

Contact and Prospect: Imaginative Geography in the Travel Writings of Richard E. Kim in the Late 1980s

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This study examines the meaning of the imaginative geography created by contact with communist countries and the prospects for a post-Cold War world. It analyzes newspaper articles, TV documentaries, and the written travelogue about Richard E. Kim's (Korean name Kim Ŭn'guk 金恩國) travels to China and the Soviet Union in the late 1980s. During this time, neither China nor the Soviet Union had established diplomatic ties with South Korea, and they were not regions in which Koreans could travel freely. As such, the Korean public's perception of communist countries was somewhat limited. However, as a U.S. citizen, Kim could travel to these countries, and his travels subsequently received significant attention from the South Korean public. Kim gave accounts of his travels in newspapers and books and on TV, but the interpretations of these trips differed according to the medium. Newspapers and documentaries represented the communist countries and the lives of ethnic Koreans according to Cold War Orientalism and emphasized nationalist identity, while Kim's travelogue departed from both Cold War Orientalism and nationalist identity. Kim's approach emphasized differences that could not be unified and presented a desirable subjectivity for the upcoming post-Cold War era. In sum, while the documentaries highlighted nationalism, Kim's travel writing suggested a cosmopolitan subjectivity, two perspectives that differed radically in their prospects for the future.

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Introduction

In August 1987, Korean-American writer Richard E. Kim (Kim Ŭn'guk 金恩國, 1932–2009) traveled to the People's Republic of China.¹ It was not a regular tourist trip, however, as his purpose was to visit the city of Longjing (龍井市), where he had lived for seven years as a child, and to meet ethnic Koreans still living there. The trip was also not private, as it was filmed by the Korean public broadcaster KBS.

At the time Kim traveled to China, the South Korean government had not only failed to establish diplomatic relations with China but had banned Koreans from traveling abroad for private purposes. Kim was able to visit China because he was a U.S. citizen, and his trip was ostensibly for the production of a program for KBS.² As a result, Kim was under external pressure to produce videos of his trip.³ The planned broadcast date was ultimately postponed, and some of the scenes were deleted due to the upcoming Korean presidential election. Considering that the videos showed regions of a communist country, it is not surprising that they were the subject of censorship, given the government's anti-communist stance.

The next year, in 1988, anti-communist sentiment in Korea softened. The Roh Tae-woo administration pursued Nordpolitik (northward policy), tried to improve the relationship between North and South Korea, and sought diplomatic relations with communist countries such as the Soviet Union and China. In the same year, the perestroika policy in the Soviet Union, the 1988 Seoul Olympics, and Nordpolitik led to a dramatic transition in South Korean society.⁴ Unlike before, the South Korean government and the public showed increased

¹ Different media sources introduced Kim's itinerary differently. According to some newspapers, he traveled to China from August 1 to August 17, 1987. Kim Ŭn'guk, "Pansegiman ũi Manju, kŭrigo Paektusan [Half a century later: Manchuria and Paektusan]," *Kyŏngbyang sinmun*, October 6, 1987, 18–19. KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) recorded Kim's trip and aired it on TV. In the program *Sun'gyoja chakka Kim Ŭn'guk kyosu ũi Pukkando pogo* [The report on North Jiandao by the author of *The Martyred*, Prof. Richard. E. Kim], he said that he had traveled for three weeks, from late July to mid-August, but he did not record his travel itinerary clearly in his travelogue. Kim Ŭn'guk, *Soryŏn kwa Chungguk, kŭrigo irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭil* [The Soviet Union, China, and lost people] (Sŏul: Ŭryu Munhwasa, 1989).

² It became possible for Americans to travel to China in 1971 during the period of détente. "Mi, Chunggong yŏhaeng chehan chŏnmyŏn haeje [U.S. lifts travel ban to China]," *Kyŏngbyang sinmun*, March 16, 1971, 1. Richard E. Kim published his novel *The Martyred* in America in 1964, and he obtained U.S. citizenship in the same year. "Sun'gyoja 12 Kuksŏ Ch'ulp'an [*The Martyred* was published in 12 countries]," *Kyŏngbyang sinmun*, May 26, 1964, 5.

³ "T'ŭkch'ip tak'yument'ŏri Pukkando, Paektusan pangyŏng ssago chint'ong [Special documentaries, *North Jiandao, Paektusan*, under discussion ahead of the broadcast]," *Tonga ilbo*, September 23, 1987, 10.

⁴ Kim Minhwan, "Perestroika, pukpang chŏngch'aek, kŭrigo Im Sugyŏng [Perestroika, Nordpolitik, and Im Sugyŏng]," *Han'guk hyŏndae saenghwal munhwasa 1980 nyŏndae: Sŭp'och'ŭ konghwaguk kwa yangnyŏm t'ongdak* [History of modern Korean life and culture in the 1980s: Spicy chicken and the Sports Republic]. ed. Kim Sŏngbo et al. (Sŏul: Ch'angbi, 2016), 154.

interest in communist countries.

During this time, once again with the support of KBS, Kim traveled to parts of the USSR and Central Asia. This trip followed on from the previous year's trip to China. However, unlike the trip to China, KBS signed a contract with Tele-Search in the UK to improve the filming and added Kim's narration to the video in post-production.⁵ However, the purpose of the 1988 trip was the same: to document, from Kim's perspective, the lives of ethnic Koreans in communist countries.

Kim remains well-known in South Korea as the author of *The Martyred*,⁶ which was his first novel and was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.⁷ However, he published only two more novels before his death. Following the publication of his third novel, *Lost Names* (1970),⁸ there was considerable anticipation of his next. This anticipation persisted into the 1980s. The novelist Hwi Sŏnwu (1922–86), who was close to Kim, later lamented that Kim felt great pressure to produce another novel. Kim stated that he had been working on a novel he called *Lost Soul* that had been “dragging on for more than a decade”⁹ following the release of *Lost Names*. He explained that the new work was a sequel to *Lost Names* and that it examined “the history of the nation” through “the history of a family.”¹⁰ He also wanted to write the new work in Korean, unlike his previous works, which had been written in English. Kim's trips to China and the Soviet Union took place around the time he intended to complete *Lost Soul*.

Following his trips to China and the USSR in 1987 and 1988 respectively, Kim published a travelogue, *Soryŏn kwa Chungguk, kŭrigo irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭl* (The Soviet Union, China, and lost people). Unlike the KBS documentaries, which were produced through collaborative efforts, the travelogue allowed Kim to express his opinions more freely and directly. In addition, it was his only work written in Korean, as *Lost Soul* was never published.

In his travel writings, Kim explored the theme of his unfinished novel *Lost Soul*, that is, the examination of the history of a nation through the history of a family.¹¹ Part of the title of the travelogue, “irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭl” (lost people), suggests that he thought that the Korean diaspora in communist countries could provide insight into the lives of all South Koreans and the history of the nation. In his travelogue, Kim points out that asking “Who

⁵ “Tŭkchip: Soryŏn ttang ŭi Hanin ŭl ch’ajasŏ [Special feature: Looking for Koreans in the Soviet Union],” *Chosŏn ilbo*, August 9, 1988, 16.

⁶ Richard E. Kim, *The Martyred* (New York: George Braziller, 1964).

⁷ Montye P. Fuse, “Richard E. Kim (1932–),” *Asian American Autobiographers: A Bio-Biographical Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Guiyou Huang (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 162.

⁸ Richard E. Kim, *Lost Names* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970).

⁹ “Pitturŏjin chŏngŭi kami sut’an ch’amhwa pullŏtta [Injustice has caused many disasters],” *Iryo pangdam: Han’guk ŭl umjikyŏ on wŏllo tŭrŭi TV taedam* [Sunday free talk: TV talks with respected elders in Korea] (Sŏul: KBS, 1986), 905. I base the contents of this paragraph on the conversation between Hwi Sŏnwu and Richard E. Kim in 1986. Their conversation was aired on KBS on April 6, 1986.

¹⁰ *Iryo pangdam: Han’guk ŭl umjikyŏ on wŏllo tŭrŭi TV taedam*, 905.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 905.

are they?” is akin to asking, “Who am I?”¹² Indeed, he stresses that the lives of Koreans living in communist countries are connected to his own and that life outside South Korea is not irrelevant to life within South Korea. However, while emphasizing such continuity, Kim also denies the homogeneity of the nation, claiming that the search for continuity in life is only to understand the differences between individuals more precisely, not to ignore them. In short, to Kim, the search for lost people was necessary to understand human singularity, not to create a larger homogenous nation.

This article focuses on the concept of a nation and the prospects for a post-Cold War world that Kim tried to present through the stories of ethnic Koreans living in communist countries. I examine the differences between the presentation of ideas in TV documentaries and in travel writings.¹³ As ordinary South Koreans could not travel to communist countries in the late 1980s, Kim’s experiences would have been beyond the imagination of many South Koreans. Thus, the following two questions are posed: What new perceptions and imaginative geography¹⁴ of the world did Kim want to present to South Korean society? Similarly, why did he highlight communist countries and the Korean diaspora within them? This article explores how Kim’s travelogue represents the communist countries he visited, the ethnic Koreans living in them, and the meaning of the globality he created through this representation.

Many studies on Kim have been overly focused on *The Martyred*¹⁵ and have examined his anti-communism and self-consciousness as a North Korean refugee.¹⁶ Building on such

¹² Kim Ŭn’guk, *Soryŏn kwa Chungguk, kŭrigo irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭl*, 244.

¹³ This paper does not aim to establish a hierarchy of genres based on truth. For example, it does not endorse the idea that TV documentaries are an ideological genre that conceals the truth, while an author’s writings, such as travelogues, reveal the truth. All genres mediate reality, and the purpose of this article is to analyze how such mediation changes meaning.

¹⁴ In his book *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said analyzes imaginative geography as distinct from natural geography. It is a spatial concept that allows us to recognize a region through representation. The imaginative geography itself cannot be said to be false, but it provides a cognitive framework for the subject to interpret space. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Concepts of the Orient* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 49–73. Although the concept has fallen out of favor, imaginative geography has been applied in various fields of study, especially in the analysis of travel writings. The examples that follow are studies that apply the concept of imaginative geography to communist countries. Dafna Zur, “Translating Place and Space: The Soviet Union in North Korean Children’s Literature,” *Translating and Transmediating Children’s Literature*, eds. Anna Kérchy and Björn Sundmark (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020), 87–99; Chang Munsŏk, “Sŭlp’ŭn yukch’e rŭl kajin chimsŭng i naenŭn pyŏl tŭrŭi t’oron sori: Ch’oe Inhun ŭi *Hwadu* wa Soryŏn iranŭn chilmun [Sound of discussion among the stars created by the animals with sad bodies: Ch’oe Inhun’s *Topic* and the question of the Soviet Union],” *Inmun nonch’ong* 77, no. 3 (2020): 111–69.

¹⁵ Most research into Kim’s literary works has taken place in Korea. Although these studies use a variety of methodologies, such as comparative literature, translation, and film studies, they focus on *The Martyred*. These studies include Chŏng Inmo, “Hainrihi Pwoeri pon Kim Ŭn’guk ŭi *Sun’gyoja* [Kim Ŭn’guk’s *The Martyred* from the perspective of Heinrich Böll],” *Togŏ kyoyuk* 31 (2004): 491–513; Song Ch’angsŏp, “Isanghan hyŏngt’ae ŭi chilli: Kim Ŭn’guk ŭi *Sun’gyoja* [A Strange form of truth: Kim Ŭn’guk’s *The Martyred*],” *Han’gukhak yŏn’gu* 10 (1998): 85–112; Kim Ryŏsil, “*Sun’gyoja* tashi ilgi: Pŏnyŏk kwa kaksaeŭk ŭi munhwa chŏk maengnak ŭl chungsimŭro [Rereading *The Martyred*: Its translation and adaptation in a socio-cultural context],” *K’agit’o* 72 (2012): 79–108.

¹⁶ Chŏng Ŭn’gyŏng, “Tjung ŏnŏ ŭi maengnak kwa tokcha: Kim Ŭn’guk ŭi *Sun’gyoja* ilgi ŭi kyŏllak toen han maengnak ŭl ch’ajasŏ [The context of bilingualism and readers: Looking for a missing context in reading Kim Ŭn’guk’s *The Martyred*],” *Ŏmun nonjip* 81 (2017): 96–126; Chŏng Chua, “Wŏllammin Kim Ŭn’guk ŭi kyŏnggye

research, this article shifts the perspective from the 1960s, when *The Martyred* was published, to the late 1980s, when the desire to end the Cold War was at its height. During the late 1980s, global changes intersected with the enthusiasm of South Korean society for social transformation.¹⁷ A political ideology calling for democracy and the unification of Korea was at the forefront of South Korean society. This period was also one of change and confusion for Kim as a writer. No longer the young man in his 20s who was unfamiliar with Korea and its language, Kim was now trying to write in Korean and think about the contemporary meaning of the nation. He combined his anti-communism and diasporic consciousness with his experience of traveling to communist countries, leading him to a search for a new globality. This article examines the context that gave rise to Kim's ideas and elucidates the meaning of the works he produced.

Cultural Contact and Cold War Orientalism

In August 1987, thirteen Korean-Americans, including Richard E. Kim, traveled to China for a three-week tour around Beijing (北京市), Shenyang (瀋陽市), Changchun (長春市), Harbin (哈爾濱市), Yanji (延吉市), Longjing (龍井市), and Paektusan (白頭山). The purpose of the trip was to observe the changes in Chinese society since the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and to meet Korean-Chinese in the Jiandao (間島) area. Kim emphasized several times that the purpose of the trip was not to enjoy the scenery and new food nor to find the authenticity lacking in everyday life.¹⁸ Although Kim went to places that were hard for ordinary people to access, he did not believe that the authentic values Koreans had lost remained in China or Jiandao. Rather, he considered ethnic Koreans in China to be people who had lost the precious value of their past, just like he had.

During the trip, Kim stuck to the Cold War Orientalism that established a hierarchy between the capitalist and communist worlds.¹⁹ For him, Orientalism, which judges the East

nömgi wa 'yurangmin/segye simin' ürosö üi külssügi: Naengiön'gi tiasüp'ora munhak üi chöngch'isöng [Border-crossing and writing as a nomad/cosmopolitan in the works by the North Korean refugee Richard E. Kim: The politics of diasporic literature during the Cold War]," *Han'guk hyöndaek munhak yön'gu* 59 (2019): 299–331.

¹⁷ For information on the changes in South Korean society during the 1980s, see Lee Namhee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and the Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹⁸ According to Debbie Lisle, the travelogues of intellectuals reject tourism, focusing instead on places that the public cannot visit easily in an attempt to find the authenticity that has disappeared from their present reality. Debbie Lisle, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 186–201. Mary L. Pratt deals with the characteristics of the travel writings of intellectuals in the imperial era: Mary L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writings and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁹ Orientalism, the Western framework of thinking about and dominating the East, established a hierarchy. As Christina Klein notes, after World War II, the United States sought to expand its global influence by integrating with non-communist Eastern nations. To this end, the United States adapted and transformed Orientalism during the Cold War. This Cold War Orientalism rejected and repeated the Orientalism of the age of imperialism. While Orientalism strives to separate the West from the East, Cold War Orientalism emphasizes the integration of the East and the United States. Integration with the non-communist East, however, was designed around feelings of sympathy for that region. It strengthened the global assertion of U.S. power. In

and the West asymmetrically, was reflected in the world order created during the Cold War era. His travels were introduced to the public through TV documentaries, newspaper articles, and books, with each medium representing his trip from a different perspective. His Cold War Orientalism was revealed to different degrees depending on the medium. For example, one newspaper article described Kim's judgement of local Chinese people. Kim described the Chinese tour guide who helped him during the trip as "a person with a bad complexion as if she had hepatitis or a parasite" and rudely asked questions about her salary and class. This questioning made her uncomfortable, evoking the response, "Why do you keep asking questions like that?" Kim continued to look down on Chinese people and act as if he already knew everything about their lives:²⁰

The Chinese seemed to think that tourists came to see and learn the great things about their country. So, they tried to show their lives proudly. While they had no pretense, they seemed to know nothing of the world outside their borders. They also did not seem to be conscious of their own lives, which were incomparably poorer than those of people in developed countries. I thought they were naive on the one hand and stupid on the other.²¹

Kim's views of the local Chinese people and his apparent dislike of China, where capitalist modernization had not progressed, reveal a typical Cold War Orientalism. The hierarchy between capitalism and communism also applied to Kim's understanding of gender differences between the locals. In his view, Chinese men were still wearing Mao jackets and feeling nostalgia for the communist days of the past, while Chinese women were open-minded and "struggling to regain their own style."²² His travel writing positively depicts the attitudes of women pursuing everyday happiness rather than grand causes. For example, he repeatedly uses the word "liberation" in regard to the lives of women, such as when he refers to the "liberation of colors" in women's attire.²³

Similarly, Kim's attempts to discover individual desires and freedoms in China led him to see historical monuments, such as the Great Wall, as symbols of oppression. He criticized that China had "mobilized" thousands of people and "forced"²⁴ them to sacrifice to build the Great Wall and that China continued to control human life at the level of the individual body, as seen in its birth control policy. Regarding human oppression, Kim felt that China had not

other word, Cold War Orientalism, like Orientalism during the age of imperialism, maintained a hierarchical relationship between the United States and non-communist East. As analyzed in this article, Richard E. Kim's perspective on the locals and ethnic Koreans in China and the Soviet Union was bound within the hierarchical relationship. Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945-1961* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

²⁰ Kim Ŭn'guk, "Pansegiman ũi Manju, kŭrigo Paektusan." Translations by the author, unless otherwise indicated.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

changed, leading him to conclude that China was not a civilized country.

The trip's main purpose for Kim was, however, not to meet the Chinese in Beijing but to meet ethnic Koreans in Jiandao. KBS covered these meetings in Shenyang, Yanji, and Longjing in detail and presented his time in North Jiandao as the most important of his activities in China.²⁵ It also claimed to provide an objective perspective.

The video filmed by Kim and his party went through a process of mediation before being shown to viewers. This process included Kim's participation as a panelist in the studio with the commentator Chin'gi Kim so that he could explain the trip and the video; the addition of visual information on geography; and the deletion, due to censorship, of roughly 10 minutes of the original 70-minute runtime. This indicates that KBS was worried that showing the unedited video to the public could invite interpretations that deviated from those intended by Kim and the broadcasting company. Therefore, the documentary exaggerated the academic characteristics of the trip by drawing attention to words like "Professor" and "Report" in the title, emphasizing an objective perspective through the use of experts who had not been on the trip, and adding geographic information to the video. However, this apparent objectivity worked as a limiting framework that allowed communist countries and ethnic Koreans within them to be represented only within a range that was acceptable for South Korean society.

The scenes that led to censorship were filmed in Paektusan. In addition, the TV documentary omitted the parts of the trip from Beijing and Changchun. However, Kim included these in his travelogue, *Soryŏn kwa Chungguk, kŭrigo irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭl* (The Soviet Union, China, and lost people), which he published two years later. The two projects also differ in other respects. For example, the documentary often presents information in a simpler style than the book, but it also includes content not mentioned in the book. Furthermore, unlike in the written travelogue, the documentary emphasizes the poor lives of ethnic Koreans in China, particularly in the tragic depictions presented by the commentators Chin'gi Kim and Richard E. Kim from the perspective of experts outside the video. For instance, in the documentary, while watching a video of women washing clothes in a stream in Longjing, Chin'gi Kim notes that it is "hard to see such a thing even in rural areas in our country," with Richard E. Kim similarly lamenting that he "only saw that in the 1950s in Korea."²⁶ Such observations beg the question: What did ethnic Koreans in China think about their own lives? However, the edits completely removed the voice of the locals despite the program's apparent emphasis on reality and objectivity. None of the ethnic Koreans in the documentary—including the women washing their laundry in a stream—speaks about their lives; instead, their lives are interpreted from the perspective of Chin'gi Kim and Richard E. Kim.

The TV documentary that aired on KBS failed to convey the contact between Kim and the locals to viewers because it completely erased the voices of the locals, filling the space with background music and commentary. The documentary provided the South Korean public with the interpretations of a socially recognized "professor" instead of the voices of

²⁵ *Sun'gyoja chakka Kim Ŭn'guk kyosu ūi Pukkando pogo* [The report on North Jiandao by the author of *The Martyred*, Prof. Richard E. Kim], directed by Kim Hŭngsŏp, aired September 30, 1987, on KBS.

²⁶ *Sun'gyoja chakka Kim Ŭn'guk kyosu ūi Pukkando pogo*.

the locals, which was well-suited to the word “report” in the title. Moreover, this authoritative interpretation focused on the poverty of life in communist countries.

Bearing this in mind, it is easy to understand why the scenes depicting the trip to Paektusan were deleted. At the end of the documentary, footage of the city of Harbin suddenly switches to a scene showing a dense forest and a majestic waterfall. Unlike the rest of the footage in the documentary, this scene includes no subtitles or additional explanations from the panelists. In the written travelogue, however, Kim indicates that it is the landscape around Paektusan. The documentary does not even identify the location as Paektusan. As a panelist, Kim only explains that ethnic Koreans who went there for sightseeing were people “mobilized” by the Chinese government. In other words, the documentary deliberately avoided provoking any nationalistic sentiment that could be connected to Paektusan,²⁷ and the only interpretation provided was that the Chinese government controlled the leisure time of ethnic Koreans in China. Such censorship suggests a deliberate attempt to prevent viewers in South Korea from identifying in any nationalistic way with these people. The locals were to be seen only as people living poor and hard lives under communist oppression.

Although the KBS documentary highlights the poor lives of ethnic Koreans and criticizes the communist governance that created such lives, these were not the only ideas Kim wanted to convey to the South Korean public. His travelogue includes overt criticism of the oppressive state apparatus of communism and pity for the poor lives of ethnic Koreans from an anti-communist perspective. However, it also marks a striking contrast to the newspaper article that exposed the mocking of a Chinese tour guide and the KBS documentary. The difference is Kim’s adoption of a reflective distance from his own perception of Cold War Orientalism. Unlike in the documentary, Kim’s reflective distance in his travelogue is made possible through his focus on cultural contact with the locals.

As an example of these differences, while the KBS documentary completely omitted the scenes from Harbin, Kim devotes many pages to detailing this part of the trip. He also often argues that nationalist sentiments are abstract and that such abstractions eventually lead to totalitarian violence. He also felt that he needed to focus on specific aspects of people’s lives to avoid making these abstractions.²⁸ His record of the Harbin trip reflects this idea. While he feels that most Koreans remember An Chōnggūn’s revolt (安重根) at Harbin Railway Station, he also feels that it is only an “abstract memory of a concrete event.” He adds, “After all, we

²⁷ The following studies refer to the history of Paektusan as a symbol of nationalism that highlights the identity of Korea: Sō Yōngch’ae, “Kiwōn ūi sinhwa rūl hyanghae kanūn kil: Ch’oe Namsōn ūi ‘Paekdusan kūnch’amgi’ [The way to the origin myth: Ch’oe Namsōn’s ‘Paekdusan kūnch’amgi’],” *Han’guk kūndae munhak yōn’gu* 6, no. 2 (2005): 96–135; Ku Chahwang, “Kūndae kyogwasō wa kihaengmun sōngnip e kwanhan yōn’gu: Ilch’e kangjomgi Chosōnō kyogwasō e nat’anan myōngsūng kojōk ūl chungsimūro [A study on modern textbooks and travelogues: Focusing on the description of scenic spots in Korean textbooks during the Japanese colonial period],” *Hanminjok ōmunhak* 69 (2015): 83–113.

²⁸ Kim believed that abstraction of ideology creates totalitarianism and that the ideology of progressive college students in South Korea and left-wing intellectuals in the U.S. was a repeat of such abstractions. Kim Ūn’guk, *Irōbōrin sigan ūl ch’ajasō* [Looking for lost times] (Sōul: Sōmundang, 1985); “Pitturōjin chōngūgami sut’an ch’amhwa pullōtta [Injustice has caused many disasters]. Iryo pangdam: Han’guk ūl umjigyō on wōllo tūruū TV taedam talk, ed. KBS, 901-25. Sōul: KBS, 1986.

only remember the event from our own self-defensive perspective.”²⁹ He describes Harbin Station as shabby, contrary to what one might imagine, and notes the lack of a monument to An, arguing that the concrete truth of life lies in a reality that differs from vague imagination. The object of Kim’s interest was, thus, not the traces of independence activists from the colonial period but the current lives of ethnic Koreans living in the area. He notes, for example, the poor life of the singers and dancers from the Harbin North Korean Folk Art Gallery (哈爾濱市 朝鮮族 文化館) and the outdated facilities of Harbin Korean National Hospital (哈爾濱市 朝鮮民族 病院).

Kim’s interest in the poor lives of the locals includes a focus on people who had escaped from such poor lives. He describes Korean-Chinese dancer Yi Insuk, who guided him in Harbin, as a special person. According to Kim, she was not in need, unlike ordinary locals, and had “a splendid appearance, but also was a well-groomed person.” He also describes her as “a rare, precious, and valuable gift”³⁰ among the people he met in China. He marveled at the fact that she knew how to dress beautifully. Moreover, he thought that her beauty was the result of her overcoming the material conditions of poverty and the oppressive control of communism.

At the same time, however, Kim was able to reflect on his views of Yi Insuk, musing, “But if I think about it carefully, am I using her through this interpretation? I am such a shameless person who thinks that I can leave Harbin with a light heart thanks to her.”³¹ Thus, in the written travelogue, Kim critiques his attempts to find a bright future for the Korean-Chinese people through this woman as potentially selfish. This reflection reveals a distinct characteristic of the travelogue: Kim feels sorrow for the poor lives of the locals but emphasizes that their lives are different from those of his readers and that the difference should not be carelessly disregarded.

Kim’s reflection that the interpretations of some could erase the realities of others is not found in the newspaper article or TV documentary. In the newspaper, his Cold War Orientalism, as revealed in his exchange with a Chinese tour guide, disappeared when he was in contact with ethnic Koreans and found a reflective distance from which to interpret and represent them. As such, although his trip to China in 1987 was introduced to the South Korean public in three media—newspaper, TV, and book—the reflective distancing related to his representations of others appeared only in Kim’s travelogue.

Nationalist Identity and Cosmopolitan Subjectivity

Approximately one year after his trip to China, Kim traveled to the Soviet Union. From April 14 to May 8, 1988, he toured Moscow, Almaty, Tashkent, and Samarkand. This trip was more public than his trip to China had been. KBS again sponsored the trip and intended to air footage from it as a special documentary. However, the broadcaster was determined to make

²⁹ Kim Ŭn’guk, *Soryŏn kwa Chungguk, kŭrigo irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭl*, 63.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

up for the perceived shortcomings of the 1987 documentary. *Sun'gyoja chakka Kim Ŭn'guk kyosu ūi Pukando pogo* (The Report on North Jiandao by the author of *The Martyred*, Prof. Richard E. Kim) had suffered from poor production, having been filmed by non-professionals. The footage was frequently shaky, and the audio had not been properly recorded. In fact, *Report on North Jiandao* aired with supplementary explanations because of the incompleteness of the original footage.

The new documentary, *Han'guk t'amgu: Soryŏn ttang ūi Hanin ūl ch'ajasŏ* (Exploring Korea: Looking for Koreans in the Soviet Union),³² was a vast improvement on *Report on North Jiandao*. The production had been outsourced to professional British producers, and the final runtime was more than three times longer than *Report on North Jiandao*. The new documentary was well received by the public, whose attention was drawn to Kim's narration. Viewers also admired how the places depicted in the video had been arranged according to a storyline rather than the order in which Kim had visited them.³³

A key feature of *Exploring Korea* is that it clearly conveys the voices of locals. As the title suggests, the purpose of the trip was specifically to meet local Koreans and present their stories. As such, while *Report on North Jiandao* represents the locals as poor and passive and excludes their voices, *Exploring Korea* emphasizes their independence by allowing them to speak for themselves. The documentary's narrative structure highlights the individual capability of Koreans in the Soviet Union by following their stories of self-made success. To facilitate this approach, the producers edited and rearranged the content according to the narrative themes of hardship and overcoming it.

Approximately one year after *Exploring Korea* aired on KBS, Kim published *The Soviet Union, China, and Lost People*, which detailed his trips to China in 1987 and to the Soviet Union in 1988. In the written travelogue, he clearly highlights his perspective as opposed to that of the TV documentary producers. The biggest difference between *Exploring Korea* and the written travelogue is seen in the scenes where Kim meets local Koreans. More Koreans appear in the TV documentary than in the travelogue, and the documentary includes many more narratives about the hardships they faced in communist countries and how they overcame them. Locals who only appear in the documentary include staff members from the Almaty Chosun Broadcasting Station, third-generation ethnic Koreans from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Korean artists from the Kazakhstan Chosun Theater, workers from a Korean restaurant called Doragy, writers from the Kazakhstan Korean Writers Association, senior researchers from the Academy of Science of the Soviet Union, Korean artists from a

³² The documentary was broadcasted in two parts: *Han'guk t'amgu—Part 1: Soryŏn ttang ūi Hanin ūl ch'ajasŏ* [Exploring Korea—Part 1: Looking for Koreans in the Soviet Union], directed by Cho Dŏkhyŏn, aired August 16, 1988, on KBS; *Han'guk t'amgu—Part 2: Soryŏn ttang ūi Hanin ūl ch'ajasŏ* [Exploring Korea—Part 2: Looking for Koreans in the Soviet Union], directed by Cho Dŏkhyŏn, aired August 17, 1988, on KBS.

³³ Chŏng Chunghŏn, "Minjok ūi tongjilsŏng, chagŭngsim ilkkaeun yŏkchak—*Soryŏn ttang ūi Hanin ch'ajasŏ* kaekkwon chŏk sigak ūro silsang poyŏ chwŏ [A masterpiece that awakened the homogeneity and pride of the nation: *Looking for Koreans in the Soviet Union*, a documentary with an objective point of view]," *Chosŏn ilbo*, August 23, 1988, 16; Pak Sŏngsu, "Tanjŏl kŭkpok, hyŏlmaek itki sŏnggong [Overcoming disconnection: Success in reconnecting blood ties]," *Kyŏnghyang sinmun*, August 22, 1988, 16.

film studio in Uzbekistan, Koreans from Leninsky Kolkhoz, and professors and students from the Department of Korean Language and Literature at Tashkent State Pedagogic University.

The documentary closely observes the lives of the people mentioned above, directly showing them expressing their thoughts through interviews and conversations. Through these depictions, the documentary emphasizes that the culture and language of the Korean people has endured even in distant foreign countries and shows how the Soviets also enjoy Korean food and customs. For example, it highlights the traditional dances and totem poles of Kazakhstan as objects that reveal the continuity of Korean culture. It also adds a narration by Kim, stating, “Even though its appearance was different, the Kazakh culture reminded me of Korean culture, which led to the discovery of the continuity of Korean culture even in foreign customs.” Such observations are entirely absent in the written travelogue.

In addition to highlighting signs of Korean culture in foreign customs, the documentary includes scenes promoting a sense of Korean ethnic homogeneity. These scenes depict ethnic Koreans preserving Korean broadcasts, newspapers, and literature; people learning Korean; women performing in traditional Korean clothing; and people enjoying Korean pop songs. Such depictions inspired the titles of reviews such as “Minjok ūi tongjilsōng, chagūngsim ilkkæun yōkchak” (A masterpiece that awakened the homogeneity and pride of the nation) and “Tanjöl kŭkpok, hyōlmaek itki sōnggong” (Overcoming disconnection: Success in reconnecting blood ties).³⁴

In the documentary, the homogeneity of the nation and the success of ethnic Koreans are further emphasized by presenting the history of the hardships they have experienced, including the deportation of Koreans during the Stalin era. Korean immigrants began settling in Primorsky Krai (沿海州) around 1860. After the Soviet Revolution in 1917, these Koreans supported the Russian communists, who advocated the abolition of ethnic discrimination and equal distribution of land. However, in 1937, Stalin accused the Koreans of being Japanese spies and forced them to move.³⁵ The Koreans Kim met in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan had experienced this forced migration in 1937. Alexei Sin, a senior researcher at the Academy of Science of the Soviet Union, who served as Kim’s tour guide, detailed his experience. In the documentary, Sin plays a central role in the scene where his testimony begins, elevating him beyond his auxiliary role as a tour guide. The following is an excerpt from his story:

When I first arrived here, I was terrified. No one told us where we were going when we got on the train, and we didn’t know anything. The leaders of the farm protested, but they were all arrested and imprisoned. We Koreans have been severely oppressed by the Stalin regime. So have other minorities. At that time, my father was also arrested,

³⁴ Chōng, “Minjok ūi tongjilsōng, chagūngsim ilkkæun yōkchak”; Pak, “Tanjöl kŭkpok, hyōlmaek itki sōnggong.”

³⁵ The outlined history of forced migration is based on the following studies: Yi Sanggūn, *Rōsia, Chungang Asia iju Hanin ūi yōksa: Konan ūl kŭkpok hayō hūimang ūl sangch’wi bagi niban yōksa* [History of Korean migration in Russia and Central Asia: History of overcoming hardships and fulfilling hopes] (Sōul: Kukhak charyowōn, 2010); Kim Kerūman, *Nanūn Koryō saram ida* [I am Korean] (Sōul: Kukhak charyowōn, 2013); Sergei Mikhailovich Han, *Koryō saram urinūn nugu in’ga* [Koreans: who are we?], trans. Kim T’aejang (Sōul: Kodamsa, 1999).

and only my grandmother, mother, younger sister, and younger brother came here with me. My family had to live without the head of the household after 1937. The court later found my father not guilty, but by then he had already passed away in Moscow. On September 14, 1941, my father died in prison.

In the documentary, Sin's testimony, which lasts about 10 minutes, overlaps with black-and-white footage documenting the labors of Koreans who struggled to grow cotton in the Primorsky Krai wasteland, emphasizing the sense of their tragic situation. However, the heavy atmosphere is resolved in the scenes that follow, which depict the family of Pavel An, the deputy director of a film studio in Uzbekistan, as an example of a successful settler in the country. Although Pavel An's father, Unam An, was also targeted in 1937, the documentary shows him leading a large family and living a rich life when it was filmed. The hopeful atmosphere created by this scene is heightened by the next scene, which shows the self-made Koreans who created Leninsky Kolkhoz, a farm once home to more than 10,000 Koreans, with educational facilities providing classes from kindergarten to high school. At this farm, children learned English from an early age and received free education in various subjects, such as physical education, music, and art. Compared to ordinary Soviet citizens, ethnic Koreans in Kolkhoz lived a very wealthy life, earning more than double the typical Soviet salary. These scenes emphasize how the local Koreans had overcome persecution through hard work and education. In sum, *Exploring Korea* focuses on ethnic Koreans in the Soviet Union. It criticizes the communist violence they experienced and highlights their successful lives in the post-Cold War era.

The narrative flow in *The Soviet Union, China, and Lost People* is quite different. Like in *Exploring Korea*, Kim introduces ethnic Koreans living in the Soviet Union and describes their lives in detail. However, he emphasizes cosmopolitan subjectivity over nationalistic identity. For example, Koreans often appear in hanbok in the documentary, but the written travelogue features Koreans wearing traditional local costumes, and Kim expresses great satisfaction with the combination of diverse cultures: "The Kazakh, Mongolian, and Chinese ethnic groups were a majority in this region, but Slavic, Uzbek, and Korean ethnic groups were also mixed. So, I could see various races. I liked that kind of thing."³⁶ Kim's criticism of communism also stems from the value he places on diversity. He argues that Stalin's dictatorship suppressed ethnic diversity, eventually leading to totalitarianism that suppressed individual freedom. However, he expresses relief that the Soviet Union had begun to increasingly respect the value of diversity in its policies of perestroika and glasnost. He argues that human beings have their own "singularity" that cannot "be erased by the expression of a single nation" and that respecting such individuality and difference is important.³⁷ He also interprets Koreans' experiences of forced migration in 1937 from this perspective. He claims that ethnic Koreans overcame the hardships caused by migration through a way of life that respected the diversity

³⁶ Kim Ŭn'guk, *Soryŏn kwa Chungguk, kŭriŕo irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭl*, 164.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

of ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan. In this way, Kim viewed ethnic Koreans not just as Koreans but as “obviously Soviet citizens.”³⁸

The written travelogue emphasizes the value of diversity over that of national identity in terms of the ideal individual for a post-Cold War world. Kim identifies Lyudmila Nam, a second-generation ethnic Korean singer, as such an individual. Her story, which appears in the book’s last chapter, corresponds with the conclusion of the travelogue that sequentially presents the lives of Korean-Chinese people who had not yet escaped poverty and the lives of Korean-Russians scattered in multi-ethnic countries in 1937. He portrays Nam as someone who has acquired aesthetic universality through music and can engage in cross-cultural communication. He describes her as the “epitome of the person who discovered and nurtured the infinite possibilities of all people.”³⁹ While the documentary, which held Koreans who achieved financial success as the ideal, does not mention Nam, she fits Kim’s ideal of the cosmopolitan individual who transcends national and ideological boundaries through an aesthetic universality.

Although the post-Cold War ideal presented in the written travelogue differs from that in the documentary, they share the limitation of being unrelated to the politics of the Soviet Union at the time. Both ideals essentially embrace capitalism and reject communism. After the forced migration of 1937, Koreans became self-reliant through their efforts and achieved success beyond economic and artistic success. Koreans also became party officers and political leaders within the communist system of the Soviet Union. As such, they were not filled with hatred for and distrust of Soviet politics and communist ideology as Kim had expected. In fact, supporting communism was critical for them to succeed.⁴⁰ However, these historical conditions that connected ethnic Koreans to Soviet society and politics are neither examined in detail nor well understood in Kim’s travelogue or the TV documentary. As a result, the idealized future subject, as presented in both works, is separated from the realities of politics and history.

³⁸ Kim Ŭn’guk, *Soryŏn kwa Chungguk, kŕigo irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭl*, 206.

³⁹ Kim Ŭn’guk, *Soryŏn kwa Chungguk, kŕigo irŏbŏrin tongjok tŭl*, 239. Kim arranged for Nam to have a recital in South Korea in September 1988. After hearing her sing, Kim recalls that he felt an “epiphany” that transcended national boundaries. Kim Ŭn’guk, “Hwanhŭi ũi nunmul, choguk e pach’in ‘Arirang’—Naega pon Sŏul ũi Rudŭmilla Nam [Tears of joy—Arirang dedicated to motherland: Mrs. Rudŭmilla Nam I met in Seoul],” *Chosŏn ilbo*, September 11, 1988, 8. Nam became famous in South Korea through Kim, and thereafter was seen in South Korea as someone who transcended the ideological barrier of communism. However, unlike Kim, who focused on Nam’s cosmopolitan identity, newspaper articles introducing her emphasized her ethnic identity. See “So Pŏlsoi Op’era tan p’ŕimadonna kŭnyŏ nŭn Han’gugin iŏtta [The prima donna of the Bolshoi Symphony Orchestra in the Soviet Union: She was Korean],” *Chosŏn ilbo*, May 15, 1988, 1; Kim Ŭn’guk, “Abŏji nara ch’och’ŏng hae chwŏyo, aekkŭllŭn tangbu [An earnest request: Please invite me to my father’s country],” *Chosŏn ilbo*, May 15, 1988, 3.

⁴⁰ The history of political activities conducted by Koreans in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan can be found in Sergei Mikhailovich Han’s autobiography. Contrary to Kim’s expectations, their socio-economic success had nothing to do with anti-communism. Right after the forced migration in 1937, the Soviet Union banned Koreans from participating in politics, but they were recognized as party officers and allowed to work in party organizations because of their education and diligence. They were in fact very proud of their participation in the political sphere. Han, *Koryŏ saram urinŭn nugu in’ga*.

Conclusion

Richard E. Kim's position in the history of modern Korean literature is unique. Although usually classified as a Korean-American writer, he is an American writer who was born in Korea but wrote in English in the United States as an adult. From the viewpoint of national literature, which organizes the history of literature based on language and nationality, Kim has been excluded from the history of modern Korean literature. Kim's work, beginning with the splendid debut of *The Martyred*, was outside the narrow scope of national literature. Until now, researchers who have paid attention to Kim's works have broadened its scope. However, their attention remains limited to Kim's fictional works. Around 1980, when Kim was preparing for his fourth novel, he expanded his career into other fields. Kim's travels, highlighted in this article, are one example of such expansion. Looking beyond his fictional works is necessary to understand Kim's literature and life more broadly.

This article dealt with Kim's travels to communist countries in the late 1980s, when a new post-Cold War era was beginning. It also reviewed the meanings of Kim's cultural contact with ethnic Koreans in communist countries and examined the ideals presented as desirable in a post-Cold War era. Kim's trips appeared in newspaper articles, TV documentaries, and his travelogue. However, the differences in the media led to different interpretations of the same trip. Amid such differences, the communist countries, the ethnic Koreans living there, and the future images presented through them took different forms.

Report on North Jiandao presented Kim's trip to China in 1987 within the framework of Cold War Orientalism, which divided the world into capitalists and communists and established a hierarchy between the two competing ideologies. It portrayed the communist world as a place in which economic modernization had not progressed and as a totalitarian space that suppressed individual freedoms. *Report on North Jiandao* indulges in Cold War Orientalism by depicting ethnic Koreans in China as people still struggling under the oppression of communism. In addition, because it highlights only the oppressive aspects of communism, it omits scenes exploring Paektusan, a mythical symbol of Korean nationalism. However, *The Soviet Union, China, and Lost People* presents a new perspective distinct from Cold War Orientalism and emphasizes Kim's reflections on his interpretation of others.

Kim's trip to the Soviet Union, which took place a year after his trip to China, also drew the attention of the South Korean public, and the trip was documented in two forms: a TV documentary and Kim's travelogue. *Exploring Korea* is in many ways superior to the documentary about Kim's trip to China as it presents stories according to a narrative flow rather than a chronology and includes the actual voices of the local people. Despite its positive reception, however, *Exploring Korea* focuses only on a specific part of the lives of many ethnic Koreans in the Soviet Union, noting only the history of forced migration in 1937, the economic success stories of the Korean diaspora, and its efforts to preserve Korean culture and language. The documentary emphasizes nationalist identity and presents its capitalist subjects as the ideal for the post-Cold War era. In contrast, the written travelogue emphasizes diversity and difference and presents a cosmopolitan identity capable of transcending

boundaries as ideal.

Traveling brings geographically and culturally separated people into contact by chance. When Pratt coined the concept of the “contact zone” in analyzing the travelogues of 18th-century Europeans, she emphasized the interactive and improvisational dimensions of encounters.⁴¹ In the contact zone, travelers and locals become connected—they encounter each other within radically asymmetrical power relations but establish a mutually influential relationship. In their contact, disparate cultures meet, scuffle, and grapple; in this process, a complex, multidirectional transculturation occurs. However, the improvisation and interactivity of the contact zone are not activated in all travels and travelogues. In Kim’s case, these aspects were greatly diminished because the two documentaries covering Kim’s travels remained tethered to the hierarchy of Cold War Orientalism and the identification of nationalism in their representations of others. As a result, in the documentaries, Koreans in communist countries are either seen as victims of poverty and communism or as proud members of a nation that overcame these forces.

Unlike the documentaries, Kim’s travelogue seeks to respect the differences between the various Koreans he met while traveling. Because of this attitude, he does not represent Koreans in communist countries by reducing them to homogeneous members of the same nation. Particularly, as he leaves China, he finds an independent figure in his tour guide, Yi Insuk, but reflects on how his interpretation may distort the realities of her life, suggesting that his travelogue is deeply respectful of the interaction within the contact zone. Such an attitude is also connected to the cosmopolitan subjectivity his travelogue proposes as crucial for the coming post-Cold War era. For him, this subjectivity embraces a person willing to open their mind by contacting others without becoming preoccupied with the particularities of race, culture, and nationality.

Of course, the transculturation within the contact zone is more active in Kim’s travelogue than in the documentaries. Still, it is not ideally realized because even some parts of his travelogue ultimately reject the unexpected meanings created by the improvisation and interactivity of the contact zone. This rejection stems primarily from his anti-communism. Although his travelogue represents women more positively than men, they are still portrayed as victims subordinate to men under communism. Moreover, the historical context in which Koreans in the Soviet Union were connected to communism is not considered.⁴² Throughout his travelogue, Kim’s comments suggest a cosmopolitan subjectivity capable of transcending national boundaries but still trapped within the walls of anti-communism. In sum, his cosmopolitan subjectivity enables the vitality of the contact zone to transcend nationalism, but its reliance on anti-communism paradoxically curtails that vitality again.

⁴¹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writings and Transculturation*, 8.

⁴² Hwang Yŏngae, another Korean-American writer, accompanied Kim on his trip, and she published her own travelogue, *Paektusan Kanŏm Kil* [The Road to Paektusan]. Compared to Kim’s travelogue, Hwang’s writing emphasizes more respect for local women. Hwang shows respect for the lives of local women as they were and does not pity or condemn them for their poverty, stating that “One cannot but admit that in the matter of women’s right, China is definitely ahead of Korea.” Hwang Yŏngae, *Paekdusan Kanŏm Kil* (Sŏul: Kip’ŭnsaem, 1988), 125. Conversely, Kim sympathizes with or criticizes the lives of the women he met in China.

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