

**Zeitschrift:** Asiatische Studien : Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft = Études asiatiques : revue de la Société Suisse-Asie  
**Herausgeber:** Schweizerische Asiengesellschaft  
**Band:** 58 (2004)  
**Heft:** 3: Performing cultures in East Asia : China, Korea, Japan  
  
**Artikel:** Dramatic art and performativity in Pak Chiwn's travel narrative  
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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-147643>

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# DRAMATIC ART AND PERFORMATIVITY IN PAK CHIWŎN'S TRAVEL NARRATIVE

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## Introduction: Performativity in Literary Art

In recent years, the humanities have experienced, to a certain degree, a turn from *text* to *performance* as a basic concept shaping the way cultural phenomena are viewed.<sup>1</sup> Although this shift has primarily influenced the *choice of object* by tending to lessen the privilege of written texts as cultural expressions in favour of theatrical processes such as rituals, festivities, games, and contests,<sup>2</sup> its potential to shape the *way objects are studied* may prove even more enriching to philological fields that otherwise would have to downgrade their most abundant source material. The concept, which was after all derived from the observation that a certain degree of performativity is inherent in all forms of utterance, does not force literary studies to restrict themselves to inquiries into the sociology of literature, such as the contexts in which texts acquire the function of agencies. On the contrary, it shows its validity precisely in its successful application to the interpretation of literary texts.

Recent studies of performativity in culture have distinguished two directions in which this performance-oriented perspective on literary texts can be developed: texts in performances (also called functional performativity) and performances in texts (also called structural performativity).<sup>3</sup> The former refers to the social contexts of written texts; the latter, to literary or rhetorical devices

- 1 For a claim of near ubiquity of this trend, which is thus seen as close to a paradigmatic turn, see Sybille Krämer/Marco Stahlhut, "Das Performative als Thema der Sprach- und Kulturphilosophie," *Paragrana* 10, 2001, 35–64, p. 35.
- 2 See e.g. Hartmut Böhme's research project "Theatralität. Theater als kulturelles Modell in den Kulturwissenschaften" (<http://www.culture.hu-berlin.de/hb/projekte.html>).
- 3 See Irmgard Maassen, "Text und/als/in der Performativität in der frühen Neuzeit: Thesen und Überlegungen (mit einem Appendix von Manfred Pfister: Skalierung von Performativität)," *Paragrana* 10, 2001, 285–302, p. 289.

by which texts overcome the limits of static representation and position themselves not as records but as triggers of mental processes.

In this paper, I follow the latter line of inquiry and look at performativity as literary technique in a renowned Korean text. The aim is not to add any new insights to the theory of performativity, but – strictly in the sense outlined above – to apply the concept as an analytical tool to the text. This will lead, I hope, to a deepened appreciation not only of the illocutionary force of this text, but also of the frame of mind of the intellectual segment of late Chosŏn society that produced it.

### 1. *Yŏrha ilgi* 熱河日記: Genesis and Significance

To demonstrate the use of performativity as a literary technique, I will analyse a Korean travel account of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Its author, Pak Chiwŏn 朴趾源 (1737–1805), today is considered one of the two or three most important literary figures of the later Chosŏn period. Hailing from an influential clan that belonged to the powerful Noron faction, he would have been expected to follow a rather traditional official career, but, for unknown reasons, he chose not to take part in the higher exams, and as a result remained at the fringes of the political elite.<sup>4</sup> In the summer of 1780, he accompanied a remote cousin who acted as First Emissary<sup>5</sup> on a congratulatory mission to Beijing and on to Jehol (Yŏrha). He used this opportunity to write the book which became the main basis for his continuing fame, the *Yŏrha ilgi* (“Jehol diary”).

In spite of its unpretentious title, the book is in fact not just a travel diary but combines a number of different genres. In the standard edition, it consists of 27 sections, each with a title of its own. The latter twenty sections are collections of notes and records arranged under different themes and with very different formats. Included are interview records, informal poetic talks (*sup'il* 隧筆 [*biji* 筆記]), highly literary essays in the format of essays *ki* 記 (*ji*), and even what

4 According to legend, after the early loss of his parents, his compassionate grandfather did not force him to study for the exams until quite late in his youth. *Kwajŏngnok* 過庭錄, the compilation of biographical anecdotes prepared by his son Pak Chongch'ae 朴宗菜, however, records the deaths of his mother and father to have occurred in 1759 and 1767, respectively. See Kim Hyŏlcho, “Kwajŏngnok-ŭl t'onghae pon Yŏnam hyŏnsang,” *Minjok munhwa nonch'ong* (Yŏngnam taehakkyo) 6/ 1984, p. 39–60, p. 40.

5 This cousin, Pak Myŏngwŏn 朴明源, was son-in-law to the king.

we would call fiction: two of Pak Chiwŏn's most famous "Chinese short stories," *Hojil* 虎叱 ("Tiger's Reproach") and *Hŏsaeng chŏn* 許生傳 ("The Life of Mr. Hŏ"). The first seven sections, comprising about 40% of the text, are basically in the diary format, but here too are interspersed texts of other genres, mostly shorter essays (*ki/ji* 記). Modern scholarship has even singled out some diary entries as independent essays and supplied them with titles.<sup>6</sup>

Although the combination of diachronic travelogue and thematically arranged topical essays is not rare in sinic travel literature, this confusing degree of complexity was among the elements in *Yŏrha ilgi* that Pak's contemporaries found excitingly (or, for some, unacceptably) different from ancient models. Another element is his fresh and variable style marked, for example, by using a language close to colloquial Chinese (*baihua* 白話) instead of Classical Chinese (*wenyan* 文言) in some parts of the text. All this caused the *Yŏrha ilgi* to be singled out as prime example of the new style that King Chŏngjo (r. 1776–1800) branded as heretic in his Literary Correction Movement of the 1790s, forcing Pak Chiwŏn and like-minded authors to write letters of self-criticism and renunciation.<sup>7</sup>

The significance of this book, however, goes beyond its literary style. It became nearly a canonical text for those intellectuals of the nineteenth century who shared with Pak and his friends the view that Korea need to keep abreast of the new technological and intellectual developments in Qing China and beyond rather than concentrating on keeping intact what most Koreans considered Chinese cultural heritage. In the twentieth century, Koreans came to regard it as a classic for both its literary and its ideological impact, a rare feat for a text that does not fit the mold of Western generic paradigms.<sup>8</sup> It does, however, meet the

6 Two of the three passages analysed below have been treated this way. Part of the narration of the 8<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month is treated in secondary literature as "Hogokchang non 好哭場論" (Kim Myŏngho, Chŏng Min) or "Hogokchang ki 好哭場記" (Sin Yŏn'u); the latter part of the entry for the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> month has been singled out as "Ibyŏllon" 離別論 (again probably first by Kim Myŏngho).

7 See Kim Hyŏlcho, "Yŏnamch'e-ŭi sŏngnip-kwa Chŏngjo-ui munch'e panjŏng," *Han'guk hanmunhak yŏn'gu* 6, 1982. King Chŏngjo seems to have been pressured to such action by literati at court, rather than having been motivated by genuine dislike of Pak's style. Thus his demands on Pak Chiwŏn remained rhetorical. See Pak Chongch'ae, (*Yŏkchu*) *Kwa-jŏngnok*, Kim Yunjun yŏkchu, Seoul: T'aehaksa 1997, p. 335–336. I am grateful to Paik Sŭngjong for calling my attention to this fact.

8 Canonization processes during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century resemble a screening procedure of cultural heritage in search of items in tune with the new order of knowledge and the arts. *Yŏrha ilgi* found early entry into the new educational canon as propagated by



expectations of contemporary readers whose idea of literary modernity came in the early twentieth-century to be closely connected with, or derived from, the burgeoning genre of the novel.

## 2. Dramatic Art in *Yŏrha ilgi*

Readers of *Yŏrha ilgi* have long claimed that it exhibits a narrative style close to fictional storytelling. Some fifty years after *Yŏrha ilgi* started to circulate, another traveller to China left a bulky report of his journey in which he called the style of his predecessor “novelistic” since it “created a *chŏn* style” (*ip chŏn ch’e* 立傳體), in distinction to “annalistic” or “treatise-like” travelogues.<sup>9</sup> Admittedly it is unclear whether the ambiguous term “*chŏn*” 傳 refers in this instance to the *wenyan* genre of (mostly biographical) “transmissions” or to the genre of vernacular story-telling (*chŏn* has been the most commonly used generic title for vernacular fiction in Korea) or to both (as I would assume).

However, the modern term “novelistic” (*sosŏlchŏk* 小說的) too has come to be applied, and there are many good reasons for this characterisation.<sup>10</sup> First and most obviously, the insertion of texts that within the modern Western generic system can count as purely fictional narratives draws attention to novelistic elements in Pak’s writing. *Hojil* is introduced by a frame narrative in which the author claims to have found it anonymously written on the wall of a shop in Yutian, a small town on the way to Beijing. A friend helped him copy the text but did it so badly that the author had to “adorn it according to my own

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newspapers and magazines by virtue of the “fiction” it contains: *Hojil* was introduced to the modern readership in 1907 in *Taehan chaganghoe wŏlbo* (Monthly of the Korean Self-Strengthening Society). The first complete print edition of *Yŏrha ilgi* was prepared in 1911 by the figure most instrumental in formulating new visions of Korean history and culture, the publisher Ch’oe Namsŏn (1890–1857), as part of the Korean classics reprint project of his “Society for Promoting Korean Books” (Chosŏn Kwangmunhoe).

9 Kim Kyŏngsŏn 金景善 (1788– after 1851) in the preface to his *Yŏnwŏn chikchi* 燕輓直指 of 1832, in: (*Kugyŏk*) *Yŏnhaengnok sŏnjip* vol. 10, Minjok munhwa ch’ujinhoe 1977, p. 3.

10 See e.g. the chapter on the work’s “novelistic depictions” in Kim Myŏnggho, *Yŏrha ilgi yŏn’gu*, Ch’angjak-kwa pip’yŏngsa 1990, p. 205–224. One sustained treatment of *Yŏrha ilgi* in the categories of (fictional) narratology is Sŏ Hyŏngyŏng’s, “Yŏrha ilgi-ŭi sŏsulyang-sang-e kwan-han il koch’al,” in: *Yŏlsang kojŏn yŏn’gu* 16, 2002, 213–136.

intentions in order to make a complete piece of writing out of it.”<sup>11</sup> The other piece, known and widely anthologised today as “Life of Mr. Hŏ” (*Hŏsaeng chŏn*), is in fact an integral (even if the longest and most important) component in one of the diary's latter twenty sections, called “Evening Talks at Yujia” (*Okkap yahwa* 玉家夜話). Again, the author claims that a third party had conveyed the story to him which he now told to his companions.<sup>12</sup> In both cases, assertion and disavowal of auctorial voice intertwine so as to blur the line between fact and fiction.

Second, its attention to details of day-to-day experience adds a degree of mimetic realism beyond what a reader might expect in any genre in classical Chinese. Although travel writing was one of the few modes in Sinitic literature that offered the possibility of narrating the mundane, this opportunity was usually rejected in favour of an artistic focus in the case of domestic travel writing or documentary conciseness in foreign travel reports.<sup>13</sup> *Yŏrha ilgi*, in striking contrast to *wenyan* travel writing but similar to Korean language travelogues,<sup>14</sup> abounds with accounts of quotidian matters, seemingly trivial observations, lengthy inner monologues, dialogues and jokes, along with the more usual discussions of historical, ethnographical and diplomatic topics.

Third, *Yŏrha ilgi* is rich in narrative techniques seemingly aimed at reader entertainment-techniques that have also lead some to characterise the style of *Yŏrha ilgi* as “dramatic” (*hŭimunjŏk* 戲文的).<sup>15</sup> These include detailed descrip-

- 11 *Yŏrha ilgi*, *Kwannae chŏngsa*, 7<sup>th</sup> month 28<sup>th</sup> day, p. 596. All quotations of *Yŏrha ilgi* refer to the *hanmun* 漢文 text in following edition: Yi Kawŏn, trl. and ed., *Kugyŏk Yŏrha ilgi*, 2 vol., Seoul: Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe 1967, rpt. 1989.
- 12 *Yŏrha ilgi* II, *Okkap yahwa*, p. 585.
- 13 For a comparative discussion of autobiographical content in Chinese and Korean travel writing, see Marion Eggert, “Das Wahre und die Schöne: Zum autobiographischen Element in chinesischer und koreanischer Reiseliteratur,” in: Christina Neder, Heiner Roetz, Susanne Schilling, eds.: *China in seinen biographischen Dimensionen. Gedenkschrift für Helmut Martin*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001, 91–103.
- 14 A discussion of *Yŏrha ilgi*'s close relationship with Hong Taeyong's 洪大容 (1731–1783) Korean language *Ŭlbyŏng yŏnhaengnok* 乙丙燕行錄, written 15 years earlier, is provided in Marion Eggert, “Language use and language discourse in Pak Chiwŏn's *Yŏrha ilgi*,” paper presented at the Conference “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular: The Politics of Language in the Diglossic Literary Culture of Korea,” Bellagio, May 25–29, 2004.
- 15 See, e.g., Kang Tongyŏp, *Yŏrha ilgi yŏn'gu*, Ilchisa 1988, p. 50. Sŏ Hyŏngyŏng 2002 (see n. 8) distinguishes between five such techniques; the appellation “dramatic” appears twice in his scheme (p. 212, p. 230), although he confines himself to mentioning the use of dialogue and, curiously, the employment of explanatory frameworks for some narrative scenes as examples of this “theatricality.”

tions of persons, including their outfits and characteristic movements, lively accounts of events, employment of vivid dialogue, and stress on humorous situations. In this respect, *Yŏrha ilgi* can serve as a repository of records of performative social interaction. Even at this level, however, there is more to Pak's writing than mere factual description.

At the end of the diary entry for the first day of the journey (a longish entry that runs thirteen manuscript pages in German translation), Pak Chiwŏn describes a certain kind of military officer who is part of the embassy, the so-called *kulloe* 軍牢 who are employed for, among other things, meting out punishments among the travel group.

The *kulloe* are a bunch of strong people who have been especially selected from the servicemen of Ŭiju prefecture. Among the staff members of our travel company, they are the most busy, but also the most hungry people. Their outfit is remarkable. [...] Their bearing is really vigorous. Their horses, however, are more like pack mules, without saddles, and they crouch rather than ride on them. A small blue signal flag is fastened to their backs. In one hand they carry a notice board for military orders, in the other hand they hold brush, ink-slab and fly-swatter, as well as a short ashwood whip as thick as a wrist. With the mouth they blow horns, and below their seats they stick ten or more red clubs. If the ambassadors need any errands to be run, they always call the *kulloe*, but the *kulloe* pretend not to hear them. Only after they have been called a dozen times they mutter curses between their teeth before finally answering in a loud voice as if they had only now heard the call. Then they jump off their horses and get on their way, running like pigs and panting like cattle, with horn, notice board, brush, ink-slab and so forth hanging from their shoulders, and the club trailing behind them. (*Yŏrha ilgi* I, *Togangnok*, p. 519)

In this passage, we find all elements of a theatrical production. There are actors, chosen for a certain role according to their physical traits, a costume that marks them visibly as interpreters of this role, and a number of props necessary for their roles such as notice boards and clubs. Thus equipped, the actors are set into action, playing out their scene according to a well-defined script. Thus, the text demonstrates the ritual-like reproduction of social relations through performative action. At the same time, however, it tells a story about the erosion of social roles through actual performance.

On one hand, the text presents both mask – the role as it is meant to be played by those who stage it – and the fissures that appear in this mask as soon as stage action begins. The *kulloe* may look vigorous as long as they wait for their entrance, but action reveals that their role is overburdened by props and pomposity degenerates into absurdity. The character of the role is difficult to maintain in actual performance. On the other hand, performance also leaves

room for the *kulloe* to improve on their role when they stage a show within a show by their reluctant response to their superiors. In both instances, performativity serves to undermine the allocation of authority and to present a social structure that is more amorphous and elastic than the rigid surface makes it appear.

This is only one small example picked at random from the rich reservoir of dramatic scenes in *Yŏrha ilgi*; a thorough investigation might well show that many if not all of these episodes serve similarly subversive functions as this one. What has often been labelled "social criticism" in Pak Chiwŏn's text is in very many cases transported by such descriptive attention to performative acts: instead of commenting outright on the contradictions and imbalances of society, he plays out scenes in which the brittleness of the *status quo* exposes itself. However, my main interest in this paper is not in these narrative uses of performativity, but in the performativity of narrative itself.

### 3. "Structural Performativity" in *Yŏrha ilgi*: The River Crossing Scene

The concept of "structural performativity" in literary texts refers to the fact that a text is not a static, unified message, but a sequence of events in the mind of the reader.<sup>16</sup> These may be acoustic events (even when the text is read silently; often the acoustic elements impress themselves in more ideal shape on the mind that reads the text to itself), but also ideas and mental images. In this sense, performativity is inherent in all texts. We may speak of structural performativity as a literary technique when this fact is consciously used and the performative level of the text artistically crafted so as to convey intended meaning. It is most easily recognized in poetry where we expect rhythm, sound patterns, style, syntax, visual layout etc. to be carefully chosen, but the technique is not confined to the poetic genre. Although the performative message can enrich or run counter to the surface meaning of the text, the technique is most often used to reinforce the latter: the structural or formal lay-out demonstrates, executes, performs exactly the things that are denoted on the semantic level.

16 In addition to the article by Irmgard Maassen quoted in n. 3, also see Klaus W. Hempfer et.al. "Performativität und Episteme. Die Dialogisierung des theoretischen Diskurses in der Renaissance-Literatur," *Paragrana* 10, 2001, p. 65–90.

On the macro level of structural design in plot and arrangement of scenes, as well as in the use of leitmotifs, this literary technique is ubiquitous in the classical Chinese novel, and may be found even in works of *biji* (“jotted notes”) character, although it is often overlooked in the latter. Its conscious employment on the micro level of individual scenes seems to occur more rarely. Pak Chiwŏn, for one, applied the technique primarily to microstructure. By its nature, a travel account is not conducive to the artistic crafting of its overall structure, but conscious performativity may be observed in several core scenes of the diary that relate especially closely to its overall themes.

The first and perhaps the most important of these instances also occurs within the entry for the first day, the day when the travel company left the Korean border town Ŭiju and crossed the Yalu river into the no-man’s land between the Chosŏn and Qing domains. A short scene narrates the actual crossing of the river.<sup>17</sup> It is preceded by detailed accounts of the physical preparations for border-crossing that involve change of costume, spending of the last Korean coins and a rather undignified customs control on the river bank. Noteworthy too is the mood that pervades the travel company as a whole and the narrator in particular, a mood of both impatience, as the travel company had waited for more than ten days for this moment, and of apprehension, as the Yalu is swollen, crossing is expected to be dangerous, and the journey through unknown lands looms ahead. At the moment of passing through the city gate, the narrator discusses at great length the alleged behaviour of Jing Ke 荊軻, the would-be assassin of the First Qin Emperor, at the time when he crossed the Yi river into Qin territory.<sup>18</sup> All these devices serve to retard the narrative, heighten suspense and direct reader attention towards the momentousness and significance of crossing the river. At last the moment has come:

17 The scenes quoted below seem to have attracted more critical attention in Korean scholarship than this one. However, its status as a key passage is suggested already by the title of this part of the diary, *Togangnok* 渡江錄 (“Record of crossing the river”). Sŏ Hyŏngyŏng (see n. 8), who mentions the importance of the river crossing theme for *Togangnok*, takes note of this passage, but fails to analyse its composition in any depth (p. 227–228). Responsible for this lack of attention may be Yi Kawŏn’s problematic translation, see below n. 23.

18 As is well known, Jing Ke (?–227 B.C.) failed in the attempt and did not return alive; he hardly would if he had succeeded, and as Pak Chiwŏn surmises, he must have been aware of the fact when starting the journey. In speaking about Jing Ke, Pak heavily quotes from his biography in *Shiji* 史記, j. 86.



The signal call of the first ambassador's footman had not yet ceased when the boatmen took up their oars. The water rushed past us, as boat songs were sung in unison, hastening the movement of the boat. Stars seemed to fall and lightning to flash. Entranced, I felt like having slipped into a new day. The pillars and beams of the General's Pavilion seemed to revolve in all directions. Those who had bid us farewell still stood on the shore, small like beans. I said to Hong Myŏngbok, the main interpreter: 'Do you know the way?' He bowed. answering, 'What are you saying?' I replied, 'The way is not difficult to know. It is on the other shore.' Hong said: 'Do you talk about "First ascending to the other shore"?'<sup>19</sup> 'This is not what I mean,' I responded. 'This river is the place of contact and of dissociation between them and us. Where there is no shore, there is water. All human relations and natural rules are like water bordering on the shore. The way is nowhere else to be sought than at this borderline.' Hong said: 'May I please ask what you mean.' I explained, "'The human mind is imbalanced 危, the mind of the way is subtle 微.'<sup>20</sup> When the men of the Far West discuss the geometric line, a comparison with a thread does not exhaust its subtlety, so they say, 'it is like the border between light and no-light'. The Buddhists approach it by saying: 'not identical and not distinct'. Therefore, only those who know the way are able to judge (or: to place themselves well at) the borderline. Gongsun Qiao 公孫僑 of Zheng 鄭<sup>21</sup> [...]'. The ship had already landed.<sup>22</sup>

The beginning of the passage seems to have two functions. First, it responds to reader expectations of climax and danger with its dramatization of departure. Second, it describes an ecstatic psychological state that, in Sino-Korean artistic culture, may be connected to creativity and inspiration. At this point, quite out of the blue, the narrator starts a dialogue that evolves into musings about the inscrutability of the border, the impossibility of describing it in terms other than

- 19 A quotation from ode 241 of the *Shijing* 詩經, "Huang yi 皇矣." In Zhu Xi's 朱熹 interpretation that can be surmised to have been the one commonly followed in Chosŏn Korea, the "shore" is synonymous here with "the point of completion of the way." Together with the two preceding lines, the verse is understood to say that it is in the absence of wavering and personal predilections that the way can be realized. See Zhu Xi, *Shi ji zhuan* 詩集傳j. 16, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 1958, p. 185.
- 20 I am using this word consciously both in its original sense, "border-like," and its present meaning, apt to translate the Chinese *wei* 微, "at the threshold of consciousness." This threshold is exactly what one finds expressed in ancient glosses of *wei* 微: "sprouts that have not yet sprouted," "when something has begun but is not yet manifest."
- 21 Gongsun Qiao (?–522) was minister of the small country of Zheng during the Chunqiu period renowned for his feats in stabilizing society and strengthening the country's position.
- 22 Minjok munhwa ch'ujinhoe ed., *Kugyŏk Yŏrha ilgi*, vol. I, *Togangnok*, p. 517. Here as in the following, I am quoting from the *hanmun* text. – Yi Kawŏn translates the last part of the narrator's direct speech as a complete sentence: "'[...] people of old like Chŏng Chasan were fully able to do this.' While we talked like this, the ship had already landed." (ibid. p. 26), thus destroying the literary effect.



those of mutual exclusivity. But while engaged in these deliberations, he has crossed the border without noticing it. Cutting off a sentence in the middle, he finds that the other shore has already been reached. This obviously highlights and reinforces the main message of the dialogue, the fact that borders are a construct of the mind, while at the same time making the first person narrator ironic and undermining the authority of his voice.

#### 4. The meaning of performativity in the river crossing scene

With narration performing (not narrating) the act that is at the text's center of interest, this passage puts the use of performative narration as a literary technique in *Yŏrha ilgi* beyond doubt. Moreover, the singular occurrence of unfinished direct speech – rare in a travel account – is a sure sign of conscious craftsmanship. Clearly, considerable artistic effort has gone into composing this passage. The question remains, for what end? Is this only an instance of Pak Chiwŏn's famous humour and self-mockery, or is there more to it?

I perceive two clues to an answer. One is the topic of the dialogue, the border or boundary, *jì* 際, the other is the dialogical nature of the passage itself.

##### a) Border

I believe the border interests Pak Chiwŏn for two reasons, both of which find expression here.

The first is a political reason. As mentioned before, Pak Chiwŏn is a prominent figure among the group of China-oriented literati called *pukhakup'a* 北學派, the Learners from the North. In advocating a prejudice-free attitude towards the achievements of the Manchu imperium as a civilization, they had to confront ossified distinctions, current among their compatriots, between “them” and “us,” the Manchu “barbarians” and the Korean “inheritors” of Chinese civilization. Probably Pak Chiwŏn had the dissolution of this conceptual border in mind when he devoted much space in his travelogue to discuss the transience and shifting locations of the Korean-Chinese border, to highlight the Manchurian and Northern Chinese space he travels through as border space of interaction and intermingling of races, and to demonstrate that the border as it exists separates not two cultural realms but two economic spheres, of which the Qing sphere is clearly superior. This political aspect of his border musings is hinted at both with the *Shangshu* quote, which is about good governance, and with the mentioning

of Gongsun Qiao of Zheng (?–522 BC), who as minister of a small country tackled many of the problems that distressed the “Learners from the North.”

The second reason for interest in the border, more obvious in the quoted text, is an epistemological one. In asking how we conceive of and define a boundary, Pak discusses the question of how concepts are set up and delimited, the nature and scope of terms. He adduces examples from three great sources of knowledge and authority known to him, which probably represent three possible world orders: Confucian, Western, and Buddhist. Each of them seems to point to the idea of a minute, hard to grasp, but most significant middle ground.

The *Shangshu* passage, in its common Neo-Confucian interpretation, describes conscience as such a central space. In Legge's translation, it reads in full: “The mind of man is restless, prone (to err); its affinity to what is right is small. Be discriminating, be uniform (in the pursuit of what is right), that you may sincerely hold fast the Mean.”<sup>23</sup> By discussing the subtleness and concentration of mind necessary to hold fast to this center of conscience, the latter part stresses the obscurity and evasiveness of this middle ground.

The next sentence takes up this evasiveness itself and discusses it through reference to mathematical abstraction. Pak Chiwŏn here obviously refers to Euclidean geometry as introduced in China by Matteo Ricci. On the very first page of his *Jihe yuanben* 幾何原本 (“The origins of geometry”), we read following definition (“border-talk”) of the geometrical line: “The line has length but no breadth. Try a flat surface on which light shines: the space between light and no-light cannot contain a single thing. This is the line.”<sup>24</sup> The unsubstantiality of the geometrical line thus exemplifies the idea of the boundary, *jì* 際,<sup>25</sup> which is shown to be in fact nothing else but a middle ground that can be conceived of, but not experienced.

23 人心惟危 道心惟微 惟精惟一 允執其中. James Legge, trl., *The Shu King*, in: *The Sacred Books of the East. The Texts of Confucianism*, Part I, rept. of the original Oxford edition (1879–85), Delhi 1966, p. 50. Pak Chiwŏn quoted only the first part, but due to the centrality of this passage to neo-Confucian doctrine, there was no need to spell it out in full in order to imply the meaning of the latter part.

24 Li Madou *kouyi* 利瑪竇口議, Xu Guangqi *bishou* 徐光啓筆授, *Jihe yuanben*, Congshu jicheng chubian vol. 1294, Shanghai: Shangshu yinshu guan, p. 1.

25 While *Jihe yuanben* uses “space between” (*jian* 間) at this point, Pak Chiwŏn chooses *ji* (boundary). Another of the early mathematical imports to China, the *Jihe yaofa* by Julio Aleni (1582–1649), explains the point and the line as the boundaries (*jie*) of line and area respectively.—Pak Chiwŏn's friend Hong Taeyong mentioned above played an instrumental role in making Western geometry known in Korea during the 18th century. See Han

The Buddhist quote, finally, amplifies what we have learned about the boundary and makes it apparent as the principle of all understanding. Not identical and not distinct: this applies to emptiness and phenomena (*kong* 空 and *se* 色), Nirvana and the human world, enlightenment and delusion, in fact to all the oppositional concepts that make up the foundations of Buddhist faith itself.

Ultimately, if understanding is to be reached, be it politically about the proper position of Korea versus China or intellectually about the nature of knowledge, one first has to grasp this infinitesimal middle ground, marked and exemplified by the border, between affirmation and denial, existence and non-existence. In other words, to understand that the border is unreal but the crossing is real, is to understand that social constructs are void of substance, but effective, and that conceptual realities are subject to critique and change. But this idea about the shifting and indefinable middle ground can be transmitted not through static statements that depend on well-defined concepts, but only in the fluid performative mode.

#### *b) Dialogue*

My second clue, the dialogical nature of the passage in question itself, reinforces this point. In regard to the Western tradition, philosophical dialogue has been described as an inherently performative genre because of the distribution of utterance among multiple, embodied voices and because the time factor disavows the idea of a singular, eternal, objective truth.<sup>26</sup> Though these traits are not necessarily shared by the East Asian tradition of philosophical dialogue in general, there is little doubt that in this instance, the dialogical mode has been chosen intentionally for its performative virtues. More importantly, this performative dialogical mode points to another level of meaning of the border.

Up to now, we have talked about a theory of knowledge: the border as simile for the defining rims of a term, the limits of concept. There is, however, another aspect to the border that the narrator mentions at the beginning of the dialogue: border is the boundary *and* the place of contact. This latter aspect points to a theory of communication. At the infinitesimal middle ground of delimitation and contact, meaning is both contested and constituted. The creation of meaning is possible only through some kind of dialogue, be it between persons, between ideas or between countries.

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Yŏngho, "Sŏyang kihahak-ŭi Chosŏn chŏllae-wa Hong Taeyong-ŭi *Chuhae suyong*," *Yŏksa hakpo* 170, 2001/6, 53–89.

26 Kaempfer et.al. in Paragrana 10/1.

Within this perspective, the place of the dialogue and the person of the interlocutor begin to resonate. The latter is none other than the First Interpreter, the one who transports meaning between the Chinese and the Korean languages just as the boat on which they travel shuttles back and forth between the two political spheres. The river passage is a dialogue, a translation of meaning. An act of communication is a translation, is the crossing of a border. Obviously, performativity in this climactic short narrative is more than a humorous device aiming at reader entertainment. Rather, it is the adequate or even necessary expression of an agenda that is simultaneously political and philosophical: to give up ossified conceptions of the world, especially of self and other, in favour of a renewing process of border transitions.

## 5. Borders revisited: Further examples of performative narration in *Yŏrha ilgi*

For these observations to demonstrate Pak Chiwŏn's intentions in using performative narration, rather than being merely the fortuitous results of a scholar's search for correspondences, they must be borne out by further examples of this technique in *Yŏrha ilgi*. The remainder of this paper therefore sets out to test the interpretation given above in the light of two more scenes that stand out as major examples of structural performativity in Pak's travelogue.

One of these is the famous passage commonly known as "Hogokchang ki," comprising the first part of the diary entry of the eighth day of the seventh month. About to reach Liaoyang this day, the embassy leaves the hilly Manchurian landscape that had, at the crossing of the Yalu, been characterized as a continuation of Korean land formations (if not of Korean territory), and enters what is marked as Chinese plain.<sup>27</sup> In Pak's narration, at the moment of passing the last of the foothills and setting eyes on the plain, a trance sets in, similar to the one experienced while crossing the river:

There was a flickering before my eyes, and suddenly a black ball leapt up and down. This day I came to know that human life has nothing to rely upon; there is no way but to head towards the sky, tread the earth and go forward. I halted my horse, looked around, and unwittingly I raised my hand to my forehead and said: "A good-crying-place. Here it is

27 While west of the Liao basin hills rise again, the embassy route leading near the coast to Shanhaiguan and from there to Peking indeed did not enter mountainous terrain again.

possible to cry!" Licentiate Chǒng answered: "Coming upon this singularly great vista, how can you think of crying?" I said: "You are right, and are also wrong. [...]"<sup>28</sup>

Again, a strong inner movement, symbolized by a kind of dizziness, prompts the narrator to initiate a dialogue with a proposal that must, for his interlocutor, verge on the nonsensical. In the ensuing conversation, the narrator explains that an urge to cry results not only from sadness, but from any intense feeling. As Chǒng inquires which of the seven feelings could incite crying at this very moment, the narrator, instead of settling on one of them, cites the crying of a new-born baby:

Which feeling may move a new-born baby? First he sees sun and moon, next he sees mother and father, all his relatives assemble around him, and he is welcomed happily by everyone. Hardly will he encounter another moment of such joy until old age. He should laugh in delight, but instead he cries incessantly and kicks around in his diapers. Is this because the holy and wise, as well as the unenlightened, will finally have to die after having encountered all manner of distress during their lifetimes, and so the child hates to have been born and feels sorrow for himself? No, these are not the basic feelings of a newborn. As long as the child lives in the womb, it is constricted in the dark, and has to crouch in confinement, but now one morning it is thrown out into open space, able to extend hand and feet and to expand its breast. Then it cannot but sound its true voice and fully express its feelings. Thus one should take the newborn as teacher and stop using one's voice for pretensions. Piro peak with its view of the east sea may serve as a place, Changyŏn (at the west coast) with its golden strand may serve as a place, and this rim of the Liao plain which stretches over 1200 *li* to Shanhai pass without a dot of mountain in sight, where the rim of the sky and the limits of earth connect with each other as if glued or sewn together, where throughout the centuries rain and clouds wander in gorgeous blue, this too can serve as a place. At noon, it was very hot [...].

Like the river crossing scene, this passage is performative narration insofar as within the narrative frame, the narrator's speech serves exactly the function he, in his speech, ascribes to the cry of the new-born: the narration of the traveler, borne (or born) into the width of the plain, explodes into a cascade of speech, thereby demonstrating what the content of the speech explains discursively.<sup>29</sup>

28 This quote and all following of this scene are found in *Togangnok*, p. 537.

29 While demonstration through action of otherwise conceptually formulated truths is, in fact, so intrinsic to narration as not to warrant the epithet "performative," the technique used here of intimately interweaving discursive and narrative exemplification so much resembles the execution (in narrative) of a script (represented by discursive arguments) that association with performance nearly imposes itself. Certainly, this instance is covered by the concept of structural performativity outlined above. Note that in the passages discussed here, the usual



At the same time, the forceful, even hyperbolic, simile of birth<sup>30</sup> marks this highly charged passage as a record of another border transition. But as in this case there is no marked political borderline, the transition becomes a purely psychological process that cannot be told but must be produced. If the river-crossing scene makes use of the dialogue for highlighting and, at the same time, glossing over the event of transition, here the event of “passing” is constituted by the dialogue itself. Thus, while being part of the same thematic complex as the river-crossing scene, “Hogokchang ki” puts its emphasis on speech, which also shifts from dialogic to monologic mode, from philosophical discussion to poetic utterance.

The last scene I wish to treat in this context, the so called “Ibyŏllon” or “discussion of parting,”<sup>31</sup> takes up elements from both earlier episodes, as will be shown presently. The placement of each of the three passages reinforces the impression that they are closely related. While the river crossing scene and “Hogokchang ki” frame one chapter of the book, *Togangnok*, “Ibyŏllon” is found in the first entry of *Makpuk haengjŏng nok* 漠北行程錄, the section of the diary recounting the journey from Beijing to Jehol. The three scenes obviously mark three stages of departure: out of Korea, into China proper, and lastly, setting out to leave China proper for the barbarian North.<sup>32</sup>

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relation between “story” (what is told) and “discourse” (how it is told; in the diction of Todorov and others) in narrative is reversed: the “content” of the scene, “that what is told,” is discourse, while the story is the instrument “how to tell.”

30 This simile is not unique, although an American audience might tend to think so. Describing border transitions in Swiss literature which naturally abounds with this motif, Peter von Matt writes: “Der eine gerät, kaum ist er über die Grenze, in die Seligkeit des ‘ozeanischen Gefühls’, den andern erfaßt die Beklemmung des Ungeborenen beim Einsetzen der Preßwehen. (While one person may, on crossing the border, experience the bliss of ‘oceanic feeling,’ another one may be gripped by the apprehension of the unborn at the start of the contractions of labour),” in: Peter von Matt, “Der Traum an der Grenze. Zur literarischen Phantasie in der Schweiz”, in: *Die tintenblauen Eidgenossen. Über die literarische und politische Schweiz*, München: Hanser 2001, 113–122, p. 116.

31 *Yŏrha ilgi* vol. 1, *Makpuk haengjŏngnok*, 610–611.

32 A fourth point of departure, the actual exit from what was considered by the Koreans as “China” through a gate in the Long Wall called Gubeikou, is again strongly marked by a highly lyrical description within the diary and an additional, extremely polished essay. However, these passages are less closely related to those considered here, as their central topic is “wilderness” and heroism rather than the process of leave-taking itself.



The frame narrative for “Ibyöllon” is the embassy’s sudden departure for Jehol made necessary by poor communication between the Ministry of Rites and the emperor. Circumstances force the narrator to leave one of his two footmen behind in the capital. At the city gate, the two servants part in tears. This leads to a prolonged inner monologue by the narrator about the experience of parting. At first the narrator tells himself that parting in life-time is more sorrowful than being torn apart by “the rim between life and death” (生死之際). Next he muses that the most bitter parting in life has a special place, the river. As before, examples from literary tradition serve to illustrate this point. But then his footmen had just now shed tears even though they were not at a riverside:

[...] They are not related like father and son, share no obligations like sovereign and minister or feelings like husband and wife, nor did they communicate like friends, but their bitterness of parting in this life was like this. So not only river and sea, stream and bridge, are places that make parting felt. In the foreign country, the foreign land, there is no place that is not a place of parting. [...]

This bitterness of parting in the “foreign land” then triggers thoughts about prince Sohyŏn’s parting from his accompanying officials when he had to remain in Shenyang as hostage to the rising Qing authorities (1638):

How could one bear [the thought of] this parting? And why should a place with water be needed to trigger the feeling? A pavilion will do, a palace will do, mountains will do, fields will do. And why would it need howling waves and clouded sun to make feelings bitter? Why would it need a tumbled-down bridge, a decaying tree to mark the place of this our parting? Even painted pillars and decorated gates, green spring and white sun are fully the place for our parting, the time for our bitter crying. On this occasion, even a man made of stone would turn his head, and even an iron heart would melt. This is the ultimate time of dying feelings for our Eastern land. Thinking like this, I had unwittingly covered twenty *li* or more. [...]

Clearly, this echoes the river-crossing scene both through repetition and contrast. The motif of river as borderline is taken up again. In the former scene, the river supplied the scenery, the narrative trigger for discourse, while the “point of contact and of dissociation” was the theme of the discourse. In this instance, dissociation itself provides the narrative trigger, while the river makes a purely internal appearance as discursive theme. Most importantly, the performative technique of the river-crossing scene is re-applied here in a similar, but contrapuntal way. The place of parting is left behind here, north of Beijing, as unwittingly as the border had been crossed on the Yalu river, and again this

narrative fact illustrates the content of the musings that have caused it: leave taking can occur anywhere, contrary to literary convention it cannot be fixed to a place; thus to leave parting behind can take twenty *li*, or more. If the point of division had been contracted to the invisible, intractable geometrical line in the first instance, here it is expanded into infinity. Furthermore, discursive contraction and expansion are mirrored by narrative time. Whereas the perspective of contraction is offered in a concise section of only a few lines (of *hanmun* text), the text devoted to the perspective of expansion takes about six times more space. And again, the genre of “discourse” plays a performative role as well, as the dialogical mode of giving and taking used in analysing the “place of contact and dissociation” gives way to solitary monologue in the discussion of the ever-expanding space between those who have parted.

Shared elements with “Hogokchang ki” are also numerous. First, in both cases the discursive part is started by seemingly improbable propositions, the definition of the place of wonder as an arena for crying in one instance and the claim of greater bitterness in parting alive over being separated by death in the other. Next, both share the theme of crying, and the theme of the “appropriate place.” But in this case as well, similarities are intertwined with opposites: the liberating outcry in “Hogokchang ki” contrasts with the bitter tears of “Ibyöllon,” and while the former scene settles on defining “befitting places,” the latter ultimately negates the concept of place, exploding it into infinite space. One celebrates birth, the other mourns death.<sup>33</sup> The river-crossing scene may, in this light, symbolize the event of procreation at the meeting point of *yin* and *yang*, “the border between light and no light.”

This is not the place to explore the implications of the three corresponding scenes in detail. Much room remains for more detailed analysis of the multiple layers of meanings opened up between them, especially in view of the issue of cultural and political relations between Korea and the Manchu empire. At this point, however, the answer to our initial question is already apparent. Performative narrative is indeed a device consciously used in *Yörha ilgi*. It consistently functions to mark – nay to *perform* – transitions that can be captured in their full complex significance only by a literary technique that sets signifier and signified in motion.

33 The idea of death frames the scene cut out as “Ibyöllon”: the initial “rim between life and death” (生死之際) is echoed by the final “dying feelings.”

