom visitors would be offered the women of the house as sleeping partners, she argues that this custom arose so that isolated communities could receive new “seed” and that one should avoid judgment (1998b, 61-2). Han is also far from averse to relaying titillating details and revels in describing her visit to a Turkish bath house (“The Sponge-soft Touch of the Turkish Bath Masseur,” 1996a, 124). Nonetheless, the picture that emerges often evokes a difference between Korea and the “Other” that relies upon a discourse of civilization versus barbarism. Thus at this Turkish bath, “the men lying on the floor of the steam room also all looked like less evolved natives, with not only their chests but their entire bodies covered in hair.”¹¹

Han’s committed Catholicism accordingly joins with a Confucian background to produce a view in which sexuality is a divine gift to be enjoyed within the context of a committed, loving relationship; proper sexual expression marks proper culture. Han does not portray herself as a prude, and complexities in self-representation remain: in Jerusalem, she is struck by the incongruity of having adult movies on television in a city holy to three of the world’s major religions (1996a, 309), but tells us that, lack of Hebrew notwithstanding, she watched late into the night before sleeping (*chal bogo chatta*). Han also writes with honesty about her first trip to a nude beach (1996b, 240-41), and tells how she eventually overcame her discomfort with shedding her clothing and the feeling of freedom (*chayu*) she then experienced. She expresses admiration for those who have grown up without shame over the body, especially compared with “a timid daughter of Korea” (*sosimhan Hanguk ūi ttal*).

Just as Han often writes explicitly from a gendered, national status, so too does her audience respond to her primarily as both a woman and a Korean (1996b, 13): comments such as “I’m very proud that there are women like you in Korea” are frequent in fan letters. Nationalist pride over Han’s achievements, evident in the editorial designation *segye paenang yōhaengja ūi sabu* (“Teacher to Global Backpackers”) and in readers’ comments, cause Han to take her responsibility in transmitting information to her fellow countrymen seriously and she generally approaches other cultures with humility and respect.

Consideration of issues of knowledge and ignorance, however, affects her deployment of narrative material: after the introduction to the first volume of *Param ūi ttal*, she disregards the temporal order of her travels and begins (1996a, 132) with her experience in Central Asia because she feels that, since that region

11. Cf. the view of outsiders again with Pak Wansō’s “A Pasque Flower on That Bleak Day,” where American GIs are depicted in animalistic imagery.

is less known to Koreans (*uri*), an account of these countries will prove more interesting. Her almost complete ignorance about Iran upon arrival makes her journey true exploration, and she delights in what she calls a hinterland of knowledge (*chisik ūi oji*).¹² Han, who regularly notes her preference for travel in remote areas (*oji yōhaeng*) and has become known to the public specifically as an *oji yōhaengga*, has in the past extended the phrase to the entire Middle East.¹³ Remarking that this was the most impressive region in human terms that she visited during her travels, she ponders why Koreans remain so unaware of the area's rich culture but shuns examination of the geopolitical factors that contributed to ignorance about the Middle East in the 1990s.

Han is nonetheless not immune from the desire to have her experiences conform to prior expectations; satisfaction in travel, she observes, can paradoxically often mean the enactment of previously held images.¹⁴ Han's vision of the Islamic world itself, as she admits, partakes of imagery formed by the adventures of Sinbad and 1001 Arabian Nights. When she wanders through narrow alleyways in Iran (1996a, 57), the medieval atmosphere that confirms her prior imaginings delights her, and while swimming on a moonlit night in an Egyptian oasis, she envisions herself as a queen from one of the region's tales (1996a, 288). Her portrayal consequently in part reproduces conventional Western Orientalist traditions.

At the same time, however, Han rejects hegemonic interpretations of history foisted upon the world by the West. Korea's own experience of colonial oppression imparts solidarity with the inhabitants of Latin America and she notes how Western historiography has distorted Korea's understanding of the region. The deeper knowledge she acquires through travel leads her to argue that Spain's colonial project involved not heroic exploration, but brutal exploitation. At one point, she asks rhetorically why Genghis Khan and the Mongols have a reputation as the world's cruelest race, and claims that such tales are the

12. Han also notes the sense of excitement and genuinely pioneering exploration that comes with lack of information in Turkmenistan, a country she initially had no intention of visiting (1996a, 81; the theme is reprised elsewhere in her work; cf., e.g., 1996b, 324).

13. This reference occurred in a now deleted Internet interview, formerly available from <http://my.netian.com/~haeo/h4/biya.htm>, first accessed in 2003, "*Oji yōhaengga wa ūi taehwa*" (Conversation with a Hinterland Traveller).

14. Lhasa, for example, with its Holiday Inn, karaoke bars, and pubs disappoints (1998b, 264); similarly, she relates how her romantic visions of staying in a Masai village come to naught (1996a, 203) when she finds that the chief is a Christian high school graduate who wears pants and button-down shirt, speaks English fluently and even owns a TV. Han, however, regularly eschews reflection on the contradictions of a world in which cultural interchange is occurring at a dizzying pace, as explored in, e.g., Iyer 1988.

falsehoods (*hŏŏn*) of Europeans who suffered under him, and that Germans and the Spanish have at least as much to answer for (1996b, 18-19).¹⁵ Han conveys to her readers her important realization that history, and knowledge of history, is determined by the powerful. Although she never makes the point explicitly, the question of historical interpretation and distortion is clearly informed by contemporary Korean conflicts with the Japanese over textbook issues.

Korea and Her Neighbours...and Korea

It becomes apparent, then, that travel allows a global epistemology for Han, but one that is novel in the larger sphere of travel writing in that it is based on identity as a Korean woman. She regularly writes about her own relationship to a multiplicity of “Others,” taking this identity as a starting point, in part because she comes to recognize that she is defined by others, above all, as Korean (2001, 178).¹⁶ For example, she feels affinity with the indigenous inhabitants of South America because they look Asian. When she looks at the children of these descendents of the Incas, who also have the Mongol spot (*monggobanjŏm*), she even finds it easy to imagine their names as Ch’ŏlsu, Yŏnghŭi, Tori, and Suni (1996b, 132). Similarly, she notes unusual affection (*chŏng*) for Eskimos as well, perhaps because of a shared racial resemblance, such as a flattish (*napch’ikhan*) face, and the Mongol spot (1996b, 212). Not surprisingly, Han tells of a particular kinship with Mongolians, because of a similar look and cultural patterns, such as drinking habits (1998b, 83).

The world consequently comes to be seen and known not merely in national terms, however, but racial terms as well.¹⁷ Han’s closest sense of affinity is to

15. Cf. 1996b, 216-220, where the theme is reprised.

16. Han contrasts dramatically on this score with others writing travel narratives in roughly the same years about unusual locales, such as e.g., Ch’oe (2002), and especially Ryu (1997, 2001), for whom the primary locus of identity resides not in being Korean, but in being a poet and a self-described hippie. Ryu, in fact, does not, as far as I noticed, use the phrase, *uri nara* to refer to Korea once in either of his best-selling travel narratives about India.

17. Han’s conception of the world at least partly in racial terms becomes most evident in Africa. Shortly upon arrival in Nairobi (1996a, 135), she is mugged in broad daylight. “Two black men held me down” (*tu myŏngŭi hŭgin*), she writes, one assailant being “a black as big as a house” (*momjip i chipch’ae manhan hŭgin han nom*). While she is being held, the intensity of the smell from the “black’s armpit” (*hŭginnom ūi kyŏdurangi esŏ*) makes her feel as though she will pass out. This superfluous use of *hŭgin* in Kenya thrice on one page becomes all the more striking for its appearance in a context in which she is encountering violence. Conversely, the term appears in otiose fashion (1996a, 223) when she meets a “*hŭgin*” doctor in Northern Kenya who is doing good works in difficult circumstances. Han is presumably either registering unconscious surprise

other citizens of South Korea, then to diaspora Koreans, to other Asians (*Tongyangin*) and on to others, who resemble Asians. As she writes in the introduction to the fourth volume of *Param ūi ttal* (1998b, 14), over the course of her travels she increasingly realizes that she is not just the daughter of her family and of Korea, but of Asia and the world. In this sense she also becomes a prominent contributor to growing discourses of Korea's larger regional and global identity, fostered by the increasing presence of foreign workers and an enormous spike in international marriages, and as evinced by the popular *Asia! Asia!* segment of MBC's *Nŭkkimp'yo* (Exclamation Point) in the early years of the 2000s. Han, who finds herself regularly invited to stay with people when travelling, often comes to be regarded as an adopted daughter. The strength of familial metaphors running in Han's texts appears not only in her nickname "Daughter of the Wind," but her frequent reference to herself as a daughter of Korea (*Hanguk ūi ttal*), and she becomes increasingly aware of herself as a cosmopolite who considers the entire world her family (1996a, 247), a discursive approach fostered by the Korean language's preference for kinship terms in addressing others, and extended here to the entire world.

The schema presented above is, however, rendered more complicated in Han's work, as the author constructs this global family in a series of concentric but overlapping circles. Affinity need not rely on visual resemblance: Han also feels special kinship with Turks (1996a, 107), whom she likens to distant relatives, because the word order of their language, their sense of *chŏng* and the Turkish national character remind her of Korea. Equally strikingly, Han recognizes new forms of intersecting identities and argues that backpackers from different nations often understand and communicate with one another more readily than with non-backpackers from their own countries. For the writer, backpackers, the *paenangjok*, become a new tribe for the 21st century (1998a, 39-43), among whom bonds of solidarity are created by information exchange and shared nomadic experience.

Furthermore, Han acknowledges that relationships with those who are closest may exhibit the greatest complexity, and both Japan and China receive special attention in her oeuvre. While Han's visits to Japan only feature peripherally, Japanese themselves appear regularly among her fellow travellers and her reactions to them provoke considerable reflection. She speaks of many with great affection, such as Yasuo, the putative "half-brother" she meets in Iran (1996a, 45) and Ikuo, a fellow student from her days studying in Utah, whom

herself or attempting to prevent misconception among fellow countrymen who might not expect a doctor in Kenya to himself be Kenyan.

she later travels to Europe with (2001, 129-134). Antagonism rears its head as well, however. Han describes with barely disguised glee (1996b, 58-60) the manner in which her superior English allows her to put down an arrogant Japanese man who expresses surprise that a Korean has the economic wherewithal to travel in Chile. After this encounter, Han observes the delicacy of the Korea-Japan relationship (1996b, 69-70): the barest slight occasions irritation, but a common East Asian background enables her to develop close friendships with them in traveling much more quickly than with Westerners. Perhaps it is in such encounters above all that one senses how Han envisions herself representing the Korean people as a whole.¹⁸

For this reason, the author also remarks how often, at the time of her travels in the mid-1990s, she met Japanese backpackers, and she wishes (1996a, 46) that more young Koreans would challenge the world with equal freedom and bravery (*chayuropko yonggamhage*). Similarly, she relates the frequency with which she came upon comments by Japanese travelers in backpacker lodge guestbooks but the rarity of Korean, and she chides her fellow Korean travelers for not leaving more information. Such passages reveal a competitive instinct, specifically vis-à-vis Korea's erstwhile colonizer. When she actually finds an entry in Korean in Syria (1996a, 321), she reads it over and over again, "as if reading a love letter." The owner of the guesthouse, seeing how attentively Han pores over the note, asks if she knows its author, and she responds, "Of course, Koreans are one people, one blood (*Han'guk saram ün hanminjok, han p'itchul*). Everyone is my relative." Han then makes a national exhortation, speaking to her readers as fellow countrymen and urging Korean youth to rid themselves of the "frog in the well" mentality and to get out and see the world.

Knowledge of China inspires contemplation of Korea in a different way. Han passes through Korea's vast neighbor several times and devotes not only a large portion of *Param üi ttal*, but a separate volume to the country. Shortly after her return to Korea from her travels, she spends a year in Beijing to study Mandarin, both for the intrinsic importance of the language, and for its benefit to her future work with refugees. China, however, as a close neighbor and the source of much Korean culture, is in many ways not striking to her. Upon Han's first visit to Beijing, she finds her own reaction surprisingly blasé: virtually everything she

18. Cf. also her encounter at 1998a, 188-92 with a Japanese traveler who comes across as especially repellent. Interestingly, Han's fluent English and her very cosmopolitanism become tools through which she may either embarrass Japanese or avoid having to concede a home field linguistic advantage (Han speaks Japanese fluently, but not natively). Knowledge, and particularly knowledge that marks one as worldly, is applied again here in a way that works in the service of Korean national prestige.

sees reminds her of Seoul, the difference simply being one of scale (1996a, 351). China is thus pre-known in a way that many of Han's other destinations are not. Nevertheless, the author argues that its great influence upon Korea and its importance per se demands deeper understanding, for no matter how cosmopolitan one might be, it remains essential to know one's roots (1998a, 53-54). While Han here means a knowledge of Korea's intellectual and cultural background, a visit to China offers understanding of Korea in another way, for it provides a return to Korea's recent past: China lags behind South Korea in development and Beijing reminds her of the Seoul of her childhood (1998a, 54).

Han's conception of Beijing as at least partly a living instantiation of the Seoul of a few decades ago raises a crucial point: one also travels abroad to witness a lost Korean past. Han regularly observes how travel in developing countries recalls days gone by in Korea, and such remarks provide nostalgia tinged with relief. In Afghanistan, the market in which clothes sent as part of aid efforts are resold suggests to her Korean War-era Namdaemun Market (1996a, 65), while children's requests for "money" or "pen" in Africa and India upon encountering foreigners is likened to the manner in which children in Korea would have asked for gum or chocolate on seeing an American soldier (1996a, 71).¹⁹ While the prior observation implies social progress, this search for the past also suggests the loss of precious customs. Remarking upon the warm invitation to stay the night that greets her when she wanders into a remote village in Laos (1998a, 157), she adds that it "would have been the same just ten years ago in a Korean mountain village too – although it probably has changed by now, of course." Nowhere, however, is the concept of return to Korea's past more apparent than when she visits Manchuria (1998b, 319), and here Han even includes a photograph from the Korean Autonomous Minority Region that offers visual proof that "our past" remains intact in the grass-roofed farm houses of Yanbian (*uri ūi yennal ūi kosŭranhi nama innŭn Yenbyen ūi nongch'on ch'oga*).

The opportunity to view ways of life rapidly disappearing from the Republic of Korea itself through travel becomes an aid to understanding Korean-ness more fully. Ultimately, however, all of Han's travel becomes a substitution for one crucial aspect of knowledge of Korea that cannot be achieved, and it is useful to consider these wide-ranging travel narratives that take Han around the

19. Similarly, Han finds the astonishment that greets her travel in Africa without a husband not unlike the attitudes a foreign woman travelling solo might have encountered in the Korean countryside 50 years earlier (1996a, 226), and the décor of homes she visits in Honduras, with their haphazard cobbling together of family photographs make her think of what a Korean house in the countryside in the '50s would have been like (1996b, 332).

world in relation to *pundan munhak*, the literature of division. The fourth volume of *Param üü ttal: kōrōsō chigu sebak'wiban* culminates in her arrival in Manchuria. Here she encounters a fierce young North Korean woman, who, although driven by famine to cross the border into China and work in a tavern, feels guilt over her betrayal of her own country and cries out “let us self-destruct in the name of the great leader” as a toast (1998b, 326). More wrenching still for Han are the refugee children whom she meets. The agony, despair and thought world of these relatives remained, at the time of writing, fundamentally unknowable.²⁰

The conclusion causes the reader to recollect that scattered throughout the work the author mentions that her dream of world travel was inspired by her father, a refugee from the North, who never returned and spent his life in essential exile. The presence of the North, an obvious but forbidden destination, lurks throughout her travel. Upon learning that South Koreans routinely have visa applications rejected by North Korea's ally Syria, her zeal to visit the country is enflamed (1996a, 315). Han's experience enables her to liken the Simien Mountains in Ethiopia to Machu Picchu, Wōlch'ulsan, Guilin, and Monument Valley and leads her to question (1996a, 262) whether these impressive mountains might resemble Kūmgangsan.

Param üü ttal: kōrōsō chigu sebak'wiban ends after some 1400 pages with the author standing at the Tumen River. Looking across to the other side and writing just on the eve of the Sunshine Policy, which would substantially open opportunities for South Koreans, including Han herself, to travel north of the 38th parallel, she thinks of the family of her father and weeps. What has become of these relatives that she has never met? Han thus concludes with perhaps the most deeply felt trope of Korean discourse of the second half of the twentieth century, a prayer for reunification. No contemporary Korean reader would miss the irony as the theme of knowledge and nation converges in climactic fashion: the lone destination that remains impenetrable to this adventurous and resourceful traveler, who even finds her way into Afghanistan during its civil war, is the north of her divided land, home to her own ancestors.

20. Han has since spent extended time in North Korea in her relief work with World Vision Korea. See Han 2005.

Conclusion

How, ultimately, do we set a figure such as Han Bi-ya into a larger global tradition of travel writing and travel writing by women? As Duncan and Gregory note (1999, 3), “there is a sense in which all travel writing, as a process of inscription and appropriation, spins webs of colonizing power, but to locate travel writing within this discursive formation also involves plotting the play of fantasy and desire, and the possibility of transgression.” Han herself, as I hope to have demonstrated above, likewise inevitably becomes involved in just such a process of inscription and appropriation, but does so from a unique position that integrates a very knowing awareness of colonizing processes as a postcolonial author, but with a beguiling lack of self-consciousness as a result of this position that renders her writing inspirational in its interweaving of new dreams for her audience. While provoking her readers to rethink their lives and to confront social norms, her commitment to her national community dilutes the potentially transgressive aspects of her work.

Indeed, what initially struck me as a Western male reader and committed backpacker who avidly consumed contemporary travel narratives about the “global hinterlands” during roughly the same period at which Han was writing was the difference in tone in her work. Where Western writers, and especially male writers, have frequently written with a measure of distance about themselves in order to place either the visited destination, or their quasi-heroic struggles in a challenging situation, at the centerpiece of their narrative, Han consistently places herself and her national, gendered subjectivity at the forefront. More bluntly stated, I felt that in reading Han Bi-ya’s oeuvre I learned little about the countries that she visited, but I learned a great deal about Han Bi-ya. This, however, was not especially a problem, as her straightforward narrative style and her endearing persona make for compelling reading and over time, I realized that while I developed little sense of unusual destinations that intrigued me, I was learning much about Korea and the changes it was experiencing during the 1990s post-democratization period as its citizens’ purchasing power rose rapidly.

Indeed, in conclusion, I have to acknowledge the indirect influence that Han Bi-ya has had on my own life: after ten years of work as a scholar of Korean Studies, I fortuitously met my own Korean spouse while travelling in India, a woman who had grown up in rural Kyöngsangbuk-do in a conservative Andong Kim village, but had been the first woman from her community to attend university and then had taken to the road amidst the growing popularity of

backpacking in the mid-1990s. Inspired by the empowering messages of Han Bi-ya's work, she sought more adventurous destinations than many of her peers and was given the teasing but flattering nickname of "Kim Bi-ya." The inscription and appropriation of which Duncan and Gregory speak take on a new significance, when one considers the way in which individuals can have their eyes opened to a wider world, and that "transgression," in its literal derivation from Latin, above all signifies the crossing of boundaries, with the possibility of new meetings and encounters, with life-changing consequences. It is a rare privilege to be able to acknowledge such gratitude to the subject of an academic study.

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