Open Access

Toshio Takemoto

Constructing the self in Megumu Sagisawa's and Miri Yu's travelogues: a case study of two Japan-based female writers of Korean origin

Abstract: This paper compares the travelogues of two contemporary *zainichi* Korean writers: *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana* [Forsythias are flowers, cherry blossoms too] by Megumu Sagisawa (1994) and *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi: Watashi ga mita Kitachōsen* [Summer vacation in Pyongyang: The way I've seen North Korea] by Miri Yu (2011). Sagisawa recalls her experiences as a foreign student in Seoul in 1993. Yu describes three visits to North Korea between 2008 and 2010. The aim of this paper is to examine the literary identity of the two writers and develop this notion into a more specific critical device. As the analysis shows, Yu describes a scenery of North Korea that is appropriate for the portrayal of herself to others, while Sagisawa tries to form a self between Japan and South Korea. Identity here is a sense of belonging with respect to the question what group to connect with. Sagisawa wonders whether to assign herself to the pre-existing category of the *zainichi kyoppo* [Korean nationals in Japan]. She creates a story about the search of herself, in which her identity is subject to change during the narrative. By contrast, Yu creates the Korean peninsula as her homeland in the literary space. She presents a uniform self-image that remains unchanged by the dynamics of the narrative.

Keywords: Megumu Sagisawa, Miri Yu, North Korea, South Korea, *Zainichi* Korean literature, travelogue

Toshio Takemoto: CEJ, Alithila-Lille3, France, e-mail: toshio.takemoto@gmail.com

1 Introduction

Megumu Sagisawa and Miri Yu have much in common. Both were born in Japan in June 1968, and both started their writing career in the late 1980s. They were also close friends. While Yu is still an active writer, Sagisawa chose to end her life in

April 2004 at her home in Tokyo. Sagisawa's grandmother was a first-generation Korean immigrant, which makes Sagisawa a Korean "quarter."¹ Yu's parents came to Japan during the Korean War as first-generation *zainichi* Koreans.² This paper studies the construction of the self in the two writers' travelogues. In order to do so, we will start with a brief introduction to the development of *zainichi* Korean literature and its historical and political background.

From 1910 to 1945, the Korean peninsula was a Japanese colony. The memory of this period is still alive in Korean society and needs to be taken into account when studying *zainichi* Koreans' ethnicity and sense of belonging. On the other hand, post-colonial criticism shows that it is certainly too simple to reduce this background to a mere antagonism by Korean people towards their former suppressors. Also, such historical and (geo-)political discourses do not take individual lives into account.

Is *zainichi* literature a genre that describes *zainichi* people's life in their own voices, and from a point of view that the "big narratives" of politics or history do not pick up? If that is the case, readers will be able to experience by themselves how individuals deal with the complex relationship between the former colonial power and the country of their ancestors. Reviewing previous research on the topic, I will now try to further define *zainichi* literature as a genre.

According to Isogai's *Zainichi bungakuron* (2004), the genre can be divided into two major periods. The first one starts after the Pacific War and continues until the 1970s. Topics dealt with in this period are the humiliation through the Japanese oppressors (following the war), the social rejection of Korean migrants by the Japanese host society (1960s), as well as feelings of alienation and individual conflicts (beginning of the 1970s). The second period starts in the middle of the 1980s. Quoting both Sagisawa and Yu as examples, Isogai states that terms such as *minzoku* [ethnicity], *kuni* [country] or *zainichisei* [*zainichi*-ness] were losing their validity for this generation of writers. Instead, they constructed their literary identity by focussing on the self and its relationship with others (Isogai 2004: 9-19).

If we follow Isogai's periodization, there is a shift in the 1980s from ethnic conflicts to a search for the self. This raises the following question: If problems of ethnicity and belonging are removed, how is this genre still classifiable as *zainichi* literature?

¹ That's the term Yu used in her commentary to Sagisawa's *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana* (Sagisawa 1997: 177).

² *Zainichi* is a generic term for foreigners living in Japan, but most commonly refers to residents of Korean origin.

Kim (2004) remarks that *zainichi* writers since the 1980s have no longer been able to write in Korean and, due to the generational shift, also have got out of touch with Korean culture. *Zainichi* writers of the new generation are not only outsiders in Japanese society, but in Korea as well. More than an ethnic identity, they demand an individual identity and show stronger interest in their relationship with the Japanese host society than with their ancestors' country (Kim 2004: 30).

By the 1980s, established writers who would hide their *zainichi* background, as for example Masaaki Tachihara (1926–1980) (see Takai 1991), had become a thing of the past. The new generation of *zainichi* writers would openly challenge the tacit understanding that being *zainichi* was a social taboo not to be discussed. Without denying their link to the Korean peninsula, most of these writers were writing first and foremost for a Japanese audience. Again one may ask how this genre can still be recognised as *zainichi* literature then.

The term *zainichi* itself points to a historical continuation of assimilation and exclusion policies from the colonial era. In this sense, Japanese post-war perceptions of otherness can be considered an important factor in shaping *zainichi* identity. Likewise, their very existence as a minority group in Japan has played a crucial role in shaping the Japanese host society's self-image as a homogeneous "us" group that could be defined against the *zainichi* "them" group. These are two sides of the same coin (Harajiri 1998: 23–34).

Given the high number of meanings of the term identity, it is necessary to take other aspects into account as well. Questions include what the self is, how it becomes defined and created and by whom. Autobiographical works appear to be a feasible genre to study such questions. In the case of *zainichi* Koreans, we can expect to gain some insight into the problem of how the self is described within the frame of homeland versus foreign land. For Koreans born in Japan these two terms are not necessarily antonyms. As we will see, both Sagisawa and Yu in their travelogues create a literary time and space that revolves around their "return" to a land that has become foreign to them.

One tacit agreement between the writer and the reader of a travelogue is that it is a non-fictional text. Told in first-person perspective, a travelogue is also a quest of the self in a foreign country. When a travelogue writer shapes this self in the narrative, the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction may become blurred (Korte 2005: 619–620). The self as it is portrayed in literature takes on a special form, and rather than retelling the facts, a travelogue is a creation (Bayard 2012: 16). It is a reconstructed literary space where the author's imagination blends with the facts. By projecting one's inner side onto the foreign country, a travelogue is also a literary self-portrait. At least this is the general idea of a travelogue. However, Sagisawa's and Yu's literary accounts of their travels to

Korea are more than that, constituting as they do a component of reconfirming their roots in a “native” country they haven’t been born in.

In *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana* [Forsythias are flowers, cherry blossoms too], Sagisawa describes her half-year experience of living in Seoul. This travelogue was published in 1994, the year after her return to Japan. *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi: Watashi ga mita Kitachōsen* [Summer vacation in Pyongyang: The way I’ve seen North Korea] is Yu’s account of her three travels to North Korea between 2008 and 2010. Both travelogues are written in the first person and in both cases the protagonist shares the name of the author. In addition, both books have a photo of the author on their cover. As these conditions show, there is a “contract” between reader and writer that the protagonist is the same person as the author.

The aim of this paper is to arrive at a more specific idea of the notion of literary identity of these two *zainichi* writers through a comparative analysis of their travelogues. For the sake of clarity, a terminological distinction will be made between “author” and “protagonist.”

2 Uncertain proofs of existence

The structure of Sagisawa’s *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana* is as follows: In the introduction the protagonist visits the Korean embassy various times to arrange for the necessary formalities of her travel. Chapters 1 through 5 describe her stay in Korea, while chapters 6, 7 and 8 give her reflections after returning to Japan. The closing chapter contains a request to get back to Korea for another travel. Along this storyline develops an account of a 24-year-old traveller in search of herself.

At this point, a few comments on the socio-political background of this era are in order. The protagonist travelled to Seoul in the first half of the 1990s, which was the time Japan’s bubble economy had collapsed, but with the aftertaste of these years still lingering. In Korea, the 1980s had seen a period of rapid economic growth. In 1988 Seoul hosted the Summer Olympic Games and in 1992 Kim Young-sam was elected president. This gave the country its first civilian government. These conditions should provide for a relatively free student life in Korea. On the other hand, the experience described in *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana* was not without hardships. In fact, the introduction has the katakana title *Konbuhagessoyo*, which means “I will study” in Korean. As becomes clear here, the protagonist takes notice of her uncertain existence. The katakana title implies that she still has much to learn about herself in Korea.

As mentioned above, in the introduction the protagonist visits the Korean embassy in Tokyo. This piece of Korea within Japanese territory is a place where the borderlines between one's own and the other country become blurred. She goes through some troubles to acquire the required identification documents for her stay abroad. She is presented here as a Japanese citizen registered in the state of Japan. Thus, at the beginning of the narrative her identity becomes expressed in the form of official documents that the other country, Korea, requires from her in order to prove her existence.

But what is this thing called “the other country” in the first place? In the second chapter, the protagonist reveals that “only my grandmother is Korean” (Sagisawa 1997: 43).³ As the narrative proceeds, the reader sees that this other country is not an obvious natural category, but an arbitrary concept that serves to create a sense of belonging to one's own country by means of contrast with the foreign. *Zainichi* Koreans embody the fact that this contrast is but an ideological construct. In *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana*, the protagonist's connection with a “native” country becomes unclear and her sense of belonging to Japan or Korea is presented as uncertain. We could say that this is a distinctive feature of Sagisawa's travelogue, which makes her differ from her contemporaries in Japanese literature.

In the introduction, the protagonist also portrays herself as a young woman going on travel. Though at the time, she was looking back on a history of seven years of prolific writing, her status and position in the literary world go completely unmentioned. She also withholds the reason for her decision to study abroad, her father's Korean roots. That means that both her being an established writer and her *zainichi* background are deliberately kept out of the narrative. This “silence” brings to the fore the protagonist's “lonely fight” with the cumbersome practical preparations of her travel. The author here emphasizes the unknownness of her protagonist.

There is some consensus among literary critics that Sagisawa's novels marry thematic weightiness with stylistic lightness (see, e.g., Takeuchi 2006: 407). Now consider the following passage from the beginning of the introduction:

In order to apply for a student visa to attend Yonsei University in Seoul, there were a few things I had to check, so I went to the Korean embassy's consulate.⁴ (Sagisawa 1997: 7)

3 All translations by the author.

4 「ソウルの延世（ヨンセ）大学へ通うため学生ビザ申請をする前に、確かめたいことがあって、一度韓国大使館領事部へ足を運んだ。」

That's still a simple sentence, and yet it is too long to call it light. It is the appropriate diction to portray an unknown young woman who has to go through the trouble of arranging the formalities for her stay abroad. The sentence creates an impression as though it was dragging something along. The protagonist's quest for herself already starts in the Korean embassy in Tokyo, that is, right in between the two countries. It is here that she realises that neither her being a writer nor her family relationship with Korea really means much.

At this point I would like to briefly discuss “the search for the I” (*watashi sagashi*) in 1990s Japan. Young people who couldn't get accustomed to their school or professional life kept wondering if the reason for their trouble wasn't in fact that their “real I” was elsewhere. With reference to Kohut's self psychology, psychiatrist and essayist Rika Kayama identified this phenomenon as a regression to the “grandiose self” one used to be in front of one's parents in infancy. According to Kayama (1999: 216), the “real I” is not something that changes all of a sudden into something else, but something contiguous to the present I, which needs to be aspired to gradually.

In this way, the author Sagisawa portrays herself not as holding a utopian desire for a self-ideal that will somehow become real one day, but as a young woman struggling with how to turn that ideal into reality. This makes her quest of the self the exact opposite of a rediscovery of the omnipotent self. The “search for the I” as described by Kayama is nothing but an unrealistic fantasy from infancy. By contrast, Sagisawa in the process of confirming her Korean roots is asking herself what she as someone existing between the two countries should do. The quest for the self in her travelogue is directed not towards the past, but towards the future. The next section examines if we can make similar observations in the case of Yu.

3 Strong self-confirmation

Before entering the text analysis of *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi*, a few basic comments about North Korea need to be made. Known for its nuclear threats, missile tests and the past abduction of Japanese nationals, it is hard to deny that most Japanese people have a very negative image of North Korea. Yet some historical facts tend to be forgotten here all too easily. After the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945, the Korean peninsula became occupied and divided by the United States and the Soviet Union. In the 1950s the Japanese economy profited greatly from a special procurement boom during the Korean War. Economic sanctions by the United States and its allies were replied to by North Korea with nuclear threats.

Many people in Japan today are not aware of this difficult historical background. When they hear the name Pyongyang, the first thing they think of is former US President George W. Bush's notion of the "axis of evil" (Kang 2003: 125). This is in stark contrast to the cover of Yu's *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi*, which shows a snapshot of her smiling with her son in the North Korean capital. This peaceful mother-child scenery preannounces a large gap with common Japanese stereotypes about the country.

When in 2006 an eighteen-volume edition called *Zainichi bungaku zenshū* [*Zainichi* literature collected works] was published, Yu refused to have her works included. As Hara (2011: 239) speculates, she might have felt suspicion or dismay about this way of generalising literary works into a specific *zainichi* genre. Yu herself remarked, when talking about *Himawari no hitsugi* [Coffin of the sunflowers], that the foundation of her writing process was not being a *zainichi* Korean but an individual (Yu 1997: 31).

Nevertheless readers and researchers alike keep searching for the *zainichi* element in her literature. That was all the more true for her 2004 book titled *8 gatsu no hate* [End of August], a novelised family history. *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi* may have been an attempt to intentionally bring this *zainichi* background to the surface. My hypothesis is that she intentionally chose a self-image that would be diametrically opposed to common appreciations of her work in terms of "pain" (Baba 2007: 104), "wounds" (Minami 2007: 47) and "ethnic suppression" (Kawamura 2011: 208).

Through her descriptions in *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi*, Yu valorises her ancestor's homeland and connects her self-identity with the literary space. This provides the main direction for her understanding of North Korea. Compiling memories of her visits to various tourist spots, Pyongyang becomes the stage to present the protagonist visitor of her ancestor's land in an attractive way. Yu here removes the ordinary travelogue's fears and apprehensions of the unknown.

The day after her arrival in Pyongyang, the protagonist starts taking photos of the city from her hotel. She reflects on this as follows:

The moment I caught these landscapes in my camera, the word *kankō* [tourism] came flashing up in my mind. I remembered that the term comes from the Chinese classic *I Ching* [Book of Changes], where the terms *kan* and *kō* are used in the meaning of "catch a country's light."⁵ (Yu 2011: 20)

5 「それらの風景をカメラにおさめた瞬間、観光という言葉が胸の内に閃いた。観光の語源が、中国の古典『易経（周易）』のなかにある「観国之光（国の光を観る）」だということを思い出した。」

Her choice of the term *hirameku* [flashing up] in this description is evocative of the flash of a camera. And in fact, the style of Yu's travelogue as a whole seems to take its model from photographs. Like a photographer cutting out fractions of the world, Yu describes North Korea as she sees it through her own eyes. Her aim is to weave her present as a person living with her family in Japan into the land and the history of her ancestors. And like a photographer, she is eager to choose appropriate spots for her account.

Pyonyan no natsuyasumi is not a travelogue that describes changes in the traveller. It is a story that presents Yu's feelings of unity and self-esteem to the reader. The places she describes serve as a stage on which the traveller can effectively perform. In this respect, it should be noted that Yu's literary roots are the drama and that she has also some real stage experiences.

Yu's mentioning of the Book of Changes in the quote above also serves to create a link between North Korea and Confucianism. Yu's reference to an ancient and widely known philosophy is intended to re-install pride on the emotions and identity of her ancestors' fellow citizens, who suffered much under Japanese occupation.

To be sure, Yu's visit to North Korea was no amusement tour. She couldn't move around as she pleased, having always a guide with her. Nevertheless, and perhaps just because of these restrictions, the protagonist visits the "Victorious War Museum" and Mount Myohyang, which is one of the four top scenic spots in North Korea. She is also allowed to attend the memorial festivity of Kim Il-sung's 98th birthday. Yu's account of these events is neither critique nor propaganda. And it can hardly be called what Sartre has termed "engaged literature" either. So what is it?

One theory about the term *kankō* is that it also includes the meaning of "proudly showing important foreign visitors the light of the country" (Kotani 2014: 152). For Yu, tourism also means to connect Korean history and culture from before and after the country's division with her personal history. The author thus links the visitor of her native country to that country's people's feelings of self-esteem. In *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi* she keeps describing positive impressions. When the protagonist later returns to Pyongyang with her son, she remarks to herself that "my heart is taking roots in my native country" (Yu 2011: 109).⁶ This is also the title of the second chapter, and it is amplified in chapter 4. The link between herself and North Korea turns into something physical. While she used to refer to herself as *derashine* [person without cultural roots], in her Pyongyang

6 「こころが祖国に根を生やしている----。」

travelogue Yu emphasises the unity between herself and her ancestors' country. This is also a result of her use of a first-person narrative.

Coming back to the question of identity, we can say that the notion of "quest for the self" is not applicable here. The self-portrait to be presented to the reader is already fixed. It combines elements of the *zainichi* Korean, who in the past commonly used to be derogatorily called *sankokujin* [third-country citizen], and negative stereotypes about North Korea. But this is just a strategic opening move that allows the protagonist to express her pride about who she is. North Korea as described in Yu's travelogue provides the stage for this venture. Her strong self-confidence is in stark contrast to Sagisawa's nameless traveller and her uncertain existence. While the latter wonders how to position herself between (South) Korea and Japan once she has detached herself from social standing and family background, Yu from the start presents a beautifully combined self-portrait of herself and (North) Korea. In so doing she converges the historical continuity of the country with her own personal identity.

4 "I" determined by others, "I" determined by the self

In her 1990 novella *Hazakura no hi* [The day the cherry trees went green], Sagisawa already combines the problem of identity with the *zainichi* issue. That was three years prior to her stay in Seoul. The protagonist of the story, as is mysteriously revealed, is from a prototypical *zainichi* area. One might be tempted to consider this setting a direct reference to her own *zainichi* background, were it not for the fact that Sagisawa was born and raised in an old-style Japanese living area in Tokyo's Setagaya ward. Just as in the close-by shopping area around Shimokitazawa Station, which served as a model for her short story *Shadanki* [Crossing bar] (Sagisawa 2005a: 139–166), until the 1990s there weren't any characteristics of a Korean population in this landscape. What is more, she learned about her Korean roots only after becoming a professional writer (Sagisawa 2005b: 94). Given this background, one may well wonder how she positions herself during her travel to Seoul, and how she sees herself in relation to the *zainichi* community in Japan, or *zainich kyoppo* [fellow Korean nationals abroad], as Sagisawa (1997: 39) keeps referring to them in *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana*.

It's social rather than individual identity that is at issue here. Thus the question shifts from "Who am I?" to "What social group do I belong to?" This fluidity is alluded to in situations that show a protagonist on the move. Where

am I? Where do I come from? Where am I heading for? In her travelogue, these are key questions in her attempt to connect her current self with her roots.

One day the protagonist in *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana* is in a taxi on her way back home from Yonsei University. She stops being a student and moves into a space of her own. Her social identity is suspended in favour of her individual identity. Yet the story is not that simple. Because when the cab driver guesses “You’re *kyoppo*, right?” the only answer she can come up with is “I don’t really know that myself” (Sagisawa 1997: 43).⁷ This whole uncertainty about her *zanichi* identity is amplified by the metaphor of moving around in a taxi. Japanese, Korean, *zainichi* – it is difficult to imagine that she would be able to gain her identity by committing herself to just one of these three groups. It could well be that it is this mixture of belonging and distancing that makes Sagisawa hold a very special place in contemporary Japanese literature.

Incidentally, Sagisawa uses the verb *wakaru* [understand] from the conversation quite frequently in her travelogue. Her stance is to take efforts to understand the other from her own, lived experience. This is also her way of commitment to Korea during her stay there. But the taxi driver’s attempt to pin her down on being *kyoppo* confuses her.

Paku (2011) analyses Sagisawa’s travelogue within a social constructivist frame. Her argument goes as follows: The *jus sanguinis* of Japanese society restrains an individual’s speech and actions. A child’s nationality is determined on the basis of the mother’s or father’s blood. This legislation at the same time becomes the basis for the ideology of national consciousness. All Japanese are blood relatives, meaning that there is historical continuity, and the nation’s territory provides them with a physical sense of unity. That is a tacit agreement stencilled into people’s minds. In addition, being an island nation provides clear-cut boundaries with all other countries and a consciousness of being remote from and, in some cases, in confrontation with them.

According to Paku (2011: 19), the identity of the self is always depending on another’s recognition. She holds that identity can only be “told” within the confines of self–other discourse. Yet in the case of Sagisawa, rather than positioning herself in opposition to the other, she has her travelogue’s protagonist ask the question what she can do once she has become aware of

7 「『僑胞でしょ』運転手が再び確かめるようにそう言うので、わたしは答えた。『わたしにもよく判りません』」

the distance between Japan and Korea. In this sense, her travelogue invents a character whose identity is not granted by another person.

Paku's argument provides some clues for studying the relationship between language as a social system and the *zainichi* Koreans. A self-image is created through having a third person evaluate the speech and actions one makes to fulfil one's social role. According to Paku, the relationship with the other person is a prerequisite for the formation of a society in which the self can realise itself. Language is one system to build up this relationship, because it is through language that the individual is incorporated as a member of society.

The term *zainichi* Korean to refer to a specific minority group in Japan is shared and tacitly understood in the Japanese language system. Both its denotation and its connotation precede any individual member of that group. It is a linguistic sign through which society confirms this group's social status, creates its social identity and, consciously or unconsciously, may even forge it. If one fits into these social norms is difficult for an individual to know, just like one needs a mirror to recognise one's own face. This mirror is the social category *zainichi* Korean as it is defined by Japanese and Koreans. Paku's analysis also applies to Sagisawa's episode with the taxi driver. Social groups as they are defined through language are formed by summarising individuals under a certain pattern.

As previous research has indicated, stereotypes are no scientific fact but a fixed view that a large number of members of a society acknowledge and believe to be true (Amossy 2006; Amossy and Herschberg-Pierrot 2010). A stereotype frequently overlaps with the commonsensical, or that "unconscious obviousness" that is widely known as self-understood (Nakamura 1984: 82). Being agreed upon by a society makes a stereotype a rule of agreement, a generally accepted notion that influences our way of thinking. An example of how a stereotype suspends or short-circuits thought is the subjective perception about the nature of "all" *zainichi* Koreans and its application to a specific individual without any consideration of that individual's personal background. This is what happens to our traveller in *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana*, who grew up in a Japanese household and learned about her Korean grandmother only when she was an adult. Being pigeonholed that way naturally leaves her with a feeling of awkwardness.

The cultural anthropologist Hideki Harajiri (1998: 54) observes that the existence of *zainichi* as something alien in Japan starts with being stared at. Let us draw a parallel here: In Sagisawa's travelogue, the protagonist traveller must feel the uncomfortableness of being talked about as a subject in mainstream discourse. What is more, Sagisawa at this point doesn't seem

to find an appropriate way of expressing her protagonist's uncertainty. The author must search for an expression with which the traveller can define her own self.

Conversely, Yu reinvents herself by becoming aware of the history of an oppressed people and through her narration overcomes this oppression. The first-person narration has a big effect here in conveying to the reader that the traveller in the story is in fact the author herself.

French philosopher Paul Ricœur (1996: 11-38) in his discussion of narrative identity makes a basic distinction between “being the same” and “being oneself.” He holds that the former is a property of things, whereas the latter is one of human character (see Kitamura 1998: 5). While this way of categorisation is relatively clear-cut, there is something that is right in between the two: person names. In the case of Yu, whose surname literally means “willow,” we find the description of willows as one leitmotif of her travelogue. The seeing subject and the seen object here merge into one, and Yu becomes part of the scenery in Pyongyang. Below is a quote from her second visit:

Pyongyang also used to be called “willow capital.” Everywhere along the promenades at the banks of the Taedong River and the Potonggang River that run through the centre of the city, the blinds of the swinging branches of the willows tinkle light and shade. When I first visited the city two years ago, I realized that my name, the beautiful land of the willows, expresses the meaning Pyongyang. (Yu 2011: 78)⁸

The idea of the willow establishes a firm relationship between the author and the city. Rather than finding the self in a foreign land, Yu projects an ideal image of herself to the scenery of her ancestors' land.

It needs to be noted that Yu is a South Korean national. The protagonist in her 2004 novel *8 gatsu no hate*, who was modelled after her grandfather, names his granddaughter Miri. In her novel Yu has him describe how this name derives from the toponym Miryang, a South Korean city that is his family's place of origin. In *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi*, North and South merge into one. When the author self-identifies with the willows that colour Pyongyang, her imagination reunites the two countries in the literary space.

8 「平壤は古来「柳京」とも呼ばれ、平壤の中心部を流れる大同江（テドンガン）や普通江（ポトンガン）の岸辺の散歩道には至るところに柳の枝の簾が揺れ、光と影をじゃらつかせている。二年前に平壤をはじめて訪れたとき、わたしの名前「柳の美しい里」が、そのまま平壤を意味することに気づいた」

Her family name also relates her to her ancestors. Such association processes evoke the memory of the colonisation era and the renaming policies undertaken by the Japanese occupiers. While keeping up the distinction between Korean and Japanese citizens, Korean names became Japanized and the Japanese family system was introduced. The loss of their ancestor's names symbolically cut the Korean people off from their roots (Mizuno 2008: 23). The author's imagination restores the names they were deprived of and invests them with positive value. She relinks the names with the place. In the course of her travel, Yu strongly renews her own existence and, as it were, reinvents it by recapturing her ethnic identity from the recollection of her family.

Some researchers consider the travelogue a variation of the autobiography genre (Hubier 2003; Korte 2005). Both share the narrative form of finding and developing the self through an encounter with the other. So when does one become an author of an autobiography? Does one already exist as an author prior to the autobiography's narrative, or does one turn into an author by telling one's story from past to present (Carron 2002: 158–168)? In the case of Yu, she forms her own image by weaving a story that reflects her life. Each of her works feeds back on its producer and transforms its author.

Two years prior to her stay in Korea, Yu told Greece filmmaker Theo Angelopoulos that a person's name is the shortest and the longest story in the world (Angelopoulos and Yu 2005: 170). The names of her characters allow for various interpretations. The protagonist in *Uo no matsuri* [Fish festival] (Yu 1993), a play about the collapse of a family, is called Yuri, a partial anagram of her own name. In *Hachigatsu no hate*, the Korean protagonists are given additional Japanese names. Their torn-apart life becomes engraved in these two names. By contrast, in *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi* Yu spins off the story by using her own name. It's the story of a traveller who turns the land of her ancestors into an object of beauty and frees it from negative stereotypes. Yu positively authenticates the term *zainichi* Korean and turns it into self-esteem built up by the love to her ancestors. She valorises her sense of belonging to the Korean peninsula.

In sum, Yu uses the first person like in an autobiography. In *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi* she creates her identity's origin, her home, by uniting herself with the land of her ancestors. She wants to tell us where she comes from. Despite being part of a younger *zainichi* generation that is known to identify only loosely with their country of origin, the travel to North Korea turns out to become a sort of homecoming for her.

5 The ever-changing self

Chapter 7 of *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana*, which has the same title as the book, is what Miri Yu in her closing commentary praises as *honsho no hakubi* [highlight of this book] because it contains the image of flowers that build a bridge between the two countries. As the *zainichi* group is not understood here as opposed to Koreans and Japanese, the common dichotomy between self and other doesn't apply.

In the later part of the chapter, there is an episode in which the “I” protagonist is finally identified by the author's name, “Megumu Sagisawa.” It is spring, and the protagonist takes a walk through the park, accompanied by a Korean journalist about her age called Soo-young. The forsythias are in full bloom, so Sagisawa asks Soo-young the Korean name of this flower. Though Soo-young tells her that it is called *kenari* [*gaenali*], Sagisawa mixes it up with the word *nagune* [*nageune*], which means traveller and is a term the protagonist has just learned (Sagisawa 1997: 148). So far all her conscious approaches to Korea have failed to break up the feeling of alienation towards the country. Her unconscious slip of the tongue here brings some sort of unity. The forsythia is now linked to the travelling protagonist and forms a self-ideal: the traveller who, like a flower, doesn't know national borders, and isn't restricted by any one society.

It has been pointed out that a slip of the tongue is in fact a quite effective way of saying what one really wants to say in the form of a mistake (Saito 2012: 199). Yu in her commentary praises this moment in Sagisawa's book as *shiteki* [poetical]. In Latin, the term “poem” is also a synonym of “creation.” By entrusting the travelling protagonist to herself and liken her to the flowers that colour the Korean landscape, author Sagisawa is creating a new self.

If people succeed in entrusting their thoughts to an image derived from a slip of the tongue, that is because the image is true. That's why Soo-young after the interview session added the following caption to one of Sagisawa's photos: “Megumu Sagisawa asked me what was the name of our country's beloved flower, the forsythia. At the prime season of bloom, in Japan it's the time of the beautiful cherry blossoms” (Sagisawa 1997: 151).⁹ The forsythia is not Korea's national flower, but being paralleled with the Japanese national flower, it acquires a similar status. Sagisawa's slip of the tongue and Soo-young's caption complement each other.

Incidentally, the modern philosopher Takeshi Ohba (2001: 128) addresses the question “What is the self?” by referring to three overlapping rings: second-person

9 「鶯沢崩は、私たちの国が愛する花、ケナリの名前を訊ねた。盛りの季節のケナリのむこうでは、サクラの花も美しく咲いているの見える。」

address, third-person description and first-person thought. Borrowing from this observation, we could say that Soo-young provides a (third-person) “description” of Sagisawa’s (first-person) “thought.” In effect, this lets Japan and Korea coexist. It is the point where a free traveller is born, who is not constrained through the social system of language and the limits of conscious communication.

Isogai (2007: 118) holds that the protagonist in *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana* is basically the same person as the author, because a friend of the protagonist at the beginning once calls her by her nickname, *Meme* (Sagisawa 1997: 17). I consider this scene less important than the occurrence of “Megumu Sagisawa” in Soo-young’s caption. Sagisawa is the pen name of her second-generation Korean father, and Megumu derives from the Kanji her mother had wanted to use for the family register but wasn’t allowed to because of official restrictions on person names (Sagisawa 1998: 21–22). “Megumu Sagisawa” thus encapsulates both countries and expresses the love she feels towards the community of her family.

Yu’s travelogue also contains a look into the future. The fourth and final chapter, which makes up more than half of the book, is titled *Kazoku to kokyō: musuko o tsurete no hōchō 2010 nen 8 gatsu* [Family and homeland: Visiting North Korea with my son in August 2010]. This title, which also alludes to the book’s main title, expresses the link between ancestors and descendants.

The last famous sight described in the book is a visit to the 2,477 metre Paektu Mountain. The hard way up to the top is like an act of recovery of a damaged mother–child relationship in the land of their ancestors. As Yu (2010: 348) describes in *Famiri shikuretto* [Family secrets], which was published the same year as *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi*, mother and child up to then have faced numerous problems, including violence and suicidal thoughts.

Yu describes the scenery of her son climbing up the mountain while commenting on the historical background of Mount Paektu: its importance as a “sacred place of revolution” against the Japanese occupiers and the geopolitical meaning of its Heaven Lake, right in the middle of which runs the borderline with China (Yu 2011: 241). Korean history and mythology here become interwoven with the author’s personal history. The author unites her personal mother–child history of the current age with the endless flow of historical time. Even though the reach of a summit is a literary cliché, we can say that it expresses her aspiration of something holy and beyond humankind.

When the two finally arrive at the Heaven Lake atop the mountain, Yu quotes the Old Testament:

Rays of light filtered through the stratocumulus clouds that mantled all of Mount Paektu. In Europe, this view is called angle’s ladder, or Jacob’s Ladder. In Genesis 28:12–15 [...] God

appears in Jacob's dream and promises to him: "I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land." (Yu 2011: 250)¹⁰

The land of the ancestors is also the land that was promised to be returned to the descendants. Though Jacob lies to get his father's blessing, he is not forsaken.

There is an analogy here with the climbing of Mount Paektu and the recovery of the mother-child relationship in the land of their ancestors. But is this reference to the reunion of God and his prodigal son just a rhetorical trick to polish up the reconciliation scene between mother and child?

The love-hate relationship between parents and children is a topic in various of Yu's works, for example her debut drama *Uo no matsuri* (1993), the autobiographic novel *Mizube no yurikago* [The cradle at the waterside] (1999) and the essay *Uo ga mita yume* [The dream of the fish] (2000). Almost like an obsession, these works feature broken families. Is this the author's unescapable destiny? Is she going to repeat with her son the hardships she had with her own parents, for instance, his father's repeated violence against her and her mother (Yu 1999: 121-122)? The scene where they arrive at the summit of Mount Paektu seems to depict her as trying to dissolve the grudge between mother and son. The first-person narration in her works in general and the self-formation of the "I"-traveller in *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi* internalise this grudge by using it as a literary device.

Here we come back to Ricoeur's (1990) notion of narrative identity: to understand oneself as a coherent story of development, which is constantly open towards revisions and edits (see Kitamura 1998: 7). The essence of being oneself is whether a human as a linguistic subject can fulfil a commitment with the other. Yu's early identity was that of a young woman who had been hurt in the relationship with her parents. Her father was always violent at home, and her mother was absent most of the time (Yu 1999: 158). However, in the course of her creative development she came to take up present-day social problems such as Japanese-Korean history. That was accompanied by the property of a single mother struggling with her child. In this way, Yu's literary self-image and her identity as an author has constantly existed and become renewed. It seems that in the travelogue's final chapter, Yu is about to create a new story with her son. The Korean people, just like all children and their parents, are constantly moving from the present to the past.

10 「白頭山全体を覆っていた層積雲から木漏れ日のような光りが洩れてきた。ヨーロッパでは「天使のはしご」「ヤコブのはしご」と呼ばれ、「創世記」第二十八章十二節～十五節[で]〈略〉神はヤコブの夢枕に立って、「あなたがどこへ行っても、わたしはあなたを守り、必ずこの土地に連れ帰る」と約束する。」

If the basis of autobiographic literature is an author's intention to make herself the object of the narrative and link the past with the present and the future, then both Yu's and Sagisawa's travelogues are a type of autobiography. What differs from the genre is that they do not provide an account of their whole life, but focus on one specific stage: Sagisawa on when she was a foreign student in her twenties, Yu as a single mother of 40.

The wrap-around band of Sagisawa's travelogue advertises the book as *yonbun no ichi no sokoku Kankoku e no gokushiteki ryūgakuki* [Hyper-personal travel account of [the author's] one-quarter homeland Korea]. Takeuchi (2006: 407) links this "promise to the reader" with the real life of the author. It is particularly the intimate contents of her travelogue that bring home the "Who am I?" question to the reader.

Yu links her own personal history to "big narratives" such as Korean history, myths, and the Bible. By doing this, the development from self–other conflict to reconciliation is abandoned. The self-image she makes explicit to the reader is valorised in advance: the proud image of a single mother in her forties with roots on the Korean peninsula. Thus, where Sagisawa presents a literary sketch of a hitherto non-existent ideal of the "I," Yu provides an already completed image of herself.

6 Conclusion

In the introductory part of their travelogues, the two authors present themselves in different ways. Yu describes a scenery of North Korea that is appropriate for the portrayal of herself to others. Sagisawa creates a protagonist whom she distances from her own family and social background, and who starts out from zero to form a self between Japan and Korea. According to context, identity changes its relationship with the self. In this sense, it is akin to what in linguistics are called deictic expressions, words whose meaning shifts depending on the situation.

Identity also refers to a sense of belonging that asks the self to commit to a certain group. In the case of Sagisawa, there is the *zainichi kyoppo* and her inconclusive feelings towards being associated with them. Her identity is subject to change during the narrative. By contrast, Yu turns the Korean peninsula as her homeland into a literary space. She presents a uniform self-image from the start that remains unchanged by the dynamics of the narrative.

As the modern philosopher Tatsuru Uchida (2009: 22–32) states about the relationship between author and work, it is not the case that the subject of expression pre-exists the expression. The former is only an after-effect of

the latter. In other words, the “I” only starts to exist by expressing itself. This viewpoint is well applicable to the relationship between author and protagonist of a travelogue. The traveller sets out into foreign lands to make various experiences before returning home. A travelogue is structured along these “real” experience fragments. The author describes the protagonist’s self and in so doing weaves a literary self-portrait from abroad. This means that in travelogues and other autobiographical texts, an author creates the main character of the text and through this creative process becomes the author. Sagisawa portrays herself as swaying between Japan and Korea, alluding to the instability of her *zainichi* identity and the freedom this involves. Yu takes up the largely negative social meaning of *zainichi* and invests it with positive value. This is the basic difference of the two works.

Coming back to the common claim that the younger generations of *zainichi* authors tend to have a weaker ethnic identity and sense of belonging to Korea, we can say that there is something unique in the works of Yu and Sagisawa: the will to discover themselves in the land of their ancestors through the narrative of their travels. I believe that it is here where we find the *zainichi* element in their work.

References

- Amossy, Ruth. 2006. *L'argumentation dans le discours* [Argumentation in discourse], 2nd edn. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Amossy, Ruth & Anne Herschberg-Pierrot. 2010. *Stéréotypes et clichés: Langue, discours, société* [Stereotypes and clichés: Language, discourse, society]. Paris: Nathan.
- Angelopoulos, Theo & Miri, Yu. 2005. Taiwa: “Ereni no tabi” o megutte [Dialogue about “Eléni: La Terre qui pleure”]. *Shinchō* 5. 168–180.
- Baba, Shigeyuki. 2007. “Ishi ni oyogu sakana”: kyōretsu na “dokuso” ga abaku seishun no hitsū na sugata [“Fish swimming on a stone”: Strong toxin uncovers bitter shape of youth]. In Minato Kawamura (ed.), *Gendai josei sakka dokuhon 8: Yū Miri* [Reader on modern women writers 8: Miri Yu], 104–107. Tokyo: Kanae shobō.
- Bayard, Pierre. 2012. *Comment parler des lieux où l'on n'a pas été?* [How to talk about places one hasn't been to?]. Paris: Minuit.
- Carron, Jean-Pierre. 2002. *Écriture et identité: Pour une poétique de l'autobiographie* [Writing and identity: For a poetics of the autobiography]. Brussels: Ousia.
- Hara, Hitoshi (ed.). 2011. *Yū Miri 1991–2010*. Tokyo: Kanrin shobō.
- Harajiri, Hideki. 1998. “*Zainichi*” toshite no Korian [Koreans as *zainichi*]. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Hubier, Sébastien. 2003. *Littératures intimes. Les expressions du moi, de l'autobiographie à l'autofiction* [Intimate literatures: The expression of the I, from autobiography to autofiction]. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Isogai, Jirō. 2004. *Zainichi bungakuron* [Zainichi literary theory]. Tokyo: Shinkansha.

- Isogai, Jirō. 2007. Tojō o ikita hitobito no keifu [Genealogy of people on the move]. *Kanagawa daigaku hyōron* 57. 116–121.
- Kang, Sang-jung. 2003. *Nitchō kankei no kokufuku: naze kokkō seijōka kōryū ga hitsuyō nano ka* [Overcoming the Japanese-North Korean relationship: Why normalisation of diplomatic relations is necessary]. Tokyo: Shūeisha.
- Kawamura, Minato. 2011. Yonhi no tame ni: “8 gatsu no hate” to iu jiken [For Yonhi: The end of August incident]. In Hitoshi Hara (ed.), *Yū Miri 1991–2010*, 196–210. Tokyo: Kanrin shobō.
- Kayama, Rika. 1999. “*Jibun*” o ai suru to iu koto: watashi sagashi to jikoi [To love the “self”: Search for the I and self-love]. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Kim, Funa. 2004. *Zainichi chōsenjin josei bungakuron* [Zainichi Korean women writers]. Tokyo: Sakuhinsha.
- Kitamura, Kiyohiko. 1998. Kurikaesareru jiko no monogatari: Pōru Rikūru no jikoron [Narrative of the reiterated self: Paul Ricœur’s theory of the self]. *Hokkaidō daigaku bungakubu kiyō* 47(1). 1–27. http://eprints.lib.hokudai.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2115/33714/1/47%281%29_P1-27.pdf (accessed 3 March 2015).
- Korte, Barbara. 2005. Travel narrative. In David Herman, Manfred Jahn & Marie-Laure Ryan (eds.), *Routledge encyclopedia of narrative theory*, 619–620. London & New York: Routledge.
- Kotani, Tatsuo. 2014. Kankō [Tourism]. *Nihon daihyakka zensho* [Encyclopedia Nipponica], vol. 6, 152–154. Tokyo: Shōgakusan.
- Minami, Yūta. 2007. “Kazoku shinema”: kazoku wakai no fuseiritsu to iyashi o kyohi suru tsuyosa [Failed family reconciliation and strength denying healing in *Kazoku shinema*]. In Minato Kawamura (ed.), *Gendai josei sakka dokuhon 8: Yū Miri* [Reader on modern women writers 8: Miri Yu], 44–47. Tokyo: Kanae shobō.
- Mizuno, Naoki. 2008. *Sōshi kaimei: Nihon no Chōsen shihai no naka de* [Naming reform: Korea under Japanese rule]. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- Nakamura, Yūjirō. 1984. *Jutsugoshū* [Collection of technical terms]. Tokyo: Iwanami.
- Ohba, Takeshi. 2001. *Watashi to iu meikyū* [The labyrinth called “I”]. Tokyo: Senshu University Press.
- Paku, Ikumi. 2011. Aidentiti no katari o naritasete iru mono: Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana no naratibu bunseki ga kenzaika saseru Nihon shakai no diskōsu no zentei [What makes the narrative: Discourse prerequisites of the Japanese society as manifested in a narrative analysis of Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana]. *Kansai gaigo daigaku kenkyū ronshū* 94. 13–20. http://opac.kansaigaidai.ac.jp/cgi-bin/retrieve/sr_bookview.cgi/U_CHARSET.UTF-8/DB00000410/Body/r094_02.pdf (accessed 3 March 2015).
- Ricœur, Paul. 1996. *Soi-même comme un autre* [Oneself as another]. Paris: Seuil.
- Sagisawa, Megumu. 1990. *Hazakura no hi* [The day the cherry trees went green]. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- Sagisawa, Megumu. 1997. *Kenari mo hana, sakura mo hana* [Forsythias are flowers, cherry blossoms too]. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- Sagisawa, Megumu. 1998. *Watashi wa sore o gaman dekinai* [I can’t stand that]. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- Sagisawa, Megumu. 2005a. *Saihate no futari* [The remotest two persons]. Tokyo: Kadokawa.
- Sagisawa, Megumu. 2005b. *Watashi no hanashi* [My story]. Tokyo: Kawade shobō.
- Saitō, Tamaki. 2012. *Ikinobiru tame no Rakan* [Lacan for survival]. Tokyo: Chikuma shobō.
- Takai, Yūichi. 1991. *Tachihara Masaaki* [Masaaki Tachihara]. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.

- Takeuchi, Emiko. 2006. Saibu kara tachiagaru: jendā, esunishiti, nashonariti no kōzu (kaisetsu). [Rising from the details: The construction of gender, ethnicity and nationality (commentary)]. In Jirō Isogai & Kazuo Kuroko (eds.), *Zainichi bungaku zenshū* [Zainichi literature collected works], vol. 14, 399–407. Tokyo: Bensei shuppan.
- Uchida, Tatsuru. 2009. *Konna Nihon de yokatta ne: Kōzōshugi Nihonron* [Japan good as is: Structural theory on Japan]. Tokyo: Bungei shunshū.
- Yu, Miri. 1993. *Uo no matsuri* [Fish festival]. Tokyo: Kadokawa.
- Yu, Miri. 1997. *Now and then: Yu Miri jishin ni yoru zensakuhin kaisetsu + 51 no shitsumon* [Now and then: Commentary by Miri Yu about her complete works + 51 questions]. Tokyo: Kadokawa.
- Yu, Miri. 1999. *Mizube no yurikago* [The cradle at the waterside]. Tokyo: Kadokawa.
- Yu, Miri. 2000. *Uo ga mita yume* [The dream of the fish]. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- Yu, Miri. 2010. *Famirī shikuretto* [Family secrets]. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Yu, Miri. 2011. *Pyonyan no natsuyasumi: Watashi ga mita Kitachōsen* [Summer vacation in Pyongyang: The way I've seen North Korea]. Tokyo: Kodansha.