Methodological Issues in Using Chosŏn Travelogues as an Historical Source: The Question of Factuality*

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Travelogues can be a rich source of factual history, but using them as such can have misleading results if the literary nature of these texts is not properly taken into account. This paper aims at enriching our understanding of the potential intricacies of the relationship between factuality and literaricity in travelogues by looking at three types of literary mechanisms that can impair the reliability of travelogues as historical source: the concoction of facts (as in records of journeys that never took place), the projection of self-images and world-views that is typical of all ego-documents, and the literary experiment that values other kinds of truth higher than factual accuracy. The article ends with a brief reflection on the value as historical source that travelogues can have precisely due to this literary nature.

The discovery that the usual definition of travelogues as a factual account of an actual journey, told in the first person by the traveller, fails to grasp the complexity of this peculiar type of source seems to be a rather recent achievement of general studies on travelogues,[1] although individual interpretations of travelogues have long taken the problematic aspects of the genre into account. In the universe of historical sources travelogues occupy a notoriously ambiguous position at the intersection of the spaces defined as geographical, historical and literary writings. Seeing travel writing as a primarily geographical source is the outcome of the European history of travel writing that saw the flowering of this kind of literature in the age of discovery and colonialism. Trying to subsume it into the field of belles-lettres is, on the other hand, hampered by the fact that travelogues indeed can consist at least partly of rather dry descriptive and academic material. While history seems to be a category broad enough to contain the widest array of materials, travelogues are in themselves quite obviously not historical writings. Rather than being part of a culture of remembrance (*Erinnerungskultur*), representing the past, they tend to strive for an illumination of a distant, but contemporary space, often with the greater aim of widening their audience's framework for interpreting the present. And while they are in fact usually a first-person narrative about presumably real experiences and would thus fall into the realm of autobiography, they are in most cases not intended as such; still, elements of narrative self-representation or self-construction are rarely missing.

What does all this mean for the use of travelogues as a historical source and, more specifically, as a source for Chosŏn Korea? It means, on the one hand, that travelogues

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[1] See Borm (2004: 13–26). See also the introduction by the editors in the same publication. Borm specifically argues against understanding travel writing as a genre, viewing it rather as multiple genres bound together by the shared theme of travel.

have to be used with special care with regard to preconceptions about their genre. While extra-textual author-reader agreements certainly do exist for certain kinds of travelogues in a given place and period, one should be aware that travelogues are not part of a universal genre canon that would allow reader expectations formed through a certain tradition to be carried over to another. Instead, close attention must be paid to any textual markers of the primary functions that the individual text at hand may have had for both author and reader. This caveat concerns especially the factuality of the accounts. On the other hand, the under-defined position of travelogues in terms of knowledge domain and textual interaction means that they can present insights into facets of Chosŏn life and mindset that may not easily be gleaned from other kinds of sources. The main part of my paper illustrates why travelogues should not be used as a historical source without taking into account their literary nature; by way of conclusion, I will point to one or two examples of fields of inquiry for which travelogues may be fruitfully used *precisely* because of this literary nature.

The limits of factuality

Chosŏn travelogues as they have come down to us are rarely a genre of purely utilitarian purposes and uses; rather, they have been written and preserved for specific communicative purposes. While this is of course a truism that applies to any sort of text, though to a varying degree, it needs to be stressed in view of the blind faith in the factuality of travel writings that historians tend to exhibit when using them as a source for historical, ethnographical and geographical information on countries of the past. I will illustrate how questionable this assumption of factuality can be by presenting three case studies, of which two are only briefly summarized and one discussed in more detail.

Travelogues as literary concoctions

The controversy about whether or not Marco Polo ever reached China, which has continued for centuries and still has not produced a final judgement, should suffice for a heightened awareness that not every travel author has necessarily travelled in the places he describes. For Chosŏn times when travel beyond the border was heavily restricted and well documented for the legal travellers (while illegal travellers would have known better than to write about their exploits), it is the domestic travelogues rather than reports about travel abroad that warrant questions about their authenticity in terms of the factuality of the journey. Scholars of Chosŏn literature like Chin Chae-gyo indeed pose the question whether the countless travelogues about Kŭmgang-san (Diamond Mountains) that were composed over the centuries always had a base in actual travel, given how formulaic the compositions are in the case of the lesser works.[2]

[2] Personal communication, Seoul, September 2005.

However, seemingly lively, personal and specific accounts are no guarantee of "authenticity" in the sense that they relate actual events. A case in point is the highly interesting 19th century travelogue *Hodongsŏrak ki* 湖東西洛記 (Record of [travels] criss-crossing the country) by Kim Kŭmwŏn 金錦園 (b. 1817),[3] former entertainer, secondary wife to a *yangban* called Kim Tŏkhŭi 金德熙 (b. 1800),[4] and poetess. As the only known extant Literary Chinese prose travelogue written by a woman, it is an exceptional text that does not closely follow genre conventions of the Kŭmgang-san travelogue,[5] which probably provides an opportunity to glimpse literary procedures that exist in other texts as well, but are less obvious.

Rather than covering one single journey, *Hodongsŏrak ki* has the appearance of an autobiography in the format of recording past travels. Finished in 1850, it covers two distinct periods of travel: a trip she purportedly undertook as a fourteen-year-old, financed by her parents out of solicitude for their once sickly daughter now disguised as a boy (in summer 1830), and her journey accompanying her husband (who left his legal wife at home) to his place of office in Ŭiju in 1845. A final part describes her poetry meetings with other secondary wives in Seoul, thus combining memories of travel with those of another leisurely pursuit of the educated and well-to-do gentleman. Indeed, this connection is what she claims in the introductory part of the essay (Kim Kŭmwŏn 1997: 467):

> "But as heaven has endowed me with the [human] nature of empathy and knowledge, and equipped me with ears and eyes, why should I alone not rejoice in landscapes and widen my horizon of experience? As it has endowed me with the talent of a quick mind, why should I alone have no place in the country of literary excellence?"

All in all, this text is a self-monument to the literary aspirations of a well-educated and gifted woman who wished to cross the boundaries of gender (and, in part, class) roles. The travel descriptions, especially those concerning events from a rather distant past, need to be seen in this light.

Right at the beginning of her descriptions of her first journey, Kŭmwŏn writes of having visited Ŭirim pond in Chech'ŏn and having detected there a pair of orioles.

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[3] As the daughter of a "fallen" *yangban* 兩班 with an entertainer (*kisaeng* 妓生), she had to follow her mother's profession. Her low social status may explain the freedom to travel she (claims to have) had.

[4] Kim Tŏkhŭi was a distant relative of the famous calligrapher and scholar Kim Chŏnghŭi 金正喜 (1786–1856).

[5] Kŭmgang-san is only one, albeit the most important, of the described destinations. The *sansu yugi* 山水遊記 (Chin. *shanshui youji*, "excursion record") forms a genre more clearly than the travelogue as such, and also much more so than records of travel abroad with their widely divergent representational structures. I am not claiming here that writings on Kŭmgang-san should definitely be seen as a sub-genre of the *sansu yugi*, but I take that possibility into account (for *hanmun* prose), as certainly there is a strong tradition of writing about Kŭmgang-san, with travel writers alluding to and building upon the works of their predecessors.

It is difficult to ascertain whether these birds (of a species which is not frequently seen in the wild) allude to the orioles which caused King Yuri of Koguryŏ to reflect on his loneliness, having lost his Chinese wife, and sing what is supposedly the oldest Korean poem transmitted to posterity.[6] But for sure, the seagulls that make their appearance in the next sentence have flown into the text from literature: They (and the purported reaction of the traveller to their appearance) are an open reference to Chŏng Ch'ŏl's 鄭澈 (1536–1593) *Kwandong pyŏlgok* 關東別曲 (Song of Kwangdong [Province]), a vernacular song (*kasa* 歌辭) about a visit to Kŭmgang Mountain. Immediately after, a fisher's song is heard through the willows, which would make every literate person think of the rich tradition of fisherman's songs which reaches back to the *Chuci* 楚辭 and has been further developed in the Korean tradition, finding a climax in Yun Sŏndo's 尹善道 (1587–1671) *Ŏbu sasi sa* 漁父四時詞 (A fisherman's songs through four seasons), a cycle of forty poems in the *sijo* 詩調 form. Together, these three allusions would refer to the three foremost poetic traditions in Korea by bringing to mind their earliest (in the case of *hansi* 漢詩) or most famous specimen (in the case of *kasa* and *sijo*). A few lines further into the text, we find an edible water plant called *pakch'ae* (Chin. *baocai*) 薄菜 which seems to have no Korean equivalent but usually serves as an allusion to Zhang Han 張翰 (fl. 301–312) of Jin 晉 (266–420) times who gave up his office in the capital when the smell of this plant reminded him of his favourite dishes at home.[7] This again resonates well with the preceding two allusions to Chŏng Ch'ŏl and Yun Sŏndo who both wrote their masterpieces as a way of stressing their contentment at being deprived of political power at court (Kim Kŭmwŏn 1997: 468f.). While the context of these allusions appears rather ostentatious for a young girl, they may still be the most adequate literary precedents she could find to express her enjoyment of travel as a means to escape strict protocol (gender roles in her case). At any rate, this brief foray into the literary make-up of the text suggests that vivid memories of a pond with orioles, seagulls, and edible weeds were probably not the reason for writing down the passage in question.

These observations on *Hodongsŏrak ki* fit in well with my findings, made during my study of the Chinese s*hanshui youji* (*sansu yugi*) 山水遊記 tradition, concerning one of the socioliteral functions of the travelogue: It seems that during late Ming and Qing times, the genre of the short mountain excursion essay was a typical field of activity for young scholars not (yet) in office who could prove their literary prowess and creativity as well as their familiarity with literary tradition by imbuing cultural mnemotopes with ever new significations. To have travelled there in person would have helped but certainly not have been a necessary precondition, as the features of the mountain, cave or lake in question would have been sufficiently familiar from previous "records". For Kim Kŭmwŏn, who systematically built up a literary persona for herself

[6] This poem has been transmitted in the form of a four syllable–four line Chinese poem (*hansi*) in *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 ("History of the Three Kingdoms", 12th century).

[7] This plant seems to belong to the genus *Typha* (bulrush; cattail). I am grateful to Rüdiger Breuer for this information.

while being excluded from the political realm, travel was the one topic she could use to connect with the male literary sphere and demonstrate that her skills were equal to those of her male peers.

Travelogues as ego-narratives and projections of world-views

Whether or not they can be read as "autobiographical" writings (like *Hodongsŏrak ki*), travelogues – at least as long as they fit the criterion of "first-person narrative", but potentially even beyond that – are by their very nature concerned with the activities of the traveller and therefore on one level inextricably engaged with a construction of persona through literary means. Such literary self-construction serves as a kind of lens through which the "object" of travel is projected into the eyes of the reader. When looking at the representation of a certain place through travelogues, it is important to keep this literary factor in mind.

Like the literary concoction of journeys of doubtful factuality, this phenomenon too may have applied more often to records of domestic than of foreign travels during Chosŏn times, as there were arguably more utilitarian designations attached to the latter; still, at least since prose *Yŏnhaengnok* 燕行錄 (Records of missions to [Qing] China) came to be rather frequently written for purposes other than the documentation of fulfilment of duties or foreign intelligence, we can see such literary self-construction at work in this kind of text as well, and I take my example, which I will introduce only briefly here in the form of a summary of an earlier study (Eggert 2008), from China travelogues.

Looking at the descriptions of Peking in Korean travelogues from early Ming to late Qing times, the changes that could be observed between 18th and mid-19th century travelogues are especially intriguing, but closer scrutiny of the texts at hand reveal that it would be misleading to attribute these changes unilaterally to Peking's historical transformation. Rather, among the many factors that need to be taken into account in interpreting the respective textual representations of the city, such as, for example, changing political relations between Hanyang and Peking, rising Korean self-awareness and growing knowledge about the surrounding world, a high degree of influence on the text formation must be ascribed to the specific way in which travel authors presented their travelling persona. It is unlikely that the comparative lack-lustre characterization of Peking in the later travelogues vis-à-vis the earlier ones is due to any narrowing of the gap in relative size, splendour, political importance, liveliness and technological sophistication between Peking and Hanyang during the period 1760 to 1860. Rather, the fashion in travel writing of projecting a self-image as inquisitive explorer of the spaces of new and useful knowledge had subsided by the mid-19th century in favour of the both more serene and more sceptical attitude of the pleasure seeker. Or, to put it in a different way that foregrounds the changes in intellectual rather than in literary climate, the awareness of the Qing empire's military weakness in the face of encroaching Western imperialism made a persona of the explorative mind who would take home the secrets of Chinese power less plausible to Korean travel writers

and their audiences; what remained was the prestige to be gained from the traveller's possession of uncommon (sensual) experiences in the foreign land.

Travelogue as literary experiment: the case of Yŏrha ilgi

This kind of narrative configuration of the described objects is not, of course, on a par with the conscious and more or less conspicuous construction of travel events, which was probably to some extent accepted for domestic travelogues. While the latter were associated with leisure and personal pursuits and therefore allowed for a higher degree of narrative assemblage of or dissociation from facts, records of foreign travel with their affinity to official life and state politics were unquestionably assumed by their readers to be firmly grounded on facts. However, as I will show in the following section, even in the case of records of foreign travel any use of the text as historical source should be preceded by a close investigation into its literary make-up and the latter's possible implications for the reliability of given passages as factual accounts. I will illustrate this claim by testing the viability of reading Pak Chiwŏn's 朴趾源 (1737–1805) famous Peking travelogue *Yŏrha ilgi* 熱河日記 (preface 1783, hereafter *YI*) as belonging to the *sosŏl* 小說 genre.

The first impression any reader will have of *YI* is that of a genre mixture. While according to its title it should be a diary, this is true only for about the first half of the work; the remainder consists of 20 sections (in the standard edition) of thematically arranged materials, partly in the format of miscellaneous notes (*sup'il* 隨筆). However, there is no decisive distinction between the two parts of the work as far as generic characteristics are concerned: The diary part contains lists and discursive material just as the miscellanies do, while the latter are often richly narrative in nature; both parts are interspersed with essays in old style prose (*komun* 古文) that can stand independently, and each of the two parts contains one lengthy passage that has been singled out by twentieth century scholarship as "short fiction in Chinese literary language" (*hanmun tanp'yŏn sosŏl* 漢文短篇小說).

This generic complexity has probably to a large degree precluded attempts to treat the question of generic affiliation of *YI* as a whole. One of the rare examples of this question being asked at all appears in an article of the always insightful scholar Im Hyŏngt'aek (1985: 93):

> "It is questionable in which categories we should understand *YI* today. It is not only a diary, but also a work of scholarly labour and a piece of belles-lettres (*munye chakp'um* 文藝作品). Even within the framework of belles-lettres, it is unclear in which category to put it."

After reviewing a number of important themes and passages from the work, he reaches the conclusion that it should be regarded as (essayistic) "prose" (in contradistinction to poetry, fiction and drama), specified as both "narrative" (*sŏsajŏk sanmun* 敍事的散文) and "discursive prose" (*sŏllijŏk sanmun* 說理的散文), but in both cases exemplary for the development of a "realistic literature" (*hyŏnsilchuŭi munhak* 現實主義文學) in Korea. His attempt to pinpoint a single genre for *YI* thus mirrors the

needs of the time (the article was written in the mid-1980s) for "sprouts" of an engaged, *minjung*-oriented, realist, and in these senses, "modern" literature.

In our post-modern age that tends to value variability, hybridity and playfulness, *YI*'s genre mix is not only better tolerated, but is one of the text's most highly valued aspects. One of the most useful recent studies of *YI*, Sŏ Hyŏn'gyŏng's doctoral dissertation about the work's standard version and narrative techniques, may represent the state of the art of literary approaches to the text (Sŏ 2008). Besides analysing the narrative techniques found throughout *YI*, Sŏ discusses the creative use of different genres as a special feature of the miscellany part, and distinguishes between the "narrative appearances" (*sŏsul yangsang* 敍述楊相) of old style prose (*komunch'e* 古文體), of the vignette (*sop'umch'e* 小品體), and of fiction (*sosŏlch'e* 小說體). While perceptive in the analysis of individual passages and in respect of creative transformations of prose genres, genre use and genre mixture are treated here as another facet of literary style, and the question of the overall genre of the work as a whole is not asked.[8]

Certainly, much speaks in favour of such an approach, and I am not about to discard or try to disprove a view of *YI* that sees much of its – so to speak – deconstructive power in its stylistic diversity and the liberal combination of a variety of genres in portions of the work. I do not even want to argue that *YI* as a whole can indeed be subsumed under a single genre, but I wish to draw attention to a certain playing with genre in *YI* that serves to unsettle our readings of the text.

While modern scholarship is rather silent on the question of an overall genre classification for *YI*, earlier readers did in fact concern themselves with it. One author of a 19th century China travelogue, Kim Kyŏngsŏn 金景善 (1788–1853), who was deeply influenced by *YI* and often quotes long passages from it, starts the preface to his travelogue, *Yŏnwŏn chikchi* 燕轅直指 ("Emissary on a wagon heading towards Peking"; 1832), with a reflection on the literary characteristics of his most important predecessors:

> 適燕者多記其行而三家最著：稼齋金氏，湛軒洪氏，燕巖朴氏也。以史例則稼近於編年而平實條暢。洪沿乎記事而典雅縝密。朴類夫立傳而贍麗宏博。
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> "Of those who went to Peking, many have recorded their journeys, but three among them are the most outstanding: [No]gajae Kim [Ch'angŏp], Tamhŏn Hong [Taeyong], and Yŏnam Pak [Chiwŏn]. When compared with [the genres of] history writing, Kim's work would be closest to composing annals, unadorned and orderly; Hong's would be akin to the recording of events, refined and meticulous; and Pak's would be analogous to setting up biographies/accounts, magnificent and extensive."

Kim Ch'angŏp's 金昌業 (1658–1721) *Nogajae Yŏnhaengnok* 老稼齋燕行日記 ("China record by Nogajae"; 1712) is, like virtually all China travelogues before him, written in the pure diary form, thus the analogy with the "annalistic" mode of historio-

[8] Serious study of the "multiplicity of styles" (*munch'e-ŭi tayangsŏng*) in *YI* probably began with Kim Myŏngho's dissertation of 1989 which extensively treats fictionality in *YI* – but as a matter of linguistic code and narrative techniques, not of genre.

graphy is immediately apparent. In his *Tamhŏn Yŏn'gi* 湛軒燕記 ("Tamhŏn's Peking record"; 1766), Hong Taeyong 洪大容 (1731–1783) departed from this traditional form of recording journeys to the Great Country by laying out his chapters according to a topical rather than a chronological design, although within chapters, materials are usually arranged roughly in chronological order.[9] Again, characterizing this narrative technique by comparison to *kisa (ponmal)* 紀事(本末), the narration of single events from beginning to end, is quite convincing. However, the relationship of *YI* to the *chŏn* 傳 type of account is less readily apparent, even if we heed the fact that *chŏn* 傳 as a historical genre was not confined to life stories ("biography" being the most common translation of the term in the context of historiography), but could also cover topical accounts like ethnographies. The topically arranged miscellanies may to some degree lend themselves to this analogy; the more conspicuous diary parts do not. The reason for equating Pak's writing with "biographies/accounts", or perhaps better "[life] stories", must then be sought in the *chŏn*'s pronounced tendency towards combining narration and reflection or judgment, in other words, in the greater leeway this genre gives to subjectivity. This, of course, is precisely the characteristic of the *chŏn* that accounted for its contribution to the development of fictional narrative – *chŏn* being, at least in the Korean tradition, the most widely used generic marker in fictional tales. Subjectivity is also implied in the verb used for the composition of *chŏn*, "setting up" (*ip* 立), a word which has many connotations of sovereignty, autonomy and individual spirit.[10] To "set up" a topical account appears to be a far more deliberate act than simply to "compile" or "record" annals and events. In other words, I would see in the characterization of *YI* as *ipchŏn* 立傳 a hint at a certain proximity to fictional writing.

This conjecture is supported by perhaps the earliest critical writing on *YI*, the anonymous preface which, as professor Kim Myŏngho has recently found out, was in fact authored by Pak Chiwŏn's close friend Yu Tŭkkong 柳得恭 (1749–ca. 1805).[11] The whole preface is centred on the question of the mode of writing of *YI*. When the book is first mentioned, almost two-thirds into the text,[12] it is this question that is asked: "Now, as for Yŏnam's *Yŏrha ilgi*, I do not know what kind of book this is" (今夫燕巖氏之熱河日記, 吾未知其爲何書也). Of course, it is clear to any reader that the answer is to be sought in, or at least prepared by, the preceding section of the preface, which discusses the way of "establishing what one has to say and setting up

[9] This was noted earlier by Gari Ledyard (Ledyard 2004).

[10] As evidence for this claim I would cite the following classical phrases that make use of this word: For sovereignty, the phrase "if the people have no faith in their rulers, there is no standing for the state" (民無信不立) used in the *Analects* of Confucius (*Lunyu* 12:7) and other ancient sources or the fact that rulers are "erected" (立) or "erect" themselves. For autonomy, Confucius' saying in the *Analects* that "at thirty, I stood firm" (三十而立; *Lunyu* 2:4); and for individual spirit, the frequently used phrase "acquire determination" (立志).

[11] Personal communication, April 2009. This preface is not contained in the English translation of *YI*'s first three chapters (Choe-Wall 2010).

[12] In line 15 of 23 lines in the 1997 Shanghai Shudian edition.

teachings" (*ib'ŏn sŏlgyo* 立言設教). Two such ways, exemplified in two Chinese classics, are distinguished: the "subtle" (*mi* 微) way of the *Yijing* which aims at elucidating truth (*t'amni* 談理) and evolves into allegorical speech (*uŏn* 寓言), and the "obvious" (*hyŏn* 顯) way of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* which is given to recording events (*kisa* 記事) and develops into "additional/unofficial traditions" (*woejŏn* 外傳). It is then shown how both ways actually cross, truth being neither confined to nor more readily identifiable in the "obvious" mode, and how they merge, intertwining the "real" (*chin* 眞) and the "false"/the "borrowed" (*ka* 假), to the best possible effect in the *Zhuangzi*. Now *uŏn* and *woejŏn* being modes of fiction writing[13] and the intertwining of *chin* and *ka* being the gist of the novel *Honglou meng* 紅樓夢, which must have been clandestinely popular in Korea too by the mid-1780s, this is most clearly a discussion of the value of fictional writing for "establishing what one has to say and setting up teachings". That the remainder of the preface takes pains to disclaim any intimation that *YI* contains anything "false" should not distract from the fact that the book – in the preface's conclusion called a combination of *woejŏn* and *uŏn* – is discussed here most obviously in the terms of fictional writing.[14]

The crucial question is, of course, what the text of *YI* itself offers in terms of genre markers. The fact that *YI* was the main trigger for the policy of "rectification of literary style/genre" (*munch'e panjŏng* 文體反正) implemented at the Chosŏn court in the 1790s, which was directed against the influence of *sosŏl* on recent trends in literati writing, corroborates this interpretation of Yŏnam's contemporary critics; so what are the observations on which they based such a judgment?

Certainly, part of the answer can be found in all those aspects of narrative technique and linguistic codes that have been adduced by other scholars as the "novelistic features" of *YI*: the vivid description of everyday actions, the ample use of dialogue, the use of vernacular Chinese (*baihua* 白話) for the recording of dialogues supposedly conducted in Chinese (while supposedly Korean language dialogues are recorded in literary Chinese, *wenyan* 文言), and the inclusion of humorous and theatrical scenes. While these elements as such pertain to style rather than to genre, their combination already points to a generic tendency of *YI* towards a work of fiction (*sosŏl*); for the latter is the only genre which makes readers *expect* the use of some or all of these linguistic codes and narrative techniques. But clearly, this argument can equally well be turned around – as is usually done – to speak of a "travelogue" written partly "in

[13] The argumentation in this preface profits from the fact that *waizhuan*/*woejŏn* is, of course, also the common denominator of the various commentaries to the *Chunqiu*, which are used to show that the "truth" of the events recorded in the *Chunqiu* can be interpreted very differently.

[14] That such a view of *YI* was held by its earliest readers is further corroborated by an anecdote told by another friend of Pak's, Namgong Ch'ŏl 南公轍 (1760–1840), in the gravestone inscription for a Yŏnam relative, Pak Namsu 朴南壽 (1758–1787): When Yŏnam read to him and other young friends from his manuscript, Namsu became so upset about Yŏnam's "love for the strange books of the storytellers" which would destroy "ancient writing" (*komun* 古文) that he wanted to burn the manuscript (Kim Myŏngho 1989: 247).

the manner of fiction"; the difference between travelogue and fiction being, of course, the ontological status of the narrated material, which in the travelogue is supposed to be factually "real".

It is here that I wish to come in and carry the discussion of traits of fictional writing in *YI* a step further – to the point where we can speak of traits of *YI as* fictional writing. Arguments for such a view of *YI* could be made from different angles, one of them being, for example, structural devices like the weaving in of leitmotifs that are even more typical of the sinic tradition of *xiaoshuo* than of the Western novel. I will stick here, however, to another argument, namely the careful obliteration of the dividing line between factual and fictional writing that can be observed in *YI*, and which is, I would contend, deliberately carried out in both parts of *YI* in both analogous and complementary ways.

As mentioned above, *YI* contains two passages that have been singled out, with some justification, by modern readers as independent pieces of fiction and that have indeed become prime examples of the modern genre concept of "short fiction in Literary Chinese". The first, "The tiger's reproach" (*Hojil* 虎叱), appears in the diary chapter "Kwannae chŏngsa" 關內程史 (History of a mission inside the pass) as part of the entry for the 28th of the 7th month; the second, known as "The account of Mr Hŏ" (*Hŏsaengjŏn* 許生傳), is the central passage of one of the miscellaneous chapters, "Okkap yahwa" 玉匣夜話 (Nightly conversations from the Jade box). Incidentally, the first can be classified as a story of the *uŏn* type, the second as belonging to the *woejŏn* type.

In the case of *Hŏsaengjŏn*, this singling out persists in anthologizing practice but in literary scholarship has over time come to comprise "Okkap yahwa" as a whole, again for very good reasons: It has been realized that the story nowadays titled *Hŏsaengjŏn*, purportedly related by the author/traveller himself during a nightly conversation with a group of interpreters, is further elucidated by the other contributions to the conversation, which can partly be regarded as (far shorter) stories in themselves. In other words, by virtue of its obvious embeddedness in its literary context, "Okkap yahwa", the clearly fictional "short story" *Hŏsaengjŏn* has succeeded in drawing this immediate context into the confines of the *sosŏl* genre.[15] Today, the part of "Okkap yahwa" preceding *Hŏsaengjŏn* is studied as "introductory tales" and thus as something that clearly forms a literary unit with *Hŏsaengjŏn* (e. g. Pak Iryong 2009).

I fully endorse this view and think it can be further corroborated by a closer look at the title which still seems to be usually understood as nightly conversations at "Okkap" (Yujia 玉匣), although no such place exists on the route Pak Chiwŏn travelled, and although it is known that the chapter had originally been titled "Chindŏkchae yahwa" (振德齋夜話, Chindŏkchae being a hall at the National Academy in Jehol, Chin. Rehe

[15] E. g., Kim Yŏngdong (1993) has individual chapters for the *kujŏn* 九傳 (nine stories in the *chŏn* format written early in Pak Chiwŏn's life), *Hojil*, "Okkap yahwa" and "Pak-ssi chŏn". *YI* is of course not discussed in a separate chapter, not even for its fictional traits.

熱河, where the Korean embassy stayed; Kim Yŏngdong 1993: 174–176).[16] A look at the use of *yujia* in the Chinese literary tradition seems also to help little in understanding the new title, as the term refers primarily to the jade boxes used during the Han dynasty for burying emperors' parents; any attempt to relate this to the contents of "Okkap yahwa" seems quite far-fetched. Perhaps, however, "Okkap yahwa" was meant to evoke another title, *Jade Box Records* (*Okkap ki* 玉匣記); this book of divination of unknown origin used to be ascribed to a "true man Xu [Hŏ]" 許眞人. Yŏnam's change of the title to "Okkap yahwa" thus probably aimed at highlighting the centrality of the figure of Mr Hŏ within the whole chapter.

We are thus on fairly firm ground in supposing that *Hŏsaengjŏn* is an integral part of "Okkap yahwa"; if the former is to be regarded as a piece of fiction, then so also is the latter. But what about the literary context of "Okkap yahwa"? What markers are there to tell us that we are dealing with a very different kind of writing in "Okkap yahwa" than in other chapters? The answer is: nothing apart from the doubtful status of the place Yujia where the conversation purportedly took place.[17] On the contrary, we might say that pains are taken to streamline the miscellaneous chapters according to a common pattern. They consist of materials that are topically related; they are usually preceded by a short introduction or preface that spells out the conditions or events due to which the materials were obtained or compiled; and these introductions invariably fail to clearly date those events, even in the case of conversation records. All this is true of "Okkap yahwa" as well; indeed, it could pass for an equivalent of the various brush talk records, the only difference being that it concerns an oral rather than a written conversation. Now, if "Okkap yahwa" becomes a piece of fiction by virtue of it containing *Hŏsaengjŏn*, should not the same apply to the whole of the miscellany part by virtue of it containing "Okkap yahwa"? – Even if it appears difficult to accept this argument, it is definitely no easier to draw a clear border line between a fictional "Okkap yahwa" and a non-fictional text containing it. This is all the more true as *Hŏsaengjŏn* is recorded as a factual story heard from a stranger and re-told to the audience – just like so many other tales related in *YI*.

An analogous case can be made for *Hojil*, although the situation looks quite different at first glance. Being of the *uŏn* type, this story does not drift seamlessly from narrated dialogue into fiction like *Hŏsaengjŏn*, but is clearly marked as an individual piece of writing. It was purportedly copied by the narrator (Pak Chiwŏn) from the wall of a guest-house or shop near the Korean Village.[18] However, this time it is the question

[16] Kim Yŏngdong (1993: 174–176). Kim goes on to try to fix the date when the nightly conversations actually happened – quite pointless if he took his own classification of "Okkap yahwa" as fiction seriously.

[17] The chapter starts with "When we had returned to Yujia, I shared the room with various adjutants and we talked at night" (行還至玉匣 與諸裨連床夜語).

[18] This village, Gaoli-bao 高麗堡 in Chinese, located in today's Yutian 玉田 county in Hebei province, was purportedly built by Koreans abducted during the Manchu invasion of Korea in 1637.

of authorship that serves to embed the text indistinguishably in its surroundings. For Pak Chiwŏn tells us that the owner of the house could not or would not tell him who the author of the story was, and that, having copied the story from a wall lighted only by candles and having shared the task with a travel companion, he finds later that the text as they copied it makes little sense, so "according to my own ideas, I filled it up here and there to render it a complete piece" (略以己意點綴爲篇; Pak Chiwŏn 1967, 1: 596 [268]).[19] The author-less story is thus provided with an author – a device for introducing fictional writing which is well known not only to modern readers but has also been used in the sinic tradition, the most conspicuous example again being *Honglou meng*. But if we accept the introductory tale as a useful, but transparent, ruse for claiming authorship while disclaiming responsibility for the contents of the story, and thus decide that it, too, is fictional, where does the "introductory tale" begin? From which point on has the diary entry (and again, by extension, the diary part of *YI* as such) been made up just for the purpose of introducing a story (which contains harsh criticism of Chosŏn's system of social stratification)?[20]

If nothing else, this careful embedding of one fictional story each into both major parts of *YI*, in a way that some of their fictionality is carried over into their textual surroundings, signalizes the need for circumspection in reading *YI* as a factual account. With careful reading, it seems quite certain that fictionality in *YI* does not stop short at obvious story-telling. In some cases, e. g., the nightly conversations (!) with learned shop-keepers at Shenyang that form the central part of the second diary chapter, "Sŏng-gyŏng chapchi" 聖京雜識 (Tales from Shengjing), the related events do indeed appear downright fictional.[21] But even in the large parts of the book where fictionality is not obvious, the narrative is perhaps more often than not a result of an artful blending of fact and fiction, of streamlining narrated situations so that they are more in line with the point they are meant to illustrate.

Indeed, a passage early in the very first diary chapter, "Togangnok" 渡江錄, seems to say as much, albeit tongue-in-cheek. It is probably not by coincidence that this passage starts with a reference to Yu Tŭkkong, the author of the preface analyzed above.

The villagers seem to have retained Korean customs and a command of the Korean language until the time of this journey.

[19] In quotes from the Yi Kawŏn edition of YI, regular page numbers refer to the Chinese text, numbers in brackets to the Korean translation.

[20] Gregory Evon who wrote the only English language contribution I know of that treats the question of fictionality in *YI* at least in passing (although based on Choe-Wall's partial translation rather than the original text), argues that contemporary readers would not have taken the message of the story any less seriously because of its fictionality, basing himself on this critical acumen of *Hŏsaengjŏn* as well as on the fact that the story takes up issues that are discussed in other parts of the diary as well (Evon 2011: 159f.). The implications of this argument would point in the same direction as my above interpretation.

[21] Great pains are taken in this case to create a setting which would allow for the night-time meetings to have gone undiscovered by the rest of the embassy.

Speaking of the mixed feelings the embassy members experience at the point where they actually have to cross the Yalu river – the border into foreign lands –, Pak Chiwŏn quotes a poem by Yu Tŭkkong about such a rivercrossing and suggests that the separation from a loved girl alluded to in the poem has no basis in reality, but is "freely uttered idle talk" 漫作無聊語 used to convey the feelings of loneliness and homeward bound longing of a person about to leave the country. He continues with musings on the departure of Jing Ke (荊軻, ?–227 BCE), would-be assassinator of the first Qin emperor, into the Qin territory, relying on its description in the *Shiji* 史記:

> 昔荊卿將渡易，頃之未發。太子疑其改悔，請先遣秦舞陽。荊軻怒叱曰：僕所以留者，待吾客與俱。此荊卿漫作無聊語耳。若疑荊卿改悔，則可謂淺之知荊卿 而荊卿所待之客，亦未必有姓名其人也。
>
> "Of old, when Jing Ke was about to cross the Yi river, he did not depart for quite some time. The Prince wondered whether he had changed his mind and asked him to send [his young companion] Qin Wuyang ahead. Jing Ke rebuked him angrily: 'I am sojourning because I wait for my retainer to accompany me.' This was idle talk freely uttered by Jing Ke. To wonder whether Jing Ke had changed his mind is to not know Jing Ke well, but the retainer Jing Ke waited for was not necessarily a man with a first name and family name" (Pak Chiwŏn 1967, 1: 516 [22]).

The task ahead of Jing Ke, the narrator continues, would already be endangered by the one companion he had (Qin Wuyang); a second retainer could only be "a retainer in Jing Ke's mind" (荊卿意中之客), not a historical reality but fiction. However, as Pak Chiwŏn argues in the next section, this fiction would not work without the complicity of the author of Jing Ke's biography in the *Shiji* 史記 which relates the story to us:

> 作之者乃就荊卿意中之客，而演之曰：其人。其人者所不知何人也。以所不知何人而曰：居遠，爲荊卿慰之。又恐其人之或來也。則曰：未來，爲荊卿幸之耳。
>
> "The author then took the retainer in Jing Ke's mind and elaborated on him, saying: 'This man'. To say 'this man' is tantamount to admitting that one doesn't know who he was. To say about an unknown person that 'he lived far away' is to console Jing Ke; to assume that this man might arrive by saying 'he had not yet arrived' is to create fortunate circumstances for Jing Ke" (Pak Chiwŏn 1967, ibid.).

The word translated here as "elaborate", *yan* 演, is part of the usual generic term for historical fiction, *yanyi* 演義 (to further develop the meaning). In his reflection on Jing Ke's river crossing, Pak Chiwŏn interprets and elaborates on the historical narrative found in the *Shiji*; and in doing so, he suggests that Sima Qian, in writing this narrative, interpreted and elaborated on the historical situation which he purported to convey. None other than the Grand Historian himself is adduced as a role model for a narrator who feels committed not to historical facts as such but to the truth and meaning that is to be conveyed through well-crafted stories to which facts may have given rise.

The potential of fictionality: Why travel records are nevertheless a prime source for history

Of course, all this problematizing of the factuality of travel records does not mean that they are worthless as a historical source. Narrative construction of personhood that informs the way in which the camel saddles sold in a Peking market place are described need not necessarily create doubt about whether or not the trading of camel saddles in Peking has been observed by the traveller. Rather, any re-arrangement of facts in travelogues for literary reasons is based on the assumption of credibility for readers. The factuality of travelogues may differ from text to text along a range from an eye-witness account of the greatest possible truthfulness to the realist novel; but travelogues will not cross the line that separates realistic from fantastical novels. And indeed, while recognizing, and reckoning with, the literary nature of travelogues deprives us of the ability to naïvely trust them (at least prior to an extended meditation on the literary and social function of the travelogue in question), doing so affords an opportunity to appreciate that the travelogue can serve as analogous to the realist novel, a genre that is otherwise lacking in the Chosŏn period.

Like the realist novel, the travelogue can "act as a window looking into society, or a mirror reflecting society" (Bannister 1995: viii); more precisely, it can reflect individual experience of and in society. In this, it is of course close to the diary with which it often shares the form, but it differs from the latter in having a kind of teleological structure, i.e. in partaking in the narrative urge of *making sense* of day-to-day happenings. That is, the travelogue has the potential to relate quotidian experiences in the context of frameworks of signification in which the former become legible as historical experience.

Of the numerous themes that could for these reasons be fruitfully explored through Chosŏn travelogues, I would like to mention two. Firstly, travelogues are a rich source for social interaction within, but especially also beyond, status groups. On the road even an aristocrat has to interact with people from all walks of life. Whether or not, and which of, these interactions are recorded is, of course, again a matter of auctorial choice; but even this choice itself can be of historical significance. The changing appearances of Buddhist monks, shamans, female entertainers, farmers and servants in travelogues could certainly serve as the basis of a specific kind of social history.

A second, perhaps less obvious, theme are decisions and value conflicts. Whether to undertake a journey or not, and when to end a journey; whether to face danger or to avoid it; how to brave difficulties, and what to enjoy: these are decisions the reasons for which are often left in the dark, sometimes made plausible by the surrounding narrative, and in rare but fortunate cases spelled out explicitly. Here, we can gain glimpses into the inner life of Chosŏn people: literati values in action. The travelogue is certainly not unique in offering such glimpses, but it can be an entertaining way of making contact with the individual and collective psychology of a bygone age.

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